

The Stone the Builders Rejected

By Keith Surface

Foreword

I surrendered my life to Jesus Christ in January, 1984. Being so overwhelmed with the mercy, love, and grace He so freely gave, I wanted everything in my life to be about Him. I was in every service, every prayer-meeting, and every revival as I sought the Lord continuously for the fullness of His Spirit and to know Him in every way that I could. The word of God began to roll in my spirit until I began first to teach and later preach the things I would see in His word. In that day, as in this day, there were many ministers of great renown that appeared to me to be doing so much for God. I would see the preacher on the TV and was moved by what they were doing, but at the same time I was often checked in my spirit. Whenever a man of God feels that “check” in his spirit it is a warning he should take seriously. But who was I to question these who had every appearance of doing much for the name of the Lord. In the spring of 1987 the Lord visited me with a vision in the night hours. This is what I saw:

I had purchased a piece of land upon which I was planning to build my house. The property was a large acreage tract filled with beautiful, century old, oak trees. I looked forward with anticipation to the day that I would occupy my new home, but I was troubled in the vision and unsure about what course to take. What troubled me was the feeling that instead of hiring a builder, I should build this house myself. I was just a young man and my only construction experience was as a helper for others. Yet in the vision I could not help but feel that if I would use a level and a framing square I would be able to build this house. But doubts flooded my mind and I began to inquire of other builders to build this house for me. I looked at the houses they had constructed and was overwhelmed at the size and beauty of the buildings. Every time I started to choose a builder I would be troubled about it and feel as though I should take up my level and square and build the house myself. Finally I convinced myself that hiring the builder was the right course to take, so I put my future home into the hands of an experienced builder.

The vision moved forward to a day that my house was near completion. I invited two pastors and their wives to come with me and take a look at the house. As we drove up the driveway lined with the beautiful oak trees and caught our first

glimpse of this new home my heart was ready to burst with pride. The massive columns that supported the roof at the entrance of the home looked to be twenty feet tall and a huge porch wrapped around the front of the home. The front door was fine handcrafted wood embedded with etched glass. As we walked through the entry I began to point out the imported tiles, the fine woodwork and wall coverings such as I had never seen before. Before me stood a beautiful spiral stairway, which we walked up admiring the craftsmanship of the railings and banister. We proceeded down a hallway that seemed to go on forever and I began to open doors and show off the various different rooms. As my guest toured one room, I stepped out onto a balcony and happened to notice that the banister was leaning a bit. Not to worry, I would speak to my builder and have it corrected. The next room we entered I saw a small hairline crack in the wall and quickly moved my guests out of the room, hoping they did not see it. As I began to go from room to room the flaws became larger and more evident. I saw leaning floors, gaping cracks in the ceiling, and floors that were buckled. Panic took hold of me and I began to run down the hallway, room to room, only to find each room worse than the one before. The floor started to move under my feet in such a way that I realized there was no foundation supporting the structure and the entire building was in danger of falling upon us. In panic I raced towards the stairway only to find the railings were now just sticks tied together with twine. The steps had turned into rotten planks with broken places where one could easily fall to his death. Amazingly, I was able to reach the bottom of the stairway. There the once beautiful wall coverings were now old strips of cheesecloth that were peeling off the wall and the air was filled with the musty stench of decay. I stood in the entryway that I had once been so proud of, and being aware that my house might at any second fall upon me, I looked up and cried with a loud voice, "My God, My God, I knew I should have built this house myself!"

I awoke the next morning troubled, knowing that God had spoken to me, but not understanding what the message was. I was led to the passage of scripture that both Jesus and Peter quoted from **Psalm 118**. "***The stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner***" (1 Peter 2:7). I knew then that this was instruction from the Lord not to turn to the religious builders of that day. Not because they might not be good men, even sincere, but just as it had been in the days of Jesus, the builders were rejecting the foundation. At the time I did not even understand what the foundation was, but I knew I would not find it in the houses of the great religious builders. Still, even as in the vision, I was unsure that I could build a house that would stand? Again the Lord took me to the scriptures.

“Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it” (Isaiah 28:16-18). When I read where God spoke of the line and the plummet I understood what He was speaking to me concerning the level and the square. No one needs to be afraid or ashamed to build if they will prayerfully build with the simple provisions that God has given to the church. Let the word of God say what it says. Let it be the measure of truth. Do not ignore the voice of the Spirit, even when He speaks contrary to the traditions of men. And do not be intimidated by the great religious builders. Trust God and He, through you, will build a house that will stand.

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It was the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. Would you set out to build your dream home in a swamp or on unstable ground? Or, would you raise the walls of a building without any foundation under it? I trust not! How about your eternal soul? Are you trusting in a religious house as your eternal habitation, yet not certain that the house is sound? It is not good enough to say, “I just believe what I was always taught.” My pastor always told the congregation that if you cannot go to the scripture and show why you believe what you believe, then you have no right to believe it. Well, perhaps you do have a right to believe it, but you are very foolish to do so. The scriptures teach us that religious builders have again and again rejected God's foundation. If the only foundation you have is that which you received from a religious builder, how do you know it is a sure foundation? There is however, one builder who was commissioned and entrusted by God Himself with laying the true foundation for the church of Jesus Christ. His name was Paul the Apostle.

A Wise Master Builder

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man

take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 3:10-11

In the above passage, Paul the Apostle speaks of himself as a wise master-builder. A master-builder is not merely someone who knows how to perform construction tasks but rather someone who first understands what the finished building is supposed to be; and secondly, how the building is to be constructed. Paul did not take this position upon himself, neither was he set as a master-builder by man. He said, ***"...I certify (I guarantee) you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ"*** (Galatians 1:11-12). His commission was to lay the foundation just as he had received it from the Lord. So certain was Paul of the gospel he preached that he said, ***"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed"*** (Galatians 1:8). Having received the gospel by revelation, his instruction must have been similar to that which God spoke to Moses when he said, ***"See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount"*** (Hebrews 8:5).

A Sure Foundation

Anyone who understands construction knows the importance of a good foundation. Can you imagine laying the foundation for a custom home and when the walls begin to be raised you realize that the foundation has been laid to the wrong dimensions? It happens! I have seen houses that had to be redesigned after the foundation was laid because the foundation was wrong. A foundation that is slightly out of level or out of square can produce nightmares for those who attempt to bring the structure together. What may seem to be hairline cracks in the floor can cause massive shifting and cracking in the walls and ceiling. The foundation is not the whole house, but the whole house will be built on the foundation; therefore the foundation is the most critical part of any structure. Paul laid the foundation of the church as God had instructed him, and there could be no other foundation laid. Any change would cause great error to enter the church. Anything left undone and the whole of the building would be adversely affected. Paul was very adamant, ***"other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ."*** This was a warning for his generation and all that would follow; the foundation must be right or the whole of the building will be wrong.

Jude left us with a sobering statement, writing, ***“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4).*** In Jude’s day men were already changing the foundation. Someone asked the question, “If in Jude’s day men turned grace into lasciviousness, then who turned it back?” Catholicism? Luther? Calvin? Wesley? Which religious builder can we look to with confidence that they gave us the sure foundation? Jude gives us the answer in saying: ***“it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3).*** We must go back to the words of those who were commissioned with laying the sure foundation. We must go to the scriptures!

What is the Foundation?

The Apostle Paul wrote that he had laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. Let us take a closer look at what that foundation is as we follow Paul through the **first three chapters of I Corinthians.**

1. “For Christ sent me not to baptize but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness: but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.” I Corinthians 1:17-18

Notice in the passage above how the preaching of the cross is synonymous with the preaching of the gospel. Never forget that the gospel is the message of Calvary. Ignore Calvary and you have no gospel. If you take the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus out of the Bible everything else is still true, but none of it has the power to save a single soul.

2. “But we preach Christ crucified....” I Corinthians 1:23)

I once commented that the church sometimes seems to be more Jewish than Christian. We search the scriptures for principles of life, relationships, and prosperity, but rarely do we hear of the power of the cross. Without the cross, the church is just another sect of Judaism. That in a secular sense is not bad, but will never impart to anyone the life of Christ! The gospel Paul preached centered on

the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and how it transformed the believer. It was not only Christ and His teachings. It was Christ crucified. In this he found the power and wisdom of God.

3. “For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” I Corinthians 2:2

Three times in these **first two chapters** Paul speaks of preaching the cross “not with wisdom of words.” This gospel foundation could not be mingled with man’s wisdom, for to do so would make it powerless (of none effect). Anytime you see a sinful Christian it is because the cross has become of no effect to them. **In laying the foundation**, not only did Paul preach ONLY THE CROSS but he preached THE CROSS ONLY!

Why the Cross?

For much of the past nineteen-hundred years theologians have sought to discover the answer to the question “*Why did Jesus die?*” **Three dominate theories** (lines of thinking), have been developed seeking to answer this question.

Theory 1

The most modern of these theories presents the death of Jesus as simply a manifestation or exhibition of God’s love for humanity. The theory is that when a man really sees the love of God revealed in giving His Son, it will break his heart towards God even to the point of emulating Christ. God in turn, when he sees man’s heart broken towards Him, will extend the promise of heaven to man. In this theory, any change in the believer comes through the psychology of emotion and can be totally absent of the power of God. This would fit those Jude warned of saying, “***These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit***” (**Jude 1:19**). The great error of this theory is that it denies that there was any real purpose of Calvary, other than emotion. The death of Jesus by itself does not demonstrate great love, but the fact that he offered Himself to die because His death was necessary for our redemption demonstrates love beyond human comprehension.

Theory 2

Another theory is called the satisfaction view of atonement. This evolved out of the penance system and presents Jesus’ death as a perfect offering of obedience to satisfy the offended honor of God. Once His honor was satisfied, God would be

agreeable to forgive the sins of man. Another form of satisfaction atonement is called penal substitution. This presents that Jesus died to suffer the legal penalty for the sins of man. Both of these forms of satisfaction atonement miss the mark because they assume that God demanded satisfaction for the sins of man, a thought the apostles never taught or embraced.

Theory 3

The oldest view of redemption and closest to the scripture is called the ransom theory of atonement. This theory presents that Jesus gave himself as a ransom (some presume to Satan) so that Satan would release mankind from his claim. There are many forms of this theory some very close to truth and some far from it. The objection of many is that God would never pay a ransom to Satan, to which I agree completely. Others have taught that the ransom was paid to God. The objection to this is that it makes God the entity that held man in captivity.

The first two of these theories miss the mark so completely because they are built upon philosophical arguments rather than the plain statements of the apostles. Some defend these philosophical doctrines claiming that the apostles were too vague in their explanation of the gospel, so it fell upon theologians in the generations that followed to formulate the true gospel. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Paul preached a gospel that may have long been a mystery, but he did not keep it such. He plainly declared the purpose and accomplishments of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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The central truth of the gospel is summed up in what are possibly the most famous words of the Apostle Paul. ***"I am crucified with Christ..."*** (Galatians 2:20). Here we have a statement too plain, too clear, and too straight forward for theologians to understand. Therefore, countless volumes have been written over the centuries of church history seeking to explain why Paul is not actually saying what he says;

"It's positional;"

"It's just his identity with Christ;"

"It's a special place we all seek to obtain;"

"It is only how God sees us."

On one hand we declare it to be true while at the same time seeking to prove that it is not a reality. But what if Paul was saying what he truly meant? What if he was not being obscure, but speaking as plainly as he could. What if he really meant that

he died when Jesus died? If that were the case then surely he would say it again. He does!

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. Romans 6:6

In the text above Paul again, clearly gives the reason Jesus was crucified. It was that we might die with Him, causing our sin to be destroyed, in order that we would no longer serve (be slaves to) sin. What does the church do with this passage? We obscure it of course! *"It's positional."* *"It's just the way God sees us."* *"It's only our identity with Christ."* *"It's not the way things are, it's what we are to strive for."* Paul could be no clearer, but we refuse to believe. Could it really be that Jesus died to crucify our old man of sin in order to free us from sin's bondage? Yes! Peter also confirms this when he gives his explanation of Calvary. ***"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed"*** (1 Peter 2:24). Did Peter really agree with Paul that Jesus died so we would be dead to sins? Did he mean that we actually died with Jesus on the cross and because we died with Him we would live unto righteousness? Of course he did! That is why he said it! But again we rush to explain it away. I could continue with scripture after scripture where the apostles spoke so clearly as to the purpose and work of the cross only to find that the church takes every such verse and obscures it with tradition and dogma. The things the apostles spoke of as being finished, we change to mean in the future. They said, ***"ye are dead,"*** but we say *"you must die."* The apostles said, we are ***"crucified with Christ,"*** but we say, *"we must crucify ourselves in service of Christ."* They said we are ***"made free from sin,"*** but we say, *"we are made free from the guilt of sin."* They said, we are ***"made righteous,"*** and we say, *"God only see us as righteous."* It is no wonder the scriptures seem so obscure to the reader; Not because the apostles made it so, but because the religious builders to this day reject the foundation stone.

The truth of the gospel is simple and clear. Jesus died so that our sinful man would die. He was raised from the dead so that He could live in us. This was not payment. This was not penalty. This was not exhibition. This was God, in Christ, dying to the old creation so that we also, with Him, would die to the old and be birthed into the new. This is the central message of the cross. **It is also the stone the builders so often reject!**