

"The Code Violation We Can't Afford"

Text: 1 Corinthians 3:10-17

**"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, pickles 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 will recall our expansion project here in 2003 and our contractor – to protect his identity we'll call him, oh, say, "Jack." You would be hard pressed to find a kinder, better Christian man – except when the building inspector came around – at which point He would start growling deep in his throat, the hair on the back of his neck would stand straight up, and his upper lip would involuntarily curl into a menacing snarl.

It actually became a source of great amusement for pretty much everyone but Jack. We would be working on some project or other, joking about this or that, when suddenly he would glance up and his countenance would darken. Building inspector! He would then say something along the lines of, "Ah, Pastor, someone here to see you." and head off in the other direction.

Every contractor knows both the value of building codes and their enforcement, and 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:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 3:10-17 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 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."

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? Because of where we are, I'm guessing that for many here it would be the long hours you poured into this building in either or both of the two major projects here. Maybe you've got your own building project going at home or maybe they've got your office building all torn up. My guess is no one would think of himself or herself as a "building project." 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 critical they 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; knows what happens when you build either *with* sand or *on* sand. Nothing built like that 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, in fact, 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, when talking about building on the sand, 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."** ²⁷ **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, **"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned."** 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 will prove 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?'"** ²³ **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."** ²⁵ **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."**

The great news for you here this morning is that what Jesus here described as **"a house built upon the rock"** applies to each of you. Through faith in Jesus Christ, every one of you has within you that 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 un-accused 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, wasn't it – 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 that 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 as 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--"** 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."**

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 the final project. You also heard that the "project" is for each Christian to be built up into a perfect, magnificent temple worthy of the 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 you in these words. Your body is now the dwelling place of God the Holy Spirit. Everything therefore that you do with your body affects that Holy Spirit who lives within you. 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 gave an example in the chapter immediately before our text, where he wrote: ***"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."*** 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 turns 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, adorn that temple as a fitting residence of the King of kings and Lord of lords. And thrill again 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.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. ⁹ ¶ "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God. ¹¹ ¶ "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ¹² You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. ¹³ ¶ "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. ¹⁴ You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. ¹⁵ ¶ "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. ¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. ¹⁷ ¶ "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

ESV **Matthew 5:38-48** "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' ³⁹ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰ And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹ And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴² Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. ⁴³ ¶ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Seventh Sunday after Epiphany – February 19, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 293 (Red Hymnal)

"O Holy Spirit Grant Us Grace"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Leviticus 19:1-2,9-18) Both our Old and New Testament lessons share a common message from our God: God himself expects nothing short of perfect and complete holiness for man to be saved. Apart from Jesus Christ, this demand is utterly impossible. No human being could ever hope to live up to such standards, which is why the law rightly strikes terror in the hearts of those who know no Savior.

Psalm of the Day – Psalm 66 (Supplement page 37) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 5:38-48) Jesus here not only repeats the Old Testament demand of perfection, he gives further evidence of just how difficult the laws demands truly are. It is one thing for man to avoid gross sins like theft and murder, another to banish all sinful thoughts from the heart, and still another to always forgive and deal charitably with enemies. Jesus' underlying message is that by the works of the law no one can earn heaven. It is through faith alone in Jesus Christ that any sinful human being can be saved.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 341 (Verses 1, 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Crown Him with Many Crowns"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 3:10-17 (Printed on the back page)

"Building Code Violations"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 353 (Verses 1-3, 6-7) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Savior Blest"

The Offering

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn - 46 (Red Hymnal)

"On What has Now been Sown"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (43) Ave (44)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

CLC News – St. Luke's of Lemmon has called Pastor David Reim. Pastor Paul Nolting has accepted the call to the tri-parish of Grace of Valentine. 2016 Graduate Heidi Radtke is considering two calls, one to Messiah of Eau Claire to teach grades 3-4 and one to St Stephen of Mt. View, CA.

Church Council Notes – 5 of 6 Council members, plus the Pastor, were present for the February 12 meeting. The Treasurer's report indicated that offerings are below budget for the first month of the year by \$1,112. It was determined that the copy machine does not need to be replaced this year. The issue will be addressed in next year's budget. Council approved a Lenten exchange with Our Savior's of Jamestown. The Council voted to send \$500 from the St Paul Education Fund to the ILC Student Aid Fund, which is in critical need of funds. The next Council meeting is scheduled for March 12.

Tour Choir Preparations – First, please consult the housing sheet on the mailbox table. The Choir Director has also sent sheet music for a song that the children of the congregation will be invited to sing with the choir. Please see Eileen McEnroe for more information.

Easter Lilies – Please don't forget to sign up for Easter flowers before the order needs to be placed. The sign-up sheet is on the mailbox table.