

## Caution: Church Construction Ahead

### 1 Corinthians 3: 1-17

There was an old sow with three little pigs, and as she had not enough to keep them, she sent them out to seek their fortune. The first that went off met a man with a bundle of straw, and said to him, "Please, man, give me that straw to build me a house." Which the man did, and the little pig built a house with it.

Presently came along a wolf, and knocked at the door, and said, "Little pig, little pig, let me come in."

To which the pig answered, "No, not by the hair of my chinny chin chin." The wolf then answered to that, "Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in." So he huffed, and he puffed, and he blew his house in, and ate up the little pig.

The second little pig met a man with a bundle of sticks, and said, "Please, man, give me those sticks to build me a house." Which the man did, and the pig built his house. Then along came the wolf, and said, "Little pig, little pig, let me come in."

"No, no- not by the hair of my chinny chin chin." "Then I'll puff, and I'll huff, and I'll blow your house in." So the wolf huffed, and he puffed, and he puffed, and he huffed, and at last he blew the house down, and he ate up the little pig.

The third little pig met a man with a load of bricks, and said, "Please, man, give me those bricks to build a house with." So the man gave him the bricks, and he built his house with them.

So the wolf came, as he did to the other little pigs, and said, "Little pig, little pig, let me come in." "No, no, by the hair of my chiny chin chin." "Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in."

Well, he huffed, and he puffed, and he huffed and he puffed, and he puffed and huffed; but he could *not* get the house down. When he found that he could not, with all his huffing and puffing, blow the house down, he said, "Little pig, are you hungry? I know where there is a nice field of turnips...."

And the story goes on. Perhaps the old English author who wrote that fairy tale was inspired to write it after reading those same verses that we just heard. There are some striking similarities. Keep in mind that Paul wrote this letter to the church at Corinth to address a major problem, one that was not unique to the early church. They were trying to build the church, but they weren't following the blueprints, the plans that Paul had given to them earlier. Paul caught wind of the situation and wrote this letter to help them get back on track. And in His infinite wisdom, God was able to look ahead in time and see that church of all ages, even people like you and would also greatly benefit from it. God saw fit to preserve and translate that letter into a language and format, chapter and verse, so we can easily understand it.

Paul restates his concerns he had voiced earlier. The church at Corinth was scattered. It was divided, they were not following Christ as much as their own preferences. Some preferred to follow Paul, some chose Cephas, others were following Apollos. They were only unified in one thing- they were touting their accomplishments and comparing themselves to each other. They were living as immature believers rather than spiritually grown disciples of Christ. Their faith journey had come to a standstill. Paul was reminding them that was not how Jesus designed or desired His church to be built.

Even though Jesus told Peter that he would be used in a powerful way to build His church, the apostle Paul also had a major role. Just as God gave Moses specific instructions in Exodus 25 on how the tabernacle, the earthly dwelling place of God was to be built, Paul was also given instructions, a blueprint, on how the NT tabernacle, the church is to be built. The major difference between the two is found in verse 9. The OT tabernacle was a physical building, one with a roof, walls and windows and doors. The NT tabernacle is a body of believers, the church of Christ.

Paul shared some of those plans in verses 10-11. The foundation is the most important part of any building. A weak and shaky foundation results in a weak and shaky building. Solid bricks and mortar and concrete are needed for a solid physical building and solid Biblical principles are required for a solid spiritual building.

A church built upon Paul, or Apollos, or Peter or any other human foundation leader is not what God has designed. For the church to survive through the ages it must be built upon the solid foundation of Jesus Christ. Paul is like a modern-day building inspector issuing a stop work order to a contractor because of a failure to follow the approved plans. If the plans call for a foundation of 12 inches of concrete the builder can't just substitute something else instead. If the plans call for wall studs to be placed 16" apart they can't be placed 24" apart. Such a building might look good on the outside and might even last for a while, but eventually it will collapse. A weak foundation will not be able to support the weight and pressure of the building that stands upon it. **Jesus is the foundation, as well as the chief builder and the Divine Architect.** We deviate from His plans at our own risk.

Paul gives a stern warning in verses 16-17. We often interpret the word "you" in these verses to refer to individual believers. That is fine, as the context of the verses preceding it allow for that understanding. However, the greater context reveals Paul has another thought in mind. The "you" is also a reference to the church collectively. Yes, the Spirit of God dwells within us as individual believers, but Paul is not writing to an individual but a church. God's "building" is not a person but a church. Jesus Christ is the foundation and His followers are the building, the structure. We must be ever so careful that we build and maintain it the way God has designed it. Few warnings of God's wrath are as clear in the NT.

**Building on a faulty foundation is teaching we can have peace, joy and forgiveness without the righteousness of Christ.** Paul identifies it as the wisdom of the world. It is the idea that one can lead an ethical and moral life without biblical principles as a guide or find peace and happiness and forgiveness for sin without the righteousness of Christ. It is furthering the idea that sin doesn't even exist. What Paul identifies as wisdom of the world we would label secular humanism.

At its root secular humanism is the belief that religious and political ideology must be examined by each person individually and not accepted simply on faith. In other words, truth is subjective and what is true for me might not be true for you.

Such a system of belief sounds tempting, since we are free to come to our own conclusions about who God is and how God can be approached. But that is building a church- a belief system- upon another foundation, a human foundation rather than on Jesus Christ. **A church built on a faulty foundation will not survive.** Ultimately God will destroy it.

Back to our story. Like a house built with straw and sticks a church built upon false doctrine and faulty teaching will not stand. The foundation of some modern churches is faulty. It is not built upon Jesus or His teaching, but on human reason and feel good theology. Once mighty words like holiness and sanctification are now foreign to the ears of many in the pews.

Though He is not the big bad wolf God is most certainly putting those houses to the test, just as he is testing your house and mine. We must resist the temptation to make our own foundation and do things our way and instead build on the foundation that has already been laid. Why take the chance and risk losing the rewards that God would like to give us? Why settle for a house made of straw and sticks that will come crashing down when God sneezes?

This morning let us thank God that He has given us a firm foundation and made us the bricks, the living stones with which He builds His church. Let us follow the plans and build using solid materials- materials that have been tried and proven in the past to be reliable. It will take some extra time and effort to build a house of brick, but the results will be worth every drop of sweat. **The church built on the solid foundation of Christ with the Scriptures as her blueprint is indestructible.**

God is a God of grace. One of the harshest warnings in the NT is followed by one of God's most amazing promises. Look with me at verses 22 & 23. God says what's mine is yours- even my Son is your Son. That means leave the straw and sticks and other worldly wisdom behind and use the good stuff God has us provided. Let us follow the plans and rejoice in knowing that buildings and denominations may rise and fall, but the church built upon the rock – the foundation of Christ- will always remain standing. Amen