

FOUNDATIONS

By Bill Irby

Perhaps you have seen the advertisement on television wherein the great fastball pitcher Nolan Ryan is pitching a company that will come to your home and shore up the foundation of your house. We all hope we never need this sort of service, but we also know that a house is only as good as its foundation. If the foundation is not good and proper, cracks will develop in the walls, the floors will begin to creak; the house itself may begin to lean and could even fall.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. If we have not built on the good and proper foundation, we will be in big trouble. Our faith is only as good as its foundation. Hear Paul: "For we are God's fellow workers: you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:9-11 NKJV).

Paul had been trained in the craft of tent making. Tents in those days could be simple affairs or they could be quite complex. Some semi-permanent tents required careful site preparation. Paul knew about foundations. The word translated "foundation" has in it the essential idea of a foundation of a house or building. There is also in the word the idea of "the elementary beginnings of a thing" and "the indispensable prerequisites for something to come into being." With regard to the church or a congregation of the church it refers to Jesus Christ Himself (see Bauer's Lexicon and other sources for further word study).

As Paul makes plain here, Christ is the foundation for the church and that is the precise foundation he laid down for the Corinthian church. As you read along in the passage it becomes clear that Paul is not a little exercised over the problem of other people not building correctly on the foundation he put down. He wrote of work that would endure (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

The Corinthians were encouraged to be careful how they built. So also should we. But we return to verse 11: "No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." We must appreciate the way Paul has chosen to say this. It is, of course, possible to lay an improper foundation. A careless craftsman may do it in building a house; careless religious people do the same thing in their spiritual lives. The only proper foundation for the Christian life or the life of a congregation is Jesus Christ. Anything else is doomed to crack, creak, lean, and fall.

Ah yes, but the proverbial "everyone" in the Christian world says that they are devoted to Christ and are building on Him. But how may one know that the edifice is being raised up on the proper foundation? The obvious answer is that we have Christ for our foundation when we rely altogether on the Word of God for everything in our faith and practice (see Colossians 3:17 and 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Just here in this passage (1 Corinthians 3:18-23) Paul reminds the Christians there that they better not rely on the wisdom of the world ("The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile"). The "fantasy Christ" of our so very wise world will save no one. The real Christ will save anyone (Hebrews 2:9). The point of all of this is rather simple: we do not want a spiritual life that cracks and creaks, and leans, and falls. We want to stand on solid ground. We want that firm foundation. We have just that in Jesus Christ our Lord through faith in His Word.