1 Cor 3:10 According to God’s grace that was given to me, I have laid a foundation as a skilled master builder, and another builds on it. But each one is to be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, 13 each one’s work will become obvious. For the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one’s work. 14 If anyone’s work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned up, he will experience loss, but he himself will be saved—but only as through fire.

Background

Last week we talked about being God’s Coworkers. At a very high level, God is responsible for creation, election, providence, and at a deep level, God regenerates the individual. None of this is part of our job description.

Our job is that we have been commissioned to make disciples, going into the world with the Good News of salvation in Jesus; in the power of the Holy Spirit-who enables us to do the work of tilling the ground, scattering the seed, fertilizing, running irrigation, and the strenuous effort of reaping the harvest.

Paul now switches the metaphor—from a field to a building. But not just any building. Not a concert or a lecture hall; not a government building; not an educational wing or a theater. No, the building that Paul is talking about is God’s holy temple.

As a leader Paul’s role was to plant and lay the foundation as a skilled, expert builder.

That foundation was the Gospel of Christ and his cross.

* Excellence to the glory of God
* The foundation determines the stability and the potential of all future construction.
* Leaders who follow Paul are to build with extreme care in anticipation of final judgment. Using quality materials, building with excellence and care is the standard. Building with flimsy and flammable materials, with shoddy workmanship is to be avoided at all costs. Why? Because this is God’s holy Temple.

**1. The local Church is God’s holy Temple.** Now, here in this context, Paul is referring to them—the Corinthian Church. And as we said last week—they are a hot mess. Despite this, Paul says…

1 Cor 3:16 Don’t you yourselves know that you are God’s temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

**What is a temple? The better question is, “What was a temple the Ancient Near East?”** In order for us to understand Paul’s metaphor here, we have to try and understand something that is not part of our culture but was a large part of theirs.

* A temple was the nexus between heaven and earth. It’s the place where the deity interfaces and interacts with his creation. It’s where the deity dwells. Every ancient culture had a word to describe what this deity did in his temple.
  + Babylonians: **sebutū**; Arameans: **šabbṯā;** For Persians: **ēw-šambat;** Greeks: **sabbaton**; Akkadians: **šapattu.**
  + Hebrews—**shabbat**. In Genesis one after a 6 day cycle of creating and organizing the world, God “sabbathed” on the 7th day. This is what deities do after their temples are built—they enter those temples and rest or they dwell there.
* A temple required a royal priesthood as a go-between. The only person authorized to enter a temple and interface with the deity is the person chosen as a priestly mediator. 1 Peter 2:4–5, 9 “As you come to him, a living stone—rejected by people but chosen and honored byGod— 5you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ…9 But you are **a chosen race,** **a royal priesthood,** **a holy nation,** **a people for his possession,** **so that you may proclaim the praises** of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Peter tells all believers—the gathered assembly of God—that they are the “living stones” being built up as God’s holy temple. They are the royal priesthood. All believers are the priests of God—because all believers are in Christ—and Christ is our high priest. You’re a holy priest in the holy Temple of the living God.

Don’t believe that? How about Revelation?

Rev. 5:9-10 “because you [Jesus] were slaughtered, and you purchasedpeople for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10You made them a kingdomand priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

The NT authors leveled the playing field. Christ is our High Priest and all who are in Christ are a royal priesthood ministering praises to God—and declaring his praises to the world.

* A temple was the deity’s command center in the world. The temple was the place from which this heavenly deity ran his nation. The reason why you need a royal priesthood is because God is king and this world is his sovereign territory.
* A temple was the place where sacrifices were made to appease the deity’s anger or wrath. Now, in the NT Jesus is God’s final and fully sufficient sacrifice who takes away the sins of the world. The benefits of that sacrifice apply to all who believe. And the new temple of God is the Spirit now poured out on all who believe and gather as his holy assembly.

The reason why the gathered assembly is so imperative is because it is the nexus between heavenly realms and earth—it’s the place where God’s manifest presence dwells; it’s the place where God mediates his presence through his servants—his royal priesthood; and it’s the place where God’s kingdom is on display. There’s no place on earth where God’s sovereign rule is more on display than in the life of the church.

**2. God’s holy Temple can be defiled and destroyed.** Now, ultimately you can’t destroy the church universal. Islam can run the church out of the Mideast, China can run the church underground. Listen, ultimately the church is an unstoppable force driven by the empowering presence of God the Holy Spirit. Pray for the church globally, but don’t worry about the Church—like it’s going to go out of business. But an individual congregation can be defiled and destroyed.

**1 Cor 3:16–17**“Don’t you yourselves know that you are God’s temple and that the Spirit of God lives in you? 17If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is holy, and that is what you are.” Paul is warning the church against anyone who would seek to destroy God’s holy assembly. Now, there may be lots of ways that a local assembly of God could be taken out. Local churches close their doors for the last time all the time in America. Sometimes because of division and factionalism within the church. Let me touch on two ways that a church may be damaged irreparably and defiled with unholiness.

**The most socially destructive activity that churches engage in is the sin of gossip.**

**I have watched a church be destroyed through sinful gossips who did immeasurable harm to the cause of the Gospel.**

**Rom 1:29** “They are filled with all unrighteousness, evil, greed, and wickedness. They are full of envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, and malice. They are **gossips.”** Notice the company that gossip keeps.

**1 Tim 5:13** “At the same time, they also learn to be idle, going from house to house; they are not only idle, but are also **gossip**s and busybodies, saying things they shouldn’t say.”

Gossip is defined biblically as “one who traffics in rumor, inuendo, or hearsay in order sow doubts about someone else’s character. It can be outright rumormonging, or hearsay—having a conversation about someone who isn’t present, who wouldn’t approve of your characterization of them, and the purpose of that conversation is to cast doubts about their character.

Two things: (1) we’ve all been guilty of this at some level. We can do it by merely asking the question about someone in a certain “tone.”

(2) Ladies, this is more tempting for you than it is for us men. Now, I’m not saying men don’t do it. They do. But it’s not as urgent of a need for us because we don’t feel the constant, unabating need or desire to share our feelings.

Don’t believe that—then by all means ask Vic if you can attend the next Real Men’s discipleship night. Men love talking about their jobs, hobbies (the cars their working on, the fish they caught, the deer they killed, the fence gates their fixing). We don’t have that metabolic urge to share our feelings or opinions about others. Spreading rumors, innuendo, hearsay—having a conversation with someone about another person who isn’t present for that conversation, and wouldn’t approve or agree with how they’re being characterized, disparaging their character—it’s destructive.

What do you do if gossip is a problem?

* Step 1: Confess your sins (James 5:16). Confess your sins to one another that you may healed.
* Step 2: Repent and choose to be kind (Rom 2:4). It’s God’s kindness that leads us to repentance. So let’s be kind to others with our words.
* Step 3: Self-correct with words that heal (Prov 15:4). The tongue that heals is a tree of life, but a devious tongue breaks the spirit. You have permission to catch yourself in the act—and right there and then, stop and ask for forgiveness, acknowledging that you went over the line.
* Step 4: Begin to view people sympathetically and compassionately (1 Pet 3:8). Finally, all of you be like-minded and **sympathetic**, love one another, and be compassionate and humble. Listen, ultimately all gossip is passing judgment. The implication of all gossip is “well, *they* were just more like *me*, then they’d be ok.”

I mention this because Gossip is terribly destructive to relationships. Worse yet, it destroys God’s holy temple—and God wants us to build up the temple.

But the Church of Jesus—God’s holy Temple is not only susceptible to being destroyed but being defiled through impurity.

**The most defiling thing in Christ’s body is sexual sin. Specifically, pornography.**

The individual believer is God’s holy Temple.

1 Cor 6:18-20 “Flee sexual immorality! (*pheugete porneia*) Every other sina person commits is outside the body, but the person who is sexually immoral sins against his own body. 19Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body.”

Now, pornography used to be a “guy” problem. Today, the statistics are that if you’re under the age of 35—93% of young men regularly view pornographic images and 58% of young women do.

It goes without saying that we live in a sex-saturated world. In Corinth brothels, temple prostitutes, naked Greek statues were everywhere all the time. It was very difficult in their culture to be a practicing devout, synagogue going Jew. Paul doesn’t give them a pass “because it’s everywhere.” No, Paul says, get your eyes back in your head. Flee all forms of sexual immorality! Because it’s defiling. God designed us with limitations. We have all kinds of limitations.

* I have to live in a world full of money and not love it.
* I have to live in a world full of things and not covet other people’s possessions.
* I have to live in a world with opportunities for self-advancement without becoming corrupt.
* I have to learn to live in a world with broken people and not judge them.
* I have to learn to live in a world with beautiful people and not lust after them.

Limits are healthy, limitations on our self-expression and freedom sustain our joy in life.

Sexual sin defiles us because we were not designed to crave what we do not have. That is called “lust.”

Sexual sin trains our minds to look at people as mere objects to be used for our pleasure.

What to do if you have lust problem?

* Step 1: Confess your sins to trustworthy men (Matt 7:6). Don’t cast your pearls before pigs. Confess to other men who you can trust and ask them to support you in prayer.
* Step 2: Reorient how you see women as the “daughters of God” (2 Cor 6:8). God says, “I will be your Father and you are my sons and daughters.” (1 Cor 9:27). I discipline my body and bring it under strict control.
* Step 3: Flee temptation (1 Cor 6:18). Fleeing temptation has two components: (1) minimizing exposure. (2) in the event of inadvertent exposure—run. Use the Joseph principal.
* Step 4: Choose life (Deut 30). Moses said, “I’ve set before you blessings and curses…11 this command I give you today is not too difficult or beyond your ability…today I have set before you life and death; abundance and scarcity.”

Let’s face it—today with the advent of mind-boggling, star trek technology in our pockets—technology has made it possible for men and women to access the most destructive and addictive material in the history of the world.

Every time we are tempted to answer the urge to look through that portal to obscenity we are choosing the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil. Something that God created to be good (Sex between a man and a woman) now distorted.

**Listen to me, do not buy the lie** that no one is free from porn addiction.

In the Garden of Eden God gave mankind a choice. Between two trees—the tree of life: a tree they regularly ate from in order to sustain their lives in perpetuity. Eat from tree on a daily basis and you will never die.

The second choice—the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. Now, the account implies that they already had knowledge of the Good—because they had God’s divine command, a commission—to responsibly steward and sensibly develop the world. To extend the project of Eden into the rest of the untamed world.

* Step 5: Structure your life for accountability not anonymity (Zech 8:16). “These are the things you must do: Speak truth to one another; make true and sound decisions within your city gates.”

When we say “Accountability” we mean to “give an account.” Not a relationship where we excuse sin and just offer to pray. These are people who are close enough to call us out and call us to account.

**Here’s why you need that so badly men, and women…because you cannot do this on your own.**

**Illus.** A wise sage had four sons who were constantly fighting. He decided to teach them the value of their unity and brotherly bond. So, he took them out into the woods and he challenged them to find thin branches and twigs. They came back with handfuls of twigs and then he took them all, bundled them together, tied the bundle at the ends and in the middle—then challenged the boys to break the twigs. One by one, all four of his scrappy sons tried to no avail. No matter how hard they tried they could not break the bundle. He then took it and untied it. And one-by-one, he broke them individuals until they all lay snapped at the boys’ feet. The lesson was clear. There is strength in numbers, power in unity—and all alone, by ourselves we are easily broken by the forces in the world that would damn us to the knowledge of that which God has made good and now evil.

Folks we are the holy temple of the Living God. Collectively, and individually—God’s Spirit dwells in our bodies and in this gathered body. And that temple can be a nexus—a meeting place where God’s holy presence is mediated and revealed to the world.

Or it can be a destroyed temple—demolished by the sin of gossip and slander—defiled by the sin of sexual immorality.