

Brick by Brick, Part 1

Sunday, January 6, 2019

1 Corinthians 3:1-13, 16

So our focus throughout the month of January will be to take some time to reflect and evaluate our lives and our church, in light of the purposes that God has given us. I believe God is moving and building among this local church, brick by brick. We have a lot going on throughout this month, and a big part of that will be our Sunday mornings together; throughout January we will be using this time to teach on the purposes of this church; for some of us we will be hearing this for the first time and for others this will be a hopefully encouraging reminder. One of our primary texts for this series is going to be **1 Corinthians 3**, and today we are going to start by reading together a large portion of this chapter, and then pulling from this text 5 principles (foundational truths) that we must embrace as we discuss the purposes of our church and even our lives. So let's read this together and then we will dig into these ideas.

I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? 5What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. 6I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. 9For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. 10According 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. 11For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw 13each 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....16Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? **1 Corinthians 3:1-13, 16**

1. Nothing we **build** will **last** without Christ as our foundation.

This is the plain teaching of **verse 11**. There is no true foundation to build your life on, to build a church on, other than a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ.

Imagine for a moment if someone built a luxurious condo, or a multi-million dollar mansion – on top of a sinkhole, or over a fault line, or in a flood zone. No matter how magnificent the structure most would consider it to be a waste. Because everyone knows no matter how great it may look - it won't last. It is simply a matter of time before the entire structure crumbles.

So as we move into 2019 - what are you building? A career? A bank account or retirement fund? A marriage? A family? New friendships? Education? A Ministry? No matter what it is - the value of what you are laboring over will ultimately be determined by the foundation you build on.

The single most important question before you today is whether or not you are in Christ and Christ is in you. If He is not – nothing else matters. What you are building, what you are laboring for, perhaps your entire life – will without question crumble if you are not standing on the foundation of a relationship with Jesus. What we are talking about this month: Purpose and direction, does not matter if we are not born again; if we are not clinging to the Gospel.

Is Christ the Lord of your life? Have you been obedient in Believers Baptism as a public declaration of your faith in Him? Are you continuing in the faith stable and steadfast and not shifting from the gospel? That is the only true foundation. If not would you be willing to cry out to Christ for the first time? That is the starting point. (PRAY) But its not the end, it brings us to the second key truth:

2. Spiritual **maturity** is characterized by **growth** in godliness.

In the **first 3 verses** of the text Paul tells the church in Corinth that one of the issues among them, is that they are not growing spiritually; they are spiritual infants. And the evidence that Paul gives to prove they are not spiritually growing, is their behavior: Jealousy, Strife, Carnal living. *The strongest evidence of who you are inside is not what you say, but rather what you do.* Godliness is you moving away from living out your human nature; and moving toward living obedience to God. This happens only through your relationship with Jesus. It is a process of Christ becoming more visible in you, and your natural man with all its sin becoming less visible.

Two things about Spiritual maturity: **1)** Is necessary. If you are truly born again, you will grow. Believers grow at different rates, but they all grow **2)** It is not Seasonal. What I mean is that growth is not just for infants or certain seasons of life. It is an exciting quest for godliness that continues regardless of your age. So remain teachable.

3. The **outcome** of our labor depends on God's **sovereign** grace.

Paul references his labor among the church, in the preaching the word. He mentions the labor of other workers who will come and build upon what he started. In v 6-8 There is also an agricultural reference of planting and watering. So the labor of God's servants is evident. But Paul also makes a critical point in v 7 about God's sovereignty by saying it is not the laborers that are responsible for the result of their work: Only God brings growth. If you garden, you can do everything in your power to plant and nurture the seed and the soil; but there comes a point where you must relinquish control to forces you cannot control and hope fruit grows.

When it comes to godliness, and spiritual maturity, we labor. Teachers labor over the word; we all labor to hear it and understand it; we labor to pray and search; we labor to participate in the community of believers; we labor to repent of sin and obey God; we labor to model how we live after Christ; we labor to invest in others through what we ourselves are learning; But we labor knowing that God must do the work under the soil, in our hearts; in the hearts of others.

Without our knowledge, God planned that in the last 2 weeks of 2018 we would be joined by the 2 most immediate former pastors of Agape; Men who labored here over a combined 18 years. And I believe that was purposeful – to remind us that we are now here building on top of their work. But If this church grows – spiritually, influentially, numerically – it is only because of HIM. In the past 7 months we have had more visitors than in the previous 3 years combined. Why? I have been here for 15 years, I can tell you we are not doing anything radically different. God is sovereign. HE chooses when and how much we grow.

Which brings us to principle #4

4. We are called to build carefully, expectantly, and thankfully.

Notice in v12-13 Pauls reminds us that one day our work will be tested by fire. If what we have done is valuable, it will pass the test and we will be rewarded. If we built with that which was worthless – our life's work will vanish before our eyes. What makes the difference? I believe labor that is done faithfully, in obedience to Christ and dependence on God – will prove itself to be gold, silver, and precious stones. While labor which is merely human, fleshly, disobedient, trusting in ourselves – will show itself to be wood, hay, and straw. So as Paul says in v10, let us build, let us labor carefully.

But let us also build expectantly. What is exciting about 1 Corinthians 3 is that – God desires and plans growth. It may not come in our exact timing; But it will come. And God can do far more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine. So we labor expecting God to move.

And we build thankfully. Notice again in verse 10, Paul said he labored – according to God's grace given to him. Paul's salvation, his calling, his gifts were All from God's kindness. Church, let us never see it as a burden to labor faithfully for the Lord. It may be challenging or tiring at times especially depending on the season of life we are in; We may suffer; but may we always be able to say: *WORTH IT. Thank you Father for choosing me, calling me, and gifting me.*

5. God's building is both an individual and corporate work.

What is God building – brick by brick? **V 16** clues us in: **We are being built up into God's temple, where the Spirit of God dwells on the earth.**

In the Old Testament the temple was the place of worship, where God's presence resided. People would come to the temple to meet with God, to learn of him, to sacrifice to Him. The temple was a place that declared God's majesty on earth – that He was with us. And now because of Jesus Christ-believers are the temple. And God is building us brick by brick into a suitable place for His presence to dwell – Holy and Blameless; a center of worship; a living sacrifice.

When the Bible speaks of God's building – it is both an individual and corporate reality. You are the individual temple of God as Paul talks about in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**. And together we are the corporate temple of God; his set apart people. In **chapter 3 verse 16 and 17** the **you** is plural in Greek – speaking of the church. So God's building is individual; he knows you. He loves you. You are not one person in the crowd. When you come to Christ, you can know He chose you. And yet – His building is corporate. You are not alone or intended to be alone. You are to be part of the eternal, universal church; you are to live this reality out in a local fellowship among other Christians. There is no other Biblical way.

So all 5 of these are key principles for us at Agape when we discuss why we exist. Our purpose as a church are born out of the purposes we all share as individual believers.

In your handout is an image that illustrates the call of Agape. Throughout January we will look deeper at this image and the realities it displays. And we will dive into each of our purposes in depth. But for today I want to end with a brief overview of this and hopefully help you see the intent behind the design.

We always begin with this purpose: We exist **to Love the Lord with all of our heart, soul, and mind**. This is the greatest commandment according to Jesus. In our image you will notice that this is the highest of the 3 circles; because this is our highest calling.

Jesus also told us that the second greatest commandment was **to love our neighbors**; He would later reiterate this command with a slight change in **John 13** – that **we are to love our neighbors as He has loved us**.

Jesus said **all of the law and the prophets depend on these 2** commands. The law and the prophets were one way of describing scripture in Jesus' day. So – all the Bible, every command, rolls up into these 2 commands. If you and I could perfectly Love God and perfectly Love our neighbor as Christ loved us – we would by default obey every other command of scripture.

The 3rd purpose is the commission that Jesus gave us; We exist **to make disciples**. Disciple making according to Jesus begins with faith and baptism, followed by teaching someone over time **to observe all he had commanded**. And as we just discussed, all that he commanded is summarized in the other 2 circles – **Love God and Love Your Neighbor**.

So we exist for these 3 purposes and notice at the very center, their connection point – is **1 Cor 3:11 – Christ is the foundation**. He gives us purpose. He holds this all together. Jesus is the only person who has perfectly loved the Lord and perfectly loved people – he has obeyed these commands and It is He who makes us blameless before God, and enables us to strive to do the same. **Jesus has all authority** to send us out to make disciples and to make our labor effective. He can grow and bear fruit as we teach people to observe his word.

So Jesus is the hinge that connects these purposes together. None of them exist alone. If we simply sought to love our neighbors – apart from our own Love for God or Without the purpose of making disciples – then we are nothing more than a social justice organization.

If we sought to Love God unhinged from our purpose to Love His people and make disciples, then we are not grasping what love for God really is.

If we sought only to make disciples, apart from a Love for God and for His People – then we end up as a religious organization concerned only about numbers of converts; devoid of a heart God and His Kingdom.

These circles must connect, hinged together by Jesus. Every activity we do must be sourced from one of our purposes. The answer to why any ministry exists in this church is because it is something that we do to work out **love for God, love for our neighbors, or to make disciples**. The circles are not just connected but they overlap, signifying that much of what we do, while an activity may be connected to one specific purpose – will also flow into others.

Over the course of the next 3 weeks, we will work to unfold this further. We will look deeper at what these purposes mean and how we are specifically seeking to walk these out together. I truly believe that God is moving here, and is building among us – Brick by Brick; person by person. And I believe this month is going to be exciting. Some of you may indeed discover that God is calling you to commit yourself to this place. Some of you may find your place to serve or a new place to serve. But the goal for all of us is to engage the new year with renewed

enthusiasm for God's call individually and corporately, and to move forward with focus and intentionality. Let's pray and worship.