

# THE CODE VIOLATIONS WE CAN'T AFFORD - JAN. 23

## *1 Corinthians 3:10-17*

Scripture Readings

**Leviticus 19:1-2,9-18**

**Matthew 5:38-48**

Hymns

**293, 341 (1,4-5), 352 (1-2,6-7), 46**

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) unless otherwise noted

***“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”*** (Romans 15:13)

Dear Fellow Christians:

There are certain things in life that just flat-out don't go together: wolves and sheep, smoking and oxygen tents, diesel fuel and ice cream, and—more to the point this morning—contractors and building inspectors. I don't care how kind, gentle, mild-mannered the contractor, I've yet to meet one that doesn't undergo a strange and frightening transformation at the first scent of a building inspector.

Many of you can probably relate. No matter how sweet and gentle the disposition, when the building inspector comes round, builders start growling deep in their throats, the hair on the back of their necks stands straight up, and their upper lips involuntarily curl into menacing snarls.

It can actually be a source of great amusement for pretty much everyone but the contractor himself. You can be in the midst of a light-hearted conversation about this or that and suddenly the builder glances up and his countenance darkens. Building inspector!

Every builder knows both the value of building codes and their enforcement. Yet they also know just how miserable a building inspector can make your life if you get sideways of him. Interestingly enough our text for this morning deals in exactly this sort of thing—building codes of a different nature, together with just how bad life can be if you violate those codes. The text that will direct our meditation this morning is found in the Third Chapter of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians:

*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. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—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. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

So far the verbally inspired words of our God. Here God himself offers us infallible truth and wisdom—his very words! How right then to prepare to give these truths our undivided attention as we pray: “Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.” Amen.

If I was to say “Building Project,” what thought first pops into your head? Maybe you've been involved in a building project at your church. Maybe you've got your own building project going at home or maybe they've got your office building all torn up for a major renovation. My guess is no one would think of themselves as “building projects.” No one would think of your Christian congregation as a building project. Yet that is exactly where our text for this morning takes us. The building project that God's Word brings to our attention this morning is you and me, individually and collectively, together with the building codes that regulate such projects. Natural man hates those codes, with a passion, but our text shows us just how important they really are.

Paul begins where every good builder begins, with the foundation. You can't skimp here. In fact every kid who has ever been to the beach knows the folly of building on a bad foundation, what happens when you build either with sand or on sand. Nothing built with a bad foundation can possibly last. Anyone who wants to create something permanent first establishes a foundation. In fact while what is above the ground tends to get all of the attention and admiration, it is really what is below the ground that gives solidity and stability. So also when it comes to human beings, Paul here tells us that there is and can be only one sure, solid foundation—which of course is Jesus Christ.

Don't allow this profound truth to thud dully upon your ears as if it were just another tired cliché. It is—and is intended to be—much more than that. Though a building without a proper foundation will fail and fall, that fall is correctable, rebuildable, not so with human beings, and the implications of that simple truth could not be more

profound. This is actually just another way to look at every human being, a more accurate and insightful way to regard every single soul in your own personal circle of life. Every single soul that is not based upon trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins will fall, and that fall will be eternal, permanent, and uncorrectable. So also Jesus said, “And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:26-27)

The fall is so great because it is eternal. There will be no bargaining, no legal loopholes or clever defenses on Judgment Day. With utter finality Scripture says, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16) Human beings in our modern, permissive, subjective-reality society have a difficult time coming to terms with such pronouncements. They simply cannot accept the reality of what God has declared or promised. Man always harbors this false sense that he will be able, in the end, to pull his own fat out of the fire somehow, some way. He will march. He will protest. He will attempt to strike what he considers a reasonable compromise to avoid the calamity that now terrifies him. All such efforts will prove to be the very definition of futility. God’s final pronouncement isn’t a mystery, it’s a certainty. He himself told us what it would be. Listen again to Jesus’ own description of that Day of Judgment in Matthew 7: “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” Nor is it a mystery as to just how that catastrophe can be averted, since Jesus then went on to talk about the very thing we are discussing this morning: “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24-25)

The great news for you is that what Jesus here described as “a house built upon the rock” applies to each of you as Christians. Through faith in Jesus Christ, every one of you has within you that one foundation that will not, cannot, fail. You know and trust Jesus Christ to be your Savior, and on that basis you can and will stand unaccused on the Last Day and you will inherit the heaven that Jesus has prepared for you. That foundation has been established in you by the Holy Spirit, working through the power of God’s Word.

This was Paul's work—laying this foundation by telling the people of his day about Jesus. So too in our text he said, “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation.. for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” Yet you, no doubt, noted that this wasn't the end of the building process, was it? Paul also said “I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.”

This is where the building codes come in. The foundation—faith in Jesus Christ—obviously has to be laid. It has to come first. That's conversion, and unless a man is converted he cannot be saved. Man can't do anything to convert himself. He can't decide to be converted. God the Holy Spirit has to do that for us, in us. Yet after conversion there is a lifelong building project called sanctification. This is the part of the human building project that never ends. In fact you'll note in our text that Paul says, “I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it.” Notice he doesn't say that someone else completed the project that he started. He referred to it as an ongoing process, to which he added these words: “Let each one take care how he builds upon it.”

Again, the Bible refers to this on-going building project as sanctification. The term is used in different ways in Scripture, but here we are referring to that ongoing process whereby a human being becomes less and less dedicated to sin and the things of this world and more and more dedicated to the things of God. You can obviously then see why this project never ends this side of eternity, since we never reach our ultimate “building project” goal. Our ultimate goal is to walk in perfect harmony with God's will and in perfect obedience to God's commandments. Every single one of us then, as well as every single Christian congregation, is in the midst of their own personal, lifelong building project. Yet this is a truth that is intended to inspire and strengthen us for the struggle, rather than depress and demoralize us at that which can never be accomplished.

Our text then goes on to give us the building codes that God has given us for this ongoing project: “Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—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. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.”

You heard Paul talk about building on the foundation with various materials. You probably also noticed that he seemed to progress from best to worst, from gold to

straw. He's talking about the fact that everything that Christians do after their conversion has an effect on that "temple of the Holy Spirit" that is every individual Christian. You also heard that the "project" is for each Christian to be built up into a perfect, magnificent temple worthy of that Holy Spirit who lives within us.

Take just a moment to consider the enormity, the importance, and the implications of what God the Holy Spirit just revealed to us in these words. Your body is now the dwelling place of God the Holy Spirit. Everything therefore that you do with your body affects also that Holy Spirit who lives within you. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 4:29-30, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

Think of it in terms of a church building project. The goal when building or expanding a church is to make that house of worship as attractive as possible. Why? Because it is a house of worship—a building dedicated to the glory and worship of God. Carry this picture over into your own bodies, your own personal temple of the Holy Spirit who now lives within you. With our God-given Christian wisdom you and I now realize that we don't own ourselves. We are temples in which the Holy Spirit resides. That means, among other things, that every bad thing that we do dirties and cheapens the temple. It's a code violation, if you will. We aren't the independent contractors that the world thinks they are.

What sorts of things degrade or defile these temples of ours? Paul gives an example later in 1 Corinthians, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1 Corinthians 6:18-20) Every bad thing, every sin we commit, is like adding something cheap, inappropriate, or dirty to what is supposed to be a holy, pure, magnificent, golden temple.

On our own, you and I are incapable of consistently adorning our own personal building project with the sort of gold and gems mentioned in our text. The good news is that God the Holy Spirit has not only laid the foundation of faith in us, he also now works through the power of his Word to transform our imperfect, feeble actions into that which is good, holy, and precious. But he does not expect us to be passive and he certainly doesn't expect us to join the opposition. Thus the warning or

encouragement that Paul offers in our text is not directed to the Holy Spirit but to you and me: consider carefully how you treat God's temple.

The words of our text teach us to weigh every thought, word, and action on the basis of God's standards, God's building codes. Recognize the reality that your body is a temple of Holy Spirit, and with that truth ever present in your thoughts, make it your life's labor of love to adorn that temple as a fitting residence of the King of kings and Lord of lords. All the while thrilling to the fact that the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ—that by which we are saved—has already been laid in you by God himself. Amen.

—**Pastor Michael Roehl**

St. Paul Ev. Lutheran Church  
Bismarck, ND