

Series: Pictures of the Church  
"The Church is a Building: The Goal is Quality"  
1 Corinthians 3: 9b-17

May 3, 2015  
Kitwe Church

Introduction:

Today we will resume a series that Phil and I have started long ago, before Easter. The subject of this series is "The Pictures of The Church." The question we are seeking to answer is, "What is a church?" So far in this series we have seen that "The Church is a Family – the goal is maturity." Next we saw that "The Church is a Field – the goal is fruitfulness." Today we continue this series and we will pick up where we left off in 1 Corinthians 3.

As a result of today's message we will see that the church is a building and the goal is quality. Now, let me make something clear. We are speaking metaphorically here. We all know that when we speak of the church we are speaking of people, not bricks and mortar. The church is not a literal building, but rather the gathering of believers meeting inside that building. Yet, in today's text we will see that Paul uses the picture of a building to teach some important truths about the Church.

Read 1 Cor. 3:9-17

9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you[a] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

For us to be the building that God intends, a building fulfills the purpose for which he is constructing us, we must look at his architectural blueprints. We must first know what a church is and how it should be built.

This last week I read an article from back in America that deeply saddened me. There was a club for immoral sexual activity that had purchased a building next to a school so that they could engage in

their immoral activities there. This is illegal because America has strict laws about how close such a club can be to places like schools. Well, once the clubs activities were discovered, the owners of the club knew it would be shut down. So, guess what they decided to do? They decided to register themselves as a church.

If you are like me you might be wondering why did they choose to register as a church? After all, what they were doing is not godly or even spiritual. Their answer was simple...

"We've now gotten a permit to meet as a church, and a church is something that cannot be defined under the U.S. Constitution," said Larry Roberts, the attorney for the club-turned-church.

The dance floor has become the sanctuary. Two rooms labeled "dungeon" are now "choir" and "handbells." Forty-nine small, private rooms remain, but most of them have become prayer rooms. The signs have changed, but the activities have not. If you went there you would not find people worshipping the Lord. Rather, you would find them engaged in worshipping the idol of lust. How sad!

It may be true that the U.S. Constitution does not define a church, but the U.S. Constitution is not the authority in such matters. God is, and the Bible certainly defines what a church is and it does not match what this group of people is trying to do.

Ephesians 5:25-27 paints a totally different picture. "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

Although this illustration from America is an extreme one and the people who called their club a church were intentionally manipulating and abusing the title of church, it is an indication of a more common problem. People don't know what a church is supposed to be! Too often, Christians end up engaging in wrong practices and believing wrong doctrines because they do not really know what a church is. If you do not know what it is, then you won't know accurately what it is supposed to do. So, many churches are filled with people who decide what they think a church should be and what it should do. But, what sources of information do they use to define their church? Often it is tradition, desires, or what they have observed. They forget an important truth, that this church is not theirs. It is Jesus' church. We don't have the right to define what a church is, Jesus does and He has clearly told us what a church is and what it should do in His Holy Word, the Bible. That is why we are taking the time to do this series. As Kitwe Church grows and takes steps to become an official church then we must make sure that we are following God's plan - His Blueprints for what a church should be.

So let's now think of today's big idea again. As a result of today's message we will see the picture that the church is a building and the goal is quality.

As we explore this idea, the first thing we see is that...

1. We, as the Church are God's Building v. 9b

He is the head of the Church. He is the owner. Eph. 1:22-23; 5:25 make this absolutely clear. As the owner, He has the right to set up His church in whatever way he sees fit. It is not up to the laborers doing the building to change His plans. He is the designer of His Church. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, he will build His church. He already has the plan laid out.

When we lived out in the bush outside of Choma we built buildings for our ministry. One of those buildings served as the house where we would live. It was really more of a shelter with a kitchen area and toilets. Our house was a safari tent that hung from the rafters of this building. To make sure everything fit I drew up detailed plans in Tonga so that workers could continue building even when we were not there. Some followed my instructions and things went well. Others, decided the instructions weren't that important and would take the easy way. The problem was that that man's disregard for my instructions meant we had to tear out what they had done to match the plans so everything fit properly. Sadly, too many churches have that same experience because they forget that we, as the Church, are God's building and He made a plan for us to follow.

2. We, as the Church have the responsibility of Continued Construction v. 10- 11

This passage teaches us three important things regarding our responsibilities in building.

A. The Leaders Must Be Wise Master Builders v. 10 a

Speaking of his own ministry in Corinth Paul said that through the Grace of God, he laid the foundation as a wise master builder. This is important. If you get the foundation wrong, you will have problems everywhere else. If it is not level then the building won't be level. If it is not square, then the building will not be square. If it is weak and cracks then the entire building can fall. If there is no foundation and the walls were erected on topsoil then the walls will fall within the first rainy season.

We will talk more about the important of the foundation in a few minutes, but for now our focus is on the fact that leaders must be wise master builders. They don't have to be architects or designers. They have to know how to read the plans, follow the plans, and communicate with the architect to clarify the plans. They have to know how to use the tools necessary for building. They have to know the right materials to use. They have to know how to train and lead the other construction workers on their crew.

Well, the pastors of the church must be wise master builders. As you know, at Kitwe Church there are three pastors/elders at this

point in time. We want you to know that we take the responsibility very seriously. We know we must be master builders. We must know how to study God's Word where we find the building plans for His church. We must follow His plan rather than trying to make our own plans or improve on God's plans. We must be in regular communication with Jesus, the Architect, through constant prayer. We must know how to use the tools for building the church (Bible Study resources, evangelism, counseling, doctrinal statements, constitution, fellowship activities, etc.) We must know how to recruit more church members into service, train them for ministry, and lead them in serving the Lord as we work together to build the church under the headship of Jesus Christ.

Many of you have been coming regularly to Kitwe Church for quite a while. You have seen that Phil has been working hard since February 2014 to lay the foundation. You have seen Nathan join him in July 2014 to keep laying the foundation. You have seen me join in January 2015 and now the foundation is nearing completion. We want to see Kitwe church take the next step toward being a mature New Testament Church. We want to lead you into these next steps if you are willing to join the labor force.

That brings us to the next concept.

B. Church Members Have a Responsibility to Continue Building  
v. 10b

Paul said that others were building on the foundation that he laid. From this we see that church members should not be spectators; but co-laborers with the pastors. The Pastors are not the hired workers. They are not elite exhibitionists showing off their talents to impress the crowds. They are team captains encouraging their fellow teammates to do their very best. Every church member is a builder...or should be, but for that to happen they must first be true church members and there is only one way to become a church member. Verse 11 uses the picture of a foundation for a building to clearly state what that one way to become a church member is.

C. All construction must be built on the foundation of Jesus Christ  
v. 11

This verse illustrates 1 possible danger that must be avoided, but often people fall right into this pit. For a person to join the building team of the church they must become a genuine Christian and that can only happen if they have put their faith in Christ as their personal Lord and Savior for the forgiveness of past sin and to be saved from the power of sin as we continue on in this sinful world. This is a pre-requisite for being a church member. That is the foundational truth of Christianity. That is the foundation that the wise master builders – the pastors – are carefully laying. We are making sure that the common ground that we stand on together is faith in Jesus Christ. Have you joined the team? Has there been a moment in time when you were born again by putting your faith in Jesus Christ?

Many times the people want to build their own church, rather than building on God's foundation of His Son Jesus Christ. You may ask, "What does this look like?" Well, many times people reject Jesus as the Foundation or basis for their acceptance in God's sight. They build their own foundation on their morality – avoiding the socially bad things such as bad language, pornography, or adultery; but this is not a level foundation. It is crooked, no matter how moral they may be. Abstaining from "really bad sins" doesn't make you acceptable in God's sight. There is still sin there and your morality can't remove it. Only the blood of Jesus being applied for the forgiveness of your sin can remove your sin. Others build their own foundation on their good deeds. They may have horrible morals, but they think they can make up for that by going to church, helping out with repairs to local community schools and orphanages, or volunteering for various charity events. However, this too is a poor substitute for the foundation of Jesus. This foundation is out of square. It won't make you acceptable in God's sight. Still others build their own foundation on money. They think they can buy their way into heaven by giving to the church—offering box or to local charities. Others make fellowship, friendship, and acceptance with the group their foundation. This is a flimsy, weak foundation.

It is not that these things are bad things, they are good things, but they are not suitable foundations. All of these false foundations will crumble. None of them make you acceptable in God's sight. None of them get you to heaven. None of them make you a Christian. Only faith in Christ makes you a Christian.

The bottom line is this: A building can't be built based on your personal beliefs. In the physical world there are scientific laws that govern the building. If you violate the scientific laws then the building will collapse and many will die. Well, for the church there are spiritual laws that govern how we build and the most important one is that faith in Jesus is the only suitable foundation for the church.

Now, in v. 12-15 Paul turns his attention to how each Christian should build on that foundation once they have received Christ as their savior. Notice, the one comes before the other. Faith in Jesus is the cause, the good works of Christianity are the effect. It can't be the other way around.

3. Each of us, as builders, must choose the building materials wisely v. 12-15

These verses illustrates a second possible danger that must be avoided, but sadly is too common. This danger using poor quality materials to build on a strong foundation. We must be very particular in what materials we use in building the church. Notice that Christ has already set the example here. You might ask, "What do you mean that Christ set the example?" Just this, that when Christ was building His Church He chose you as the material He would use. When you become a Christian you are baptized by the Holy

Spirit into the body of Christ. To be a Christian is to be part of the church. Remember what the word church means. It comes from the Greek word, "Ekklesia" – which means called out ones. The church is not a structural building, it is a group of people that God has called out of the darkness of this sinful world to be separated for His special use. If you have turned to Jesus Christ in repentance of sin and faith in His work on the cross then you are part of the church.

You are the material He chose (Romans 8:29–30 "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom He called he also justified, and those whom he justified also glorified." As a member of His Church you are = HAND-PICKED. CHOSEN. CALLED OUT. Like a builder going to hardware store to select wood etc. Some supplies are bought early on and some chosen later because of the timing in the process of building. Some of you are already Christians who have been baptized into the body of Christ. You are already part of the Church. Some of you have not yet received Christ, but 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God is not willing that any would perish but that all would come to repentance. In Matthew 16:18 we saw that He wants to build His church. He is not finished yet, and the fact that you are here with a desire to know this God makes me believe that He is calling you – choosing you to be the next materials used in the building. Your part in that is to be willing to become His!

For those of you who have already made that choice; who belong to Jesus as part of His church, you must now choose wisely how you use your life to build up His Church. Every decision you make is an investment for eternity. You can choose to do things the easy way to just get by with the bare minimum in the Christian life. You can choose to live by the motto, "How close to sin can I get without falling over the edge?" But, when you live this way you are building your life with the cheap materials pictured in this passage as wood, hay, and stubble. It is easy, but it is not strong. It is cheap, but it will not last.

On the other hand you can choose to invest in eternity in things that will last. In this passage those things are described as gold, silver, and precious stones. That is what this building in India was made of. It is called "The Golden Temple," but it's actual name is Haminda Sahibe which literally translates as "The Abode of God." This is what your life should look like because you have made every choice in life as an investment into God's Kingdom. Your overall concern was to please God. The question you ask yourself with each question is, "What would Jesus want me to do in this situation." You will live by the motto, "Anything worth doing is worth doing well." Life won't be easy, but it will be fulfilling. What you invest in will be costly, but they will last.

You might ask, what does this look like. Well, this picture is painted for us in 2 Peter 1:3–8. 3 His divine power has granted to

us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to[a] his own glory and excellence, [b] 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue,[c] and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities[d] are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

These are the traits that must be in each of our lives. If we choose these materials to build our lives and our ministries then we will see results that last. We will have invested in gold, silver, and precious stones in our spiritual lives.

Now, what you do in your life impacts all the rest of us in the Church. How you build your life contributes to the building that is the Church. This church will only be as strong as it's weakest link. What we build our lives with will be revealed. On the Day of Judgment God will be examining both our actions and our attitudes. Will what you have built in your life and in this church be strong and valuable like the materials used to build the Harminda Sahib Temple? Or will it be like a thatch building out in the bush?

I can tell you from experience out in the bush, that when you build with wood, hay, and stubble nothing lasts when the fire comes. You can escape with your life, but not much else. I don't know about you, but as for me, I want to have something to present to the Lord on Judgment Day. I want my life to have produced eternal rewards. I want to hear my Savior say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Every church member must pay careful attention to how they build on the foundation. After the foundation of faith in Christ has been firmly set and solidified in your heart then you must join the work of building God's church, but this is a serious task. You must be careful about how you build on it. You must be just as committed as the Pastors are to knowing God's Word so you can know His plan, following His plan rather than setting out on your own plan, communicating to the architect in prayer, using the tools of ministry (evangelism, teaching, counseling), and helping to train other new builders as well. Every Christian is supposed to multiply themselves by training others. Why is that? Verse 16-17 tells us the answer.

4. Our Purpose, as the Church, is to be the dwelling place of God v.16-17

The purpose of a building is provide shelter. It is a place to host visitors and build relationships. That is what the Church is

supposed to be. It is a house – God’s House. Every house has a kitchen where food is prepared and a dining room where meals are eaten. God’s house is the place where we gather to receive the spiritual food of God’s Word. Every house has a bathing room to clean clothing and body. God’s House is where we come to receive the cleansing of God’s Word to purify us after our work in this sin cursed world where we still pick up the stains of sin from day to day. Every house has a sitting room where people gather to rest and be refreshed by fellowship with one another. God’s House is where we gather for spiritual rest and refreshment.

So, we have seen the purpose of a building. It is a dwelling place. A place to host visitors and build relationships. But an architect always builds his own house in such a way that it fulfills those basic functions that a house must fulfill, but it also reflects His character, personality, and skill. When we lived in America, we found a house in Parkersburg, WV that was built by an architect to showcase his ability. This house was made not only to be a dwelling place – it was intended to display his wisdom and skill as an architect. It was meant to display his glory! It was amazing. We couldn’t help but be drawn to it.

Christians, we are the church. We are the temple and He dwells in us! What a privilege! We have a practical purpose, but we also also have glorious purpose. We are intended to display His wisdom and skill as the architect of His church. We are to draw all men to Him by lifting Him high in our personal lives and our church worship services. We are to build His church by ushering new believers into His Church, making them feel welcome, and practically helping them grow by being spiritually fed, cleansed, rested, and refreshed.

Conclusion:

So, we have seen today yet another picture of the church. In this picture, the church is a building and the goal in quality! We, as the Church, are God’s building. We, as the Church, are responsible for continued construction. Each of us, as builders, must choose the building materials wisely. All because our purpose, as the church is to be the dwelling place of God.

Are we ready for the task?

1. Some of you may need to stop being spectators and actually join the team, but putting faith in Christ today. You might say, but for as long back as I can remember, I have believed that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. I believe that the Father raised him from the dead to prove that he really is the Savior and Lord of the universe. But the question is, have you personally received Jesus Christ into your heart to save you? It is not enough to just believe these things about Christ in your head. We must consciously, intentionally choose to receive Christ into our hearts by faith. To receive Christ we have to admit we are sinners, that we’ve fallen short of God’s perfect standard. And we have to ask Christ to forgive us and



adopt us into his family. Have you ever done that? If not, I hope you will today!

2. Some of you may need to give up the wood, hay, and stubble you have been using to build your life and instead start investing in gold, silver, and precious stones.