

A Life Well Built

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

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Introduction

You may recognize the little adjustment to the phrase, “*a life well lived*” in our title today. You see it isn’t so much about living life to its fullest as much as building our life to last.

There are many ways that one could gauge a life well built. Some would say this would be an individual who created so much passive income that they got to spend their life “enjoying it.” Others would gauge it by one’s influence or fame but today we are going to look at what the Bible would describe as a life well built *not just for this life but for the one to come.*

There are some things in life that simply aren’t built to stand the test of time. In fact, there are some things that even by design are not created to last: like the phone you have in your pocket where just a couple years after you buy it they create software forcing to get the latest phone even though your phone in theory is perfectly fine. (*though some of you rebels hold on refusing to update*)

Or how appliances these days are not built to be repaired but to be replaced. Or how our cars are really just made out of plastic.

We live in a world where things don’t last. Jesus said this world is where moth and rust destroys and where thieves break in and steal. *And yet we will find today that it is possible to build a life that will last, that is a life well built.*

Context of 1 Corinthians 3

Chapter three opens up with Paul addressing a problem within the Corinthian church and it was a problem of carnal divisions. Rather than people emphasizing the name of Christ, they were clinging to Paul and to Apollos.

Paul clarifies that both him and Apollos are nobodies. It isn’t about them, but all about Jesus.

While they might have a role in watering and planting that is nothing compared to God’s role of giving the increase or that is causing the growth in people’s lives.

And yet both the planter and waterer (*that would be Paul & Apollos*) will receive their own reward *not according to the results but according to their labor.*

Paul then summarizes this in saying that they are God’s fellow workers, and the Corinthian believers were both the field they were working in and the building that they were helping to construct.

We find here the shift from Paul using the illustration of **agriculture** to the illustration of **architecture**. From the end of verse 9 until verse 15, Paul is going to keep with this theme of building and construction regarding a believer’s work & reward.

I have found that there can sometimes be a **false humility** that is involved when thinking about

heavenly rewards. While our love for Jesus should obviously be our greatest motivation, it doesn't have to be our only motivation. It was God who came up with the reality of rewards and it's seen all over Scripture as a further motivation to live our lives *sold out for Jesus Christ*.

In addition, we also learn from Scripture that the more rewards that we gain here on earth will in heaven create a greater capacity to praise, honor, and glorify Him there. One example of this would be in the casting of the crowns at the feet of King Jesus found in Revelation 4.

And so today we are going to talk about what the Bible has to say about the Day that we either gain or lose rewards *for both what we built our life on and what we built our life with*.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 & Pray

You'll notice today that we're going to lean into this theme of construction and architecture as we study this text...

The Foundation (verses 10-11)

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

There is not a more important aspect about a building than the structural integrity of its foundation. It could be the most incredible building but with an unstable foundation, the beauty of it won't matter when it comes crashing down.

We start off here in verse 10 with Paul recognizing that any work that he puts in is only because of the work that God put in him first. He says that this is "*According to the grace of God which was given to me,*" Paul knows that anything he has built in his life is attributed fully to His amazing grace.

This is how Paul not only lived his life but built his life, by grace. Paul knew that any lasting fruit that would come from his life was produced by the grace of God that he had received.

1 Corinthians 15:10

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was with me*.

It was because of this grace that Paul was able to be a wise master builder who laid the foundation while others came and built upon what he laid. *We know from context that what he is referring to is the fact that he founded the church there in Corinth by preaching the Word of God found in **Acts 18**. And now others come and continue the work there that was started by him.*

Master builder: "*architektōn*" - *ar-khee-tek'-tone* – where we get our English word architect
Only time this word appears in the NT and it refers to an expert craftsman or a chief constructor

This concept of "building" is the thrust of this text. Paul uses this theme of construction as an illustration and *alludes to building three times in verse 10 alone*.

Builds: "*epoikodomeō*" - *ep-oy-kod-om-eh'-o* (the tense stresses that this is a continual action)
To build upon, to finish the structure of which the foundation has already been laid, to continue construction of an unfinished building (*with a foundation already established*)

This is something that Paul did as a wise master builder, but we know that there is a greater builder than Paul and that is Jesus Himself. *Jesus was certainly more than simply a carpenter.*

Matthew 16:18

¹⁸ And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

And this build is not yet complete, and it is in this work that Jesus invites us to be a part of His ongoing construction project. ***But we must be careful how we build on it.***

Paul says at the end of verse 10, “let each one take heed how he builds on it.”

Take heed: “*blepo*” – *blep'-o* to watch carefully, to be vigilant, to be on the lookout, to think about carefully, to beware, to consider and contemplate

Jesus would often use this word saying things like, “*Take heed that no one deceives you*” or “*Take heed what you hear*” or “*Beware of the scribes who...*”

So, in what ways are we to take heed in how we build our lives?

Well, we start here with the foundation. We are to make sure we are building on a firm foundation.

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

Foundation: “*themelios*” – *them-el'-ee-os* – something that is put down, the support of a structure

This building we are sitting in now has a foundation. Maybe you were here with us before the carpet went in and we had the opportunity to write verses on the foundation of this sanctuary.

And you know in California we build our foundations differently than many others states because while we might not have hurricanes and tornadoes, we have earthquakes! They make them in a way that can hold up from an intense shaking.

And the *foundation* that our lives must be built on is Jesus only. All else will crumble.

As the great hymn goes, “On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.”

2 Timothy 2:19a

¹⁹ Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands,

It stands and it will always stand. We would be wise to build our life on Jesus.

Jesus is described as the chief cornerstone. *Meaning without Him, it's all coming down!*

Ephesians 2:20

²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,

I love the emphasis that Paul puts here on the reality that there is NO OTHER foundation.

It is Jesus and Jesus only. ***Should that not be the motto of our lives?***

It reminds me of when Peter was preaching in Acts 4 and the religious leaders are questioning him asking him in what power or by what name he healed the lame man. And he responds with the name of Jesus who he mentions is that chief cornerstone which the builders rejected. *And this...*

Acts 4:12

¹² Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

No other name, no other foundation, no other Savior, no other Lord. No other foundation will last, and no other name will save.

At the end of Matthew 7, Jesus uses the illustration of the man who built his house on the sand vs the rock. **Do you remember?** The difference maker was not in the hearing what Jesus had to say but in the doing what Jesus said. He said for the man who heard His sayings and does them was like the man who built his house on the rock. And then in contrast the man who heard but did not do the sayings of Jesus was like the man who built his house on the sand and when that storm came, it all came crumbling down.

Are you building your life on Jesus? It starts with the foundation! **But secondly**, what are you building with? *While there is only one foundation, there is a variety of materials that could be used.*

The Materials (verse 12)

¹² Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

Now while the firmness of the foundation is first and foremost, what materials are used also matter. You could have the best foundation but if you use shoddy materials, the building will only endure as long as the materials will last even though the foundation remains unmoved.

Paul lists 6 different materials that someone could build with. Now I don't think that each one of these have a specific meaning but there is clear division into the quality of materials listed. Materials that are high quality and materials that are low quality. *(put up the two lists here)*

Gold, silver, precious stones vs. wood, hay, straw

Precious stones don't refer to jewels but rather find stone materials like marble or granite

Straw: post-harvest, dried stalks of grain *(can be also translated as stubble)*

Gold/Silver/Precious Stones

Valuable, Lasting, Beautiful, Hard to Obtain

Wood/Hay/Straw

Cheap, Perishable, Ordinary, Easy to Obtain

Anyone remember the story of The 3 Little Pigs and the big bad wolf? Have you ever read the end of it? The three little pigs eat the wolf! But nonetheless you know the story, they tried straw, they tried sticks, but it wasn't till they got to the brick house where the house was built to last.

So, these are two categories of work in the believer's life. We will come to find that the material used will make all the difference when it comes to the rewards that will be either gained or lost.

These materials don't represent things like someone's wealth, talents, opportunities, or even spiritual gifts. They do represent the believer's response to what God has provided in their lives which could entail wealth, talents, opportunities, or even spiritual gifts.

The question will be: *what did we do with what God gave us?*

And not only what but why. These materials represent not only things done but the motive behind what was done. *The heart and not just the act.*

Jesus emphasized the importance of the heart and motive in His famous sermon on the mount...

Matthew 6:1-4

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ³ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

Jesus would go on and say the same thing about prayer and fasting.

Jesus says you could do something legitimately good but if it's done to be seen, then that right there would be your reward. That work would be like building your life with wood, hay, and stubble because while it won't last to be rewarded in eternity.

Someone's life might look good now and have the appearance of a life well-built **but will it last?**

Time will certainly tell and not only time but what Paul will refer to as, "the Day". This is why it is both important what you build on and what you build with because of the **inspection** that's coming to the life of every believer.

The Inspection (verse 13)

¹³ each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

Now every architect and builder know that the inspection eventually comes. *Will the work be accepted? Will they have to redo something? Is it up to code?* It's a day that is typically filled with anticipation and expectation. The believer too will have a day where the life he built will be inspected.

Both his foundation and the materials will be put to the test.

The Day that is being referred to here is a day *for believers only*. Certainly, unbelievers will have a Day as well, but it will be much different than what is referenced here in verse 13. The unbeliever's day is when they stand before Christ at The Great White Throne judgment and the books will be opened, and Jesus will personally and individually judge everyone who rejected Him by ultimately casting them in the lake that burns with fire.

However, the "Day" of verse 13 is known as the Judgement Seat of Christ or the Bema Seat.

The exact timing is debated but it will happen at some point after a believer's death or the rapture.

This judgment is not for punishment but for reward, for either the gain or loss thereof.

2 Corinthians 5:10

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Romans 14:10c & 12

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹² So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Judgement seat is a single word in Greek: bema. A *bema* was a raised platform on which judges sat to view athletic games. Their job was to make sure contestants followed the rules and to present awards to the victors. The *bema* was never a place to reprimand the athletes or to punish them in any way. It was a place of testing and reward. In the same way, the *bema* of Christ will not be a place of condemnation for us but a place where we receive reward for how we lived for the Lord.

When Paul says “*whether good or bad*” in 2 Corinthians 5, *bad is the idea of worthless*. This isn’t a place for sin to be judged since that price has already been paid. Of course, anything sinful won’t last or be rewarded but there will also be things that weren’t inherently sinful but just not worth anything.

Fire isn’t used here for *punishment* but rather a *tool* used to test each one’s work. That phrase, “*each one’s work*”, is repeated twice I believe to emphasize two things: that this will take place for every believer & that it is the person’s work being tested, not the person themselves. *While the builder’s work might be burned up by the fire, the builder himself is not touched by the flames.*

Paul says here that each one’s work will be made clear, declared, and revealed. Paul uses three words to really say the same thing which is that all work will become **KNOWN**. *While it might not be clear now, it will be made clear then.*

Clear: “*phaneros*” - *fan-er-os*’ – become apparent, evident, known openly and outwardly

Declare: “*dēloō*” - *day-lo’-o* - to make known, to make plain, to bring to light

Revealed: “*apokalyptō*” - *ap-ok-al-oo’-to* - to cause something to be fully known, publicly

Luke 8:17-18

¹⁷ For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor *anything* hidden that will not be known and come to light. ¹⁸ Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him *more* will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him.”

Clear is same word as light

On this Day what each person produced in their life will become visible and seen.

1 Corinthians 4:5

⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.

While we don’t know what’s in someone’s heart, the Bible tells us that it is God who weighs the heart. He knows and on that day each one’s praise will come directly from the Lord!

What is the tool by which this will be become clear, be declared, and be revealed? FIRE

Fire is symbol of both judgment & testing. The picture is that fire will be the tool of testing the work. It will either pass through being purified by the fire or it will be burned up and consumed.

Test: “*dokimazō*” - *dok-im-ad’-zo* – to examine and evaluate, to prove the quality of something

“of what sort it is” or what kind of work it is

After a building is complete, there is a thorough examination done before the building can be sold or occupied. This is of course done by an inspector who uses a variety of tools to ensure the safety of the building. They seek to verify the structural integrity, verify the proper installation of things like plumbing and electrical, and of course especially in California making sure everything is up to code whether it makes any sense or not.

This is not so much the *quantity* of work which is tested as much as the *quality* of work.

Though the more you live for Jesus the more that is able to come out the other side of the fire.

Remember that time Jesus intentionally sat by the treasury and *people watched?*

Mark 12:41-44

⁴¹ Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. ⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³ So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

It is the character of the work that is being tested. The motive that lies behind the works. The testing or judgment is not based on amount or results but faithfulness and motive.

Just earlier in the chapter, Paul had reminded them that it is God who gives the increase, He deals in the realm of results, and we are to focus on faithfulness.

1 Corinthians 3:8

⁸ Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

I think we will be surprised in many ways at what will endure vs. what will burn. It just might be the person you thought would get all the rewards because what they did was seen was actually in it for the wrong reasons and the widowed woman who committed her life to pray on behalf of church behind closed doors whose name no one knew will gain more than most.

We would be smart to test our own work before it is tested by fire. Paul said this when referring to the taking of the communion elements as we are to examine ourselves before we take it.

1 Corinthians 11:31

³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

We ought to test our materials that we are building with before we build with them: like how someone would taking a 2x4 making sure it isn't bowed, making sure the paint isn't old, ensuring the wires aren't faulty

To do this effectively, we of course need to be like David & ask God to search us and try us.
Will what I'm doing last? Will my work make it through the fire? Will my labor endure, or will it burn?

There are only two effects that the fire has on the believer's life: their work will either endure or their work will burn. *This brings us to the appraisal....*

The Appraisal (verses 14-15)

¹⁴ *If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

Appraisal: to set a value, to estimate the worth, particularly by persons appointed for the purpose

The act of building has now ceased, the inspection has taken place, and now it's time to see what the worth is of what was built, *the appraisal.*

From the 16th to the mid 20th century before English got all wacky, praise & appraisal were actually synonymous terms with one another. *We read earlier that each man's PRAISE will come from God.*

There is a story about a couple that worked and saved to build their dream retirement home. They picked a contractor who would agree to build the house as they designed it. When he finished, they came to inspect the work. As they toured the first floor, they told the contractor that if the second

floor looked as good, they would give him a bonus. But as they searched for the stairs, it dawned on them that their designs did not include a way upstairs.

So as we look at the appraisal, let's first see the work that endures in verse 14...

Work That Endures (verse 14)

¹⁴ If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

Endures: *menō* – men'-o – to remain

Endures, meaning that any “work” that makes it through the fire and does not burn up will be rewarded. That would be the gold, silver, or precious stones. *This work could be described as being done in Jesus, for Jesus, and like Jesus.*

John 15:16

¹⁶ You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

Remaining fruit and enduring work will be REWARDED.

Reward: “*misthos*” - *mis-thos'* - recompense, paid outcome of a particular work

Hebrews 6:10

¹⁰ For God *is* not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

This is work that is done as we serve one another as fellow believers.

But it also includes when we love those outside the church in Jesus' name.

Luke 6:35

³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

Love that little detail, “*hoping for nothing in return*”. That is one of the aspects that will turn an endured work to a burned work if we serve or love not for Jesus' sake but for our sake.

Colossians 3:23-24

²³ And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

This is the difference maker: as to the Lord and not to men. All that we do as to the Lord we can know that we will receive the reward as we make it all about Jesus.

Work That Burns (verse 15)

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

Burned: “*katakaiō*” - kat-ak-ah'-ee-o – to be consumed, to be burned utterly, wholly

This would be the wood, hay, and straw. *This is any work not done for Jesus.* Time wasters or self-focused work. *This can even include many good things done with wrong motives.*

Suffer loss: to forfeit something, to sustain damage *wrongly used by some regarding purgatory*

The loss is not salvation for the fire does not burn the person but the works so that there is no reward for that work that was done. *Essentially those “works” will have been wasted.*

Paul even emphasizes this by saying “*he himself will be saved, yet as through fire.*” **He made it but barely. He made it but he smells like smoke. He made it but everything that was with him was singed.**

This person makes it to heaven but there will be some who in a sense have nothing to show for it.

Now don’t hear what I’m not saying... when I say barely, it has nothing to do with the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross which is mighty to save but rather the person’s life as a witness of Christ. This person will have no stories to share, no testimonies to give. He’ll be stoked to be there but there is a very real sense of loss. Not a punishment but a “*missing out on*”.

Saved, yet as through fire...

Imagine you have a beautiful house that you spent a lifetime building and adjusting but one day it catches fire, and you wake up in the middle of the night to find the flames roaring. You jump out the window and are saved but the house is burned up and a lifetime of work is burned up.

FOR SOME THE DAY THEY SEE JESUS WILL AT FIRST BE LIKE THIS – filled with regret.

The feeling of loss will be very real. Thankfully it be tempered with being saved and redeemed.

But the Scriptures tells us of this future day now that we might build our lives with that which will last and that which will bring reward.

2 John 8

⁸ Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward.

Now some might say well I’m good as long as I get to heaven. Getting there will be good enough I won’t need any of the extras. I’m sure I will be happy, and I won’t care about the other stuff.

Well, think about it like this, my 9-month-old daughter has an absolute BLAST playing with our Tupperware drawer. Having the time of her life. To her there is no better experience than that. But I know from experience there is WAY better things out there like snowboarding, white water rafting, and so much more. So yes, while you will have absolute joy in heaven regardless, the capacity to enjoy all that God wants for you will increase with these rewards that He gives.

Schindler’s List – Movie (true story)

Oskar Schindler, became concerned about the welfare of his Jewish factory workers during World War II. As a result of his compassion for the Jews being killed, Schindler creates as many factory jobs as he possibly can for Jews. He risks his own life by arguing with German army officers that the Jewish labor is essential for his factory. At the end of the movie, World War II is drawing to a close, and Schindler has spent a small fortune of his personal wealth to pay off army officers in order to save the lives of about 1,200 Jewish men and women. As the war ends and Schindler is saying goodbye to these dear people he has saved, he looks around at their faces. Then, his gaze stops, not on a face, but on his car parked in their midst. Schindler simply breaks down and sobs uncontrollably as he realizes he could have sold his car and used the money to save 10 more lives. Then, he looks at his ring and knows it could have saved two more lives. As much as he had done, Schindler feels the weight of it being not enough.

What will it be like for us on that Day that we see Him? Will the lives that built stand the test of His holy fire? What will remain of all that we did?

Revelation 3:11

¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Revelation 22:12

¹² “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work.

It was John Wesley who said...

John Wesley

I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity.

Oh, that we might live for what will last! Oh, that we would live our whole lives for the Lord!

1 Corinthians 15:58

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

C.T. Studd (*British missionary who gave up the “good life” to live for Jesus*)

Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life, yes only one, Now let me say, “Thy will be done”; And when at last I'll hear the call, I know I'll say “twas worth it all”