

## God's Building

### 1 Corinthians 3: 9 - 23

In our nearly 25 years of marriage, Julie and I have been homeowners for 3 of those years.

We purchased a home at 601 Cherry Street in Anaconda, Montana, only two blocks away from the church I was pastoring. This was back in 2011. It was a modest home by today's standards, but we both agreed it would suit our growing family, offered some curb appeal, and was in our price range – about 80,000 dollars. Sure, it wasn't 10 acres in the country where I could start my gentleman's farm, but you have to start somewhere.

For me, purchasing a home was sort of a big deal. It sent the message that I was, for better or worse, serious about putting down roots in a new community.

This was a definite change for me.

Not since proposing to my wife back in 2000 had I made such a big commitment. I was always used to having a contingency plan - an escape plan if you will - when things didn't work out.

Call me cautious, call me gun-shy, call me ye of little faith, but don't call me stupid. If experience has taught me anything, it's that nothing in this life is a sure thing.

As a matter of fact, God really only guarantees a couple of things in this life: He guarantees that He'll walk with us every step of the way through this life – the ups and downs, the twists and turns, the mountains and the valleys. He promises to never leave us nor forsake us.

He also guarantees that He'll forgive us our sins and take us to heaven to be with him for ever and ever if we put our faith in His One and Only Son Jesus.

The rest of life is no guarantee. We may live a life that looks it came straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting, or we may be a small child that get swept away by the next natural disaster that hits our continent. We just don't know the future.

But I do know this: God is the Author, Maker, and Sustainer of all life and He is the righteous judge, so whatever happens, we are never justified in pointing our finger at him and declaring we know better than He does.

Which makes me want to say something about prayer: It's good to pray and ask God to do things for us, like heal my Aunt Darlene from cancer and heal Jesse McComas from his cancer, and help Darrell and Lance through their upcoming back surgeries and Help Blake through his ongoing physical ailments and challenges and help Zach in school and the list goes on and on and on, and of course we pray because we know the type of God we serve: A loving, compassionate and merciful God.

But there's no guarantee in these prayers. We can't say to God, "I prayed this prayer and now you are obligated to give me what I want." We all know life doesn't work this way.

No, we pray these prayers because we have no one else to turn to. And if he chooses to not give us what we are so desperately desire, we feel let down and crushed because we want it so bad, but we must never lose hope, because our life with God is only beginning in this life. We still have eternal life with Go to look forward to, and then all our prayers will be answered. Bu the ironic thing about this is that the

prayers we pray now on earth won't seem like such a big deal when we finally get to heaven.

I knew going into it, that the house – buying process can be a big headache. This is probably why I avoided it for so long, never mind the fact that I had a serious lack of funds.

The searching, the wondering, the paperwork to secure financing, the emotional investment and turmoil that accompanies the whole process, it can really be stressful. It looks nothing like what they show on TV!

And then there's the home inspection. Where you hand over lots of your hard-earned money to a so-called expert so he can scrutinize every corner of the property in hopes that he'll discover all its flaws before you finally pull the trigger on the deal.

I remember one house that we ready to put an offer on, when suddenly, we received a deluge of rain for an entire week. As it turned out, we discovered that a river practically ran through the basement!

This would have been perfectly acceptable had we been purchasing Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water! Such is life for the prospective homebuyer.

But here's an interesting thought:

The Apostle Paul was a home inspector in his own right - an appropriate job for a man who just described the Corinthian church as a field and a building. In 1 Corinthians 3:9 he writes, *"We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."*

In fact, he went even further. The Apostle Paul rolled up his sleeves, donned his hard hat, and clipped on his headlamp. Then he got down on all fours and ventured into places we hate to go so that he could discover the raw truth about the structure he was surveying.

And what he found would've scared away even the most ardent real estate mogul. Here's his report.

First, the good news:

It's a new building and its foundation is solid. The current owner has an impeccable track-record for pride of ownership.

But here's the bad news:

It's structurally weak.

It certainly isn't ready for any new additions, and its overall design needs a serious overhaul.

It's hampered by its disjointed and conflicting flow.

Internal remodeling is a must, and it looks to be an extensive and messy job.

Certainly not a job for the faint of heart. A fixer-upper, if I've ever seen one.

Now a do-it-yourselfer may not be scared off by this assessment, but **this is a church Paul's describing**, not a house!

A church goes beyond its physical presence.

A church is a spiritual entity, and it's going to need spiritual help, but still, the comparison of a church to a physical building isn't a bad one.

After all, Paul used the analogy to hopefully help the Corinthians admit their flaws, repent, and become better, more mature Christians. His analogy should serve us well.

For example, both a house and a church have a physical aspect to them. They both take up space and have certain dimensions. And as I alluded to earlier, both a house and a church give off a certain curb appeal.

You can drive by a house and tell right away if it's a place you'd like to visit:

Is the paint peeling off?

Are the porch steps in disrepair?

Is the lawn and garden overrun with weeds?

These could be signs that either someone is too busy for their own good or just doesn't care. But let's not be too quick to judge. We've all had our moments when life can get a bit overwhelming and even the thought of completing the littlest chore can seem overwhelming.

And the same can be said for the church and even in our personal lives. In other words, how is our curb appeal?

Corporately and individually?

Have we put our best foot forward and set out the welcome sign?

Do we have a smile on our face?

Does our body language and demeanor invite people into conversation, or do we send off signals that say we don't want to be bothered by newcomers or that we're too busy to catch up with old-timers?

And the initial impression is only the beginning.

It's not enough to nod acknowledgingly in the direction of someone we barely know. We must be prayerful and intentional in our interactions because when we do, we'll pick up valuable information that will enable us to minister to them more effectively in the future.

Some people we meet are going to need prayer. Others need encouragement or challenge or a job. Still others just need a good old-fashioned hug. But we won't know until we decide to be invested and be in the moment with them.

Realtors always talk about building up home equity.

It's the same with our relationships. We invest in relationships, and hopefully the payoff is that we will all be drawn closer to God and to each other, and this will make for a stronger, more resilient church that can survive challenging times. And in this activity, God will be honored.

The lingering effects is that we become mature in Christ, and this addresses the biggest complaint Paul has against the Corinthian church: *"Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly – mere infants in Christ."*

In other words, God's moved into the house, but we still haven't given him the key to the front door!

We're still not ready to trust our new owner, for that is what he is!

Remember, Paul refers to the Corinthians not as just any building but God's building and not just as any field but God's.

And to drive home his point, less we forget, he writes in verse 16, *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?"*

What is the Apostle suggesting?

Simply that if God is the owner of you and me, then we're obligated to live by his house rules, and the Corinthians were failing big-time in this regard. They were being unruly and ungrateful house tenants. *"There is jealousy and quarreling among you,"* Paul says.

And the remedy, Paul says, is going to take more than a paint job!

Your jealousy and arguing go straight to the studs, to the heart of the matter - your lack of spirituality – your lack of Christlikeness. You're focusing on mere men when your attention ought to be on Christ because *"It's only God who makes things grow."*

What is drawing your attention away from Christ?

We all know that we're all affected by this curse, and we can easily name the usual suspects: job and family responsibilities, health and finances, possessions and life goals.

But when you think about it, will any of these elements of life ever go away? Do we even want them to? Of course not, these things are what make life life!

What I'm saying is that life happens and there will always be responsibilities and challenges and trials and diversions. But at the same time, we're always given a choice as to how we react to them and how we deal with them.

We can live life with God or without Him.

Paul chose the former: He writes: *"by the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder."*

In other words, Paul chose to live a life under the refuge of God's grace.

This is where Paul believed he could do the most good for God.

This is where Paul believed he could participate in the God's divine plan for humanity.

Paul knew that God's blueprint for humanity's restoration and salvation begins and ends with God's Son Jesus, and where he would see and experience the glory of God and life eternal.

God invited him into this new existence, and Paul was taking full advantage.

And he says to the Corinthians and to you and me, join me: *"So no more boasting about men and the things of this world ... All things are yours – the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, no*

*more comparisons are necessary - because you are in Christ, and Christ is of God."*

May the prayer of David's resonate within our souls from Psalm 27:  
*"One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord forever all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple." Amen.*