

## **Building On The Foundation**

### **The Quality of Our Work**

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Most of us probably have watched a house or some sort of building being built. It is happening all over the place. It is hard to miss. And the way that it usually works is that once the land is cleared, and the place is leveled for the building, not much seems to happen for a good while. You do not see the house going up. There is a lot of work being done, but from the outside looking in, it looks like very little work is being done.

This is especially true of large office buildings, and skyscrapers. I got the opportunity back in southern California when I was working for Trans-America to watch a fairly large office building being put in next to the Trans-America Building in Costa Mesa, California.

The builders excavated a huge pit for this building, and seemed to do a lot of nothing for a long time. It seemed like months that that pit was just a gaping hole, and nothing was being done. That is how it would appear if you did not actually look down into the pit, and see the men working. You could not see anything happening above ground, or very little.

I only came into the office about once a week. So, I was able to watch this in stages. Once a week, I came out of the parking garage, and looked down into the hole. And then once in a while, while I was working in the office, I would get up and go to the window, and be able to see from a higher vantage point what was going on down there.

I could see the workers in there preparing the ground, and I could see that they had brought in the big pile driver, and they were driving huge lengths of steel into the ground. I could see them setting up rebar for the concrete work. I could see them actually pouring the concrete.

They were doing a lot of stuff, but it was all down there in that pit, and it looked like (if you did not look into the pit) nothing was happening.

Yet, once the work was done that needed to be done, the building went up in a snap, or so it seemed to me. The steel frame seemed to construct itself overnight. I know that from one week to the next, it was up, basically. That is the way that it appeared.

Then, before I knew it, it had its skin of glass on it. And then it was not very long and we were grudgingly sharing our nice, spacious parking garage with these new corporate neighbors. It seemed like just a few weeks after everything got up, there were people moving in.

Now, the last time that I spoke, I spoke about the foundation—the Rock. Remember that? Christ our Rock. He is the foundation that has been laid for us.

Today, I want to take that another step further. I want to speak about what happens next—the building on that foundation.

If you would, please turn to Luke 6, we will be reading verses 46 through 49. As soon as you see this, you will understand the context. It is the Sermon on the Mount. It is the end of the Sermon on the Mount, but it is Luke's version. I am coming to Luke for a very specific reason and that is that Luke introduces the story differently than Matthew does.

It is not a great deal different. If you will remember in Matthew he introduces the story with the whole thing on "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?", and he goes on and talks about getting away from Him, those who practice lawlessness. Remember, they said that they were casting out demons, and healing in His name, and this and that in His name. It is much longer in Matthew.

But, in Luke, he takes that whole story, and crunches it down into one sentence, and uses it as the introduction to building on the Rock.

**Luke 6:46-49** "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say? "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: "He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on

the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

Now, what I wanted you to notice here is that by using verse 46 as the introduction to the parable, Luke draws an arrow right to the main lesson that Jesus wants us to get out of it. The lesson is, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things that I say?" That is the theme. And then, he gives the parable of building on the Rock. That is what he wants us to get out of it.

Look at it this way. If we call Jesus "Lord," or "Master," and we are His slave (*doulos*) it is only logical that we do what He says. That is what Jesus says in verse 46, "why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"

"Why do you say that you are My servant, yet you don't do the things that I command you to do?" That is the theme of the parable. So, to put it another way, we are not just to hear Him, but we are to also put His teachings into practice. This is what Romans 2:13 says. Paul writes there:

**Romans 2:13** (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.

**James 1:22** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

So, this is the theme of the parable about building on the Rock: do not be just hearers, but be *doers* of what Jesus tells us to do.

**Luke 6:47** "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like."

Jesus tells us here about the approved person; the one, as Matthew says, who is wise. The one who Jesus says is the guy for Him—His servant—His kind of servant. Now, stick the word approved in the back of your mind. We will come back to that in a moment. This is the approved person. Notice that He gives a three step process here.

First of all, he says that this person accepts Jesus as Lord (the Protestant way of saying that)—he has "come to Him." The one who accepts Jesus as his personal Savior, commits himself to Him. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that he hears the teaching—he listens to it.

First he comes to Jesus, and accepts him; and secondly he hears the teaching.

And the third thing is that he puts these things into practice.

It is very simple three-step process. You accept Jesus as Savior, you hear what He says, and then you put it into practice. This is the wise person, the approved man that Jesus is looking for.

Now, by contrast, let us read verse 49:

**Luke 6:49** "But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."

Notice what this person did. How many steps of the process did he actually complete? One. All Jesus says here that he did was that he heard. Notice that he did not accept Jesus as Lord, and he did not put the teachings into practice. A lot of people do this.

They will say that they accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, Lord, and Master, but they do not do anything to show that. What Jesus is saying here is that step three validates step one!

Anybody can hear the teachings, it has been happening for 2,000 years; the sayings of Jesus are known far and wide. People quote them every day; even people who are secular use biblical adages and principles as part of their everyday conversation. But, because they do not do them, they are screaming out to anybody who has eyes to see that they really do not accept Jesus as their Lord, Savior, and Master.

You can hear them all you want, but the proof is in the pudding—the proof is in the doing. It is in putting it into practice.

And so he says, the latter (putting into practice) is evidence of the former (accepting Jesus as his Master).

This is an illustrative way of reiterating verse 46. This is reiterating the theme. The theme is, a servant is logically expected to perform his master's orders. If he does not perform his master's orders, he is not a servant of the one that he is calling his master, in reality.

In verse 48, it says the approved man:

**Luke 6:48** ". . . dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock."

Again, this is a picturesque way of saying that he put a great deal of effort into laying his foundation, into reaching the foundation. It also implies persistence and determination to reach his goals. Determination to reach the genuine article. There are a lot of people who seek the truth, but do not have the determination to go all the way through all the flotsam and jetsam until they hit the real truth, if you know what I mean. They only go so far and think they have the truth, when maybe their next step would have actually put them on to the truth of God.

But, this person dug deep. He wanted to get all the way down to the bedrock. And he was not going to stop until he hit that hard rock underneath that was firm and would not move. He dug deep.

The most durable houses in Palestine, the ones that you can still see today after digging in the ruins, are the ones that are founded on bedrock.

Sometimes the builder of these houses would have to go 20 or 30 feet into the ground to hit the bedrock.

Now think about it in terms of a shovel, or a mattock, and trying to dig down 20 or 30 feet into that earth over two or three-thousand square feet of area where this house was going to be built. Some of them are that large or larger.

A lot of these houses that they have found in Jerusalem with these types of foundations are huge houses. They think that they were built by Romans as their villas. They went all the way down, although in Jerusalem, it is pretty close to the surface. But, even so, these villas that these wealthy Romans or Jews had still exist and you can still go down into their basements and see the work that they did.

Now what they would do is that when they hit that bedrock, they would then put their stone, or their brick, right on top of the bedrock and mortar it down in some way so that it would not move. From there, they built their house using that firm foundation for their floors, and their walls, and of course their ceilings and roof later on.

One of the things that they did, to even add further strength to that, especially in the Roman period, is that they built great arches.

So, not only did you have the solid firm bedrock as the base, but you use the arch which is one of the strongest construction methods to make sure that house was firm. And whatever beat against that house, whether wind, or rain, or flood, it would stay. It was not going to be moved.

Now let us notice the foolish builder. Jesus says here that he builds a house on the earth without a foundation. And this, of course, He says would easily wash away in a flash flood.

Flash floods were fairly common occurrence in Palestine because it was a fairly dry land, and if they had a gully washer, the rain did not have a chance to soak in. And it would just sweep down the wadis, and mountain passes, and wash away everything in its path. The sandy soil there did not help, because it would just easily be caught up in the rushing waters, and undermine any house, or anything that was built on it.

It is interesting here that Jesus uses the word "earth" as a contrast here to the word rock. He means soil, basically, whether sand or clay. It was very small bits of rock and organic material. We know what the Rock represents, we had a whole sermon on that. What does earth represent?

If you will remember the sermon, "The Beast From the Earth and 666," you will remember that I went through what earth is in comparison to water in chapter 13 (where one beast rises from the water, and the other from the earth). If you will remember what I said there, earth represented something of this world, the first contradiction to what the Rock represents, because the Rock is something not of this world. The Rock is Jesus Christ who has always been, and now He dwells in heaven at the Father's right hand. That is stable. That is secure.

The other thing about earth is that earth is more stable than water. The beast that rose from the earth in chapter 13 of Revelation had more stability and longevity than the beast from the water. The sea represented the turmoil of peoples, languages, cultures, politics, and such.

So, the earth here represents not just something of this world, but also the *appearance* of stability.

The word 'appearance' is important here. It works the same way in Revelation 13 with the beast from the earth. He appears to come out of something stable, out of the religions and the spiritual ideas of this world. But he is no more stable than the beast from the sea in the end when he comes up against the Rock, Jesus Christ.

The same thing happens here in Luke 6. The earth has an appearance of stability. But what does Jesus say happens to this earth? It gets saturated with water. What happens when you take soil and add water to it? The stability is gone, especially when you add a great deal of water as shown in the parable. This earth may have seemed to the foolish builder to be stable, but it is not. It is not really stable; it is something of this world. And as soon as a little bit of water hits it, its strength is undermined. Its stability is very deceptive.

On the other hand, water cannot do that to a rock. You can throw all kinds of water at a rock and it will just sit there and take it. It will have no effect in the short term. Obviously, there would be erosion eventually, but do you realize how long that takes?

Now, if you had a piece of granite there, and you put it in the middle of a river, and let the river go at it, it would take thousands of years, maybe more. I do not know the erosion rate on granite, but it is going to be significantly longer than dropping a big chunk of earth in that river, and seeing how long that would last! That is the difference that we are talking about here.

Earth, which is of this world and has an *appearance* of stability, versus the Rock, which is not of this world, and *is* stable, and durable, so much so that it is eternal. It will never be worn down. If you will go back with me to Proverbs 10, we will have a bit of a synopsis of what we just learned here in a proverb form. Solomon writes:

**Proverbs 10:23-25** To do evil is like sport to a fool, but a man of understanding has wisdom. The fear of the wicked will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted. When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked is no more, but the righteous has an everlasting foundation.

Paraphrased, he says in verse 23, "Doing evil is easy, and natural for a man." And the other half of this proverb says, "But a righteous person has to apply understanding, and thought, and effort to live wisely."

What we have seen here in this particular verse is that doing what comes easy, or natural, is not necessarily good—probably not. We are just going with the flow. But a wise person—a righteous person—will take a hold of his human nature and apply what he has learned to act wisely. This is the idea coming back into this of "dug deep."

The wise person has to put forward a great deal of effort in order to do the right things to build upon the foundation.

And I will add this: We need to remember that wisdom is godly application of the right knowledge and understanding. You could say that wisdom occurs, or appears, in choices and behavior. It starts in the mind with the choices, making the right decisions, and it comes out of a person in his behavior—in the things that he actually does, says—his outward manifestation.

**Proverbs 10:24** The fear of the wicked will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted.

This stresses the effect of doing evil versus doing good. The effect of doing evil is destruction—of having the thing that you greatly fear surely coming to pass (Job 3:25). It ends up in death and destruction, and sorrow.

The latter person receives blessings, though. The one who applies wisdom—the righteous one—will get what he wants.

Now, the desire has to be good, and in a righteous person it would be. There is a reward for doing good versus doing evil. And evil will be similarly rewarded with destruction.

So, we cannot think that the things that we do are not going to have their effects. It is an automatic law of the universe that what we do is going to produce something in return. Verse 25 then has to do with the nature of the durability of a person's works. It brings in the transient nature of the wicked. It says that the whirlwinds will just pick up the wicked and that is that! He is gone! The whirlwind stands for any type of calamity, like the flood in Luke 6, or great winds; any kind of great trial that might come upon a person, the wicked person could not take it. He does not have the stuff to endure through it.

But the righteous person has an everlasting foundation. The righteous person is not transient in the least. He is on the whole other end of the scale. The things that he builds on the foundation are forever. He has an eternal, everlasting foundation; and the things that he builds upon it in a proper way are going to last in his character right on through.

So, this is a bit of a synopsis of the parable that Jesus gave. I do not know if He was thinking of this, but obviously, where it says that the righteous have an everlasting foundation sure sounds a lot like what He spoke about there in Luke 6.

We were in Ephesians 2 last time talking about Christ as our foundation—our chief cornerstone. But I want to go over it again a bit more deeply this time. I want you to remember what had already taken place in the second chapter of Ephesians: Paul had just finished talking about Christ being able to pull the Jews and the Gentiles together; that wall of separation between them had been beaten down by His death. And the two were being made into one. It says that they were not of the commonwealth of Israel, but now they could be through Christ, because they were Abraham's seed now.

**Ephesians 2:19-22** Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

This is very similar in many ways to what Peter says in I Peter 2, where he talks about us being built up as living stones, and that Jesus Christ is the stone that the builders rejected, but has now become chief of the corner.

This is Paul's version of the same thing. Paul's focus is on the church as a whole; as a singular building; as *the* Temple of God which He dwells in. And, just like Peter, he talks about that we are all living stones in this one building. Now, the foundation, here, as Paul defines it, has three parts.

Notice, he says, verse 20 "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." The way that we can look at this, to give us a good idea of how this works, is to visualize an arch—a very strong construction method.

If we think of the prophets as one side of the arch, and the apostles as the opposing side of the arch, Jesus Christ is the keystone that goes in the center of the arch that holds those two sides together in place, and gives it strength.

If you remove the keystone, both sides of the arch will collapse. It needs that keystone at the top to lock them into place. They will stay in place once that lock has been installed. The lock is the stone that connects the two sides of the arch at the top.

Now, literally, what Paul was talking about here was the prophets being one wall, and the apostles being an intersecting wall, but Jesus Christ is the stone that they put in the corner to lock those two walls together so that neither one of them falls down. It is the same principle.

We, in our modern building methods, are not very familiar with that principle, as being the chief stone of the corner, because we do not build in stone much anymore. That is why I think that the arch principle, or illustration, is a bit easier for us to grasp.

This is what Paul is getting at. We have the prophets that wrote this whole great Old Testament as one side, and then on the other side we have the 27 books of the New Testament written by the apostles, and Jesus is the one that links the two groups together.

Jesus gave meaning and form and spiritual depth to what the prophets wrote. Remember Moses brought the law, and Jesus brought grace and truth. He brought the spirit of the law that opens—it is the key—to what the Old Testament prophets had written. And then what the apostles did was take the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and His magnification of the law, and write the New Testament to cover these spiritual aspects of things that we need to know as God's people being prepared for the Kingdom of God.

And so you have Jesus Christ being the link that holds these two sides of the foundation together. That is the visual that you need to have here as we go through this. He holds everything together, and He gives it strength.

One without the other does not work. That is why these people who have rejected the Old Testament have no backbone. They have no real basis for what they practice.

You have to have both. If you reject the New Testament and just have the Old Testament, you lose the spirit of the law. You lose our contemporary New Testament understanding of the way the Old Testament is supposed to be applied.

Either way, one is at a disadvantage. That is why you need Jesus Christ there in the center to give you the teaching in the right proportion with the right spirit in it.

I want you to notice the internal organization that Paul gives his argument in Ephesians 2:19-22. In verse 20 he speaks of the building's foundation—its basis; in verse 21, its formation and growth. Notice that it says, "in whom the whole building being joined together grows into a holy temple."

He is showing that there is not just a foundation, but there is also a building being built by growth on it. It is almost like an organism—a living organism, living stones as it were—who are working together to build with God this Temple. It is in formation. And then, verse 22 is the function of the Temple. So, we have three bits of organization: foundation, formation, and function.

The function in verse 22 is for us to be a habitation and dwelling for God in the Spirit. He wants to live in us. He wants to live through the church of God. He wants to be part and parcel of our every act. And so we are being built up to house God Himself; to be seen in every act that we do.

So, this building that is being built—this Temple—is not static. The foundation is not static, the formation is not static, and the function is not static. It is dynamic. It is living. Our Foundation is living in heaven. And that is where we have hope—that our Foundation is living as we are, and more so! He is the One that gives us the true life that enables us to grow. And then, our function is continual because God lives in us.

So, this building is not like this building we are in right now. This building is finished. This building does its function without any idea or consciousness of itself, of its purpose, or of its function.

The building we are talking about here in Ephesians 2 is all those things, and it is still being built. Each member contributes something to the building in small and big ways depending on where Christ has put that person in the building. Remember the concept that we are living stones in this building.

Paul has a similar message to the Corinthians in I Corinthians 3. Here, Paul is speaking more to individual Christians rather than to the church as a whole. In Ephesians 2 it was more general to all of us. We are being built up into a holy temple. The 'you' there is plural, and was speaking to the whole church.

Now, here in I Corinthians 3, it is a bit more personal and intimate to each individual Christian.

**I Corinthians 3:9-10** For we [apostles and ministry] are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

Now, some will say that Paul is speaking to the ministry here. But I do not think that he was just speaking to the ministry. I think that is a cop-out by saying it is just ministers he is talking about how they should build on this foundation because each one of us, minister or no, has a responsibility in his growth as a living stone.

**I Corinthians 3:11** For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

That was the whole gist of my sermon last time. Jesus Christ is the Foundation. He is permanent. Any other foundation is going to cause ruin for one's life.

**I Corinthians 3:12-13** Now if anyone [notice how general that word is] builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire [symbol of trial]; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

The fire itself will tell you what you have been building with.

**I Corinthians 3:14** If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

Remember we saw that in Proverbs 10 that there is going to be an effect for our efforts whether good or bad.

**I Corinthians 3:15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

A very sore trial. He is going to have to go through the fire as we would say.

**I Corinthians 3:16-17** Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

We all start with the same foundation. That is a given. It is through His sacrifice, His life that we are all called, forgiven, and converted. He is the beginning. Remember Paul in Hebrews 2 calls Him the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the ground of everything that we are and do in our conversion.

The truth that we learn all comes from Him. The truth throughout our entire conversion process is from Him. He is the One who inspired the prophets. He is the One that inspired the apostles. He is the One who said and did all those things as our Example.

It all ultimately comes back to Him. He called Himself that. In John 14 He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

He is the whole package. That is what Paul is saying here. Jesus Christ is the Foundation, and no one can lay any other foundation. If you lay another foundation, you are not part of the church of God. It is as simple as that.

But, Paul warns at the very end of verse 10, "Let each one take heed how he builds on it." Notice the assumption here.

Once the Foundation is laid, everyone is going to build upon it one way or the other. So, Paul says that it is the manner in which one builds that he is worried about. If you have the foundation of Jesus Christ it is going to cause you to do certain things. There will be a building built on the foundation. But how are you going to build on it?

This also gives us a big clue that the superstructure—the building; what is built upon the foundation—is our responsibility. Obviously God Himself is going to be working with us. But how we build upon it is up to us. We have to make decisions. We have to follow God, or not. We have to take the promptings of the Spirit, or reject them.

And so Paul says, "You be careful how you build on it. You are going to build something on it, so be careful. Watch it! Take heed!"

This is a warning for us to be cognizant of what we are doing with our lives. It is not something that we can just breeze through and not think about. The people of the church of God should be the most thoughtful, and careful, and concerned people in the world about how their lives are going, because we have to take heed to how we are building on that perfect foundation.

It has been laid for us. We have no excuse. It goes all the way to bedrock. It is bedrock. How are we going to build on it? How are we going to take this precious gift and use it? That is what Paul is worried about. He is referring to our works, basically. Are we builders of excellence? Or are we just average builders unwilling to put in the extra that it takes to be really good? Or are we slap-dash and irresponsible and inferior builders?

We have to evaluate ourselves in this area because I cannot tell you what kind of builder you are, not unless I see your works as they come out. Maybe I could get a good idea, but you are the best judge of that outside of Jesus

Christ because you know yourself best. You (like we do every year before the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread) have to evaluate where you stand—whether you are in the faith, or not (II Corinthians 13:5).

Just what kind of building are we building on top of the foundation?

Paul splits out six different gradations of builder here. And they are defined by the materials that each one uses: Gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw (stubble)—six different qualities of materials.

Now if you think it through, these materials decrease from gold to straw in beauty, value, rarity, and durability—gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw.

I do not think we need to define gold and silver. We all know gold and silver. They have been the eternal standards throughout mankind's history of everything that is pure, and valuable, and beautiful. We still value gold; even though platinum may be here, it is still gold and silver that captures our imagination.

Now, precious stones on the other hand might trip somebody up. He is not talking about diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and such. Have you ever built a building with any of those? You would need so many of them, and then something to hold them together with. What he is talking about here are not precious stones like we think of today, but costly building stone like marble, granite, onyx, and even good looking limestone; these are the types of building materials that would be used in making temples, and homes of the rich and famous, for making fortifications. They might not use them all in a fortification, like marble, but they would use one of the lesser costly stones like limestone, sandstone, or granite.

Obviously, we are talking about big stones that take a lot of money and effort to carve into building materials. The next one is wood. We build with wood predominately in America. I do not think we need to explain that one very much.

Hay is simply dried, cured grass. There are some huts in various part of the world made of grass, and any nice windstorm or a fire would sweep them away.

Now straw might be confusing to some. Stubble is a better word and is used in the King James Version. Stubble is the dried stalks left after the harvest of wheat, barley, oats, or rye. In times past when they had thatched roofs, this is what was used. They did not waste anything. They would take what was left from the harvest, cut them down close to the ground, bundle them up, and use them for roofing—not the walls, but just the roof. It is very weak roofing material.

This is what we are talking about here: A whole progression of building materials from best to worst.

In terms of works, what we are talking about (and this may take a bit of a leap, please bear with me) is very similar to the idea of *hamartia* in the sense of sin. If you remember what the term *hamartia* means, it means "to miss the mark." It does not necessarily mean "to sin." It means an archer has taken his arrow and shot it at a target, but he missed. He did not hit the bull's eye. Now, he might have hit the target, but he was aiming for the bull's eye. And he missed.

Now if we are going to think of this in terms of *hamartia*, gold is the bull's eye. Silver is just outside the bull's eye, and so is precious stones. Wood, though, is a bit further away, and hay is even further. And stubble is just nicking the edge of the target—just barely sufficient—no points are scored, but at least one hit the paper.

I want you to take this literally. I want you to get the idea, here, what we are talking about. Producing works of stubble are works, and that is about all, if you understand what I mean. You actually did something, but it was not very profitable.

It says, as we read on here, that these are the works that are burned. They do not stand up. They do not last the test of time whereas, gold, silver, and precious stones will. The test is fire. Fire, unless it is super hot does not have

a great deal of effect on gold and silver. In fact, it purifies it at those temperatures. It becomes even more pure, valuable, and beautiful, because a person who is working in gold does things of such high quality and caliber, that when some trial comes along, he is thinking about it. He understands that there is a lesson to be learned here, and he just does not leave it at that, he learns the lesson! And then the next time he does a work similar to this, it is even purer than before.

Now, fire will scorch precious stones, and the beauty may be lost, it is going to be there. Fire will destroy wood, but it takes a while to do it. It burns at a higher temperature than hay or stubble. Stubble goes up in the fire very fast, and it is gone.

Think of the Great Fire in London with all those thatched roof houses there in the city, and how that must have spread! London was destroyed. A similar thing that would happen with works God compares to stubble. There is nothing there, there is no protection. There is nothing learned—(snap!) Up in smoke!

Paul is saying that we have the opportunity to land our arrow somewhere in this mix between gold and stubble. What are our works? Have we considered measuring them, or evaluating them? Where do we stand?

Now, it is obvious here that Paul is talking about works and growth because of his statement in verse 15. It is a parallel of Ephesians 2:8 through 10. Notice that I did not say Ephesians 2:19-22. This is Ephesians 2:8-10 which say that we are saved by grace through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast. But, verse 10 says that we have been created in Jesus Christ *for* good works so that we would be prepared to do all of these good works. That is what verse 15 here says. "If anyone's work is burned he will suffer loss, but he will be saved, yet so as through fire."

Now Protestants look at this, and they say, "Oh it doesn't matter what works we do, we're going to be saved no matter what." Are you sure? Did you ever read verse 17? "If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him."

That tells me that there are some works that are so bad, that God is not going to accept them. Works do not save us. But, if our works are not up to snuff,

they could keep us out of the Kingdom of God. If our works go to the opposite extreme of actually being defiling—remember what it says there in Galatians 5:19-20? What does it call those works like adultery, idolatry, wrath, etc? They are called "works of the flesh."

Those are the kinds of works that Paul says elsewhere that if we do such things we will not be in the Kingdom of God.

So, we *are* going to build on the foundation. What kind of building materials are we going to use? Gold through stubble? Stubble still nicks the paper on the target.

Or is it going to go so far off as to miss the target altogether and be a work of the flesh; one that defiles the Temple? The Temple which God says is holy, which you are! Only holy works count!

The lesson is that we are to strive for growth in our works so that in time as we progress through our Christian lives, we begin to build with higher and higher quality materials in every area of life—our marriages, childrearing, interactions with others, our jobs, and even down to little things like the expression on our face; the way we speak with strangers.

I would also like to use the illustration of the way that you drive your car, the way that you keep your yard; everything is either gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble; or a work of the flesh.

Where on that line are your works? You may be different with different things. Your driving may be gold. I doubt it, but it might be. But, on the other hand, maybe your service to your brethren is hay. Which is more important?

Some people like to major in the minors, when they should be majoring in the majors.

Evaluate yourself. These were just some examples. What are you? Are you satisfied with wood, hay, and stubble? You should not be. You might make it to the Kingdom with wood, hay, and stubble, but your rank and reward will suffer.

Paul is writing to a minister here in II Timothy 2. It is a similar exhortation but it applies to all just as I Corinthians 3 does.

**II Timothy 2:15** Be diligent [KJV 'Study'] to present yourself approved to God [there it is that word—approved], a worker who does not need to be ashamed [Why? Because he is building with gold, silver, and precious stones], rightly dividing the word of truth.

Then verses 16 through 18 he talks about people and ministers who have not been faithful.

**II Timothy 2:19-21** Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore [conclusion] if anyone cleanses himself from the latter [vessel of dishonor], he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified [set apart, made holy] and useful for the Master, prepared [Ephesians 2: 10] for every good work.

We are exhorted to be diligent. This means that we are to be conscientious, hard working, industrious, thorough, careful, and reliable. Go to any thesaurus. These are all synonyms of diligent. The term implies real effort and concentration, focus and planning—having a goal, the steps to reach those goals delineated. And also having an attitude that is always on call. A diligent person, to an employer, is always ready to jump in and handle the work.

Now these qualities combined with the corresponding follow-through—actually doing the work—win approval from God. That is what it says here. That these diligent characteristics are what God is going to approve of. It is going to get God's seal of approval.

Verse 19 presents one given in two parts. We know this by two truths which he names here, two quotations from the Old Testament. The first one is, "The Lord knows those who are His." This means that God's calling, as said

elsewhere, is irrevocable. It means that He stands behind His calling. He knows what He is doing. We do not ever need to doubt that what God did as part of our conversion and salvation was right. So, we have this part of the foundation as firm and solid. God knows what He is doing. He knows the ones that He is working with.

The second one is, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." This is a reiteration of Luke 6:46, which is, "All true Christians obey the Master's voice." In other words, all true Christians are changing from sinful to righteous. They are departing from iniquity, and becoming righteous. As it said in Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and do not do the things which I say?"

"If you call Me Lord, Lord, and I really am your Lord, you will be doing what I say, and I say 'Depart from iniquity all those of you who practice lawlessness.'" It makes sense.

Those are the two things that we have as a sure foundation for ourselves. God knew what He was doing, and if we are a true Christians, we are departing from iniquity. This identifies us, then, as a true child of God.

Now in verses 20 and 21, Paul again refers to these different qualities of materials that we can build with, except it is changed just a bit here. Now, we are not building materials, we are a vessel. We could be a pitcher, a pot, a glass. There are gold and silver pitchers on the one hand, and there are wooden and clay pitchers on the other hand. The gold and silver ones are honorable ones, he calls them, whereas the wooden and the clay ones are dishonorable; they are ignoble.

A vessel of gold or silver would be used at the master's table, or as an ornament in his house, as evidence to other people of the house's wealth and prestige. It would be a vessel of honor. A vessel who was placed somewhere where it could be seen and used in the right way.

On the other hand, a wooden or clay vessel would at best be only utilitarian, possibly used by the servants in the house for their own use; and if it were broken or marred in some way, it would hardly be missed. It would be cast on the garbage pile without a second thought.

Now Paul tells us to be cleansed of the latter. We are not shooting for utilitarian—being used by the servants. We are shooting for a vessel of honor used at the master's table by the Master Himself. This is written to a minister, remember. His first idea here was for Timothy to become a servant who is fitting to be the wine glass in God's hand.

Think of Jeremiah. What was he supposed to do? He was supposed to go to the nations with a glass of wine and tell these other leaders of these other countries what God said. In a way an evangelist does a similar type of thing. Not necessarily the same type of message, but what Jeremiah had to do was make them drink the cup that God gave him to take to all these kings. And God said to make them drink it.

Now, Timothy, then, was to be one who was to be a vessel of honor that could be used in a way like this. And that is what everybody is shooting for. Whether you are a minister or not, that you would be worthy and ready to be the servant of God when He calls you to do some mission or take a message, or to do some sort of act for Him.

And it does not have to be going before kings. It could be disciplining your children. It could be making the right example to someone who needs it. It could be having the right answer at the right time for someone who has a question. It could be song leading. It could be giving a sermonette or sermon. It could be passing out hymn books at the door. It could be having a friendly, outgoing, smiling personality so that other people would have the benefit of your fellowship.

I could go on and on with ways that you could be a vessel of honor. And they range from little and insignificant to the globetrotting to the leaders of the world giving them the message of the Kingdom of God.

But he says here that we are seeking to be a vessel of honor so that whenever God needs us we will be prepared for every good work.

So, we are not to be satisfied with mediocre or poor works. We are called to a life of continuous self-improvement. There is no resting on the oars, no coasting, no perception that we are good enough, or ever will be—we are always to be improving our character, our personalities, our works.

Now, let us conclude, then, in I Timothy 6, just a page back, verses 17 through 19, and I want you to take this personally because you are rich in this present age (whether physically or not, spiritually you are very rich). You have more of the truth and a greater environment for practicing it than almost anybody has ever had in this world. So, take this to heart. Therefore we are much more responsible because of this, because of what God has blessed us with, certainly in terms of spiritual matters.

**I Timothy 6:17-19** Command those [talking to Timothy again] who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

We had better make use of what God has given us for the glory of God. We are to do good. We are to practice good works at least equal to our physical and spiritual riches. We must be ready to give, willing to share the things that God has given us. Be Johnny-on-the-spot. Jump up to help others, give them instruction, praise them and build them up, add your skills to the work of the church.

I know that we are scattered. But there are things that you can do to help the church do its work. Even in places where there is only one family, you just need to think a little bit to know where you can help. If you do not know, ask! If nothing else, give of your money! There are ways to help. You could write letters. Years ago Mr. Shirley Togans did a wonderful article in the Forerunner about people in this scattered times doing nothing but sending encouraging letters to one another. It is something to do.

One can pray if there is nothing else. That is a work. And God will love it. He loves to hear your voice. He loves to know that you are thinking of Him and your fellow brethren.

There are so many ways to build the best materials on Christ's solid foundation. And by these works, we will be educated, and prepared for our responsibilities ultimately in the Kingdom of God.