

Agathos

By Pastor Greg
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1 Corinthians 3:10-17

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According to the Catholic Church History of Martyrs, on February 14, 270 A.D. Roman Emperor Claudius II, dubbed "Claudius the Cruel," beheaded a priest named Valentine for performing marriage ceremonies. Claudius II had outlawed marriages when Roman men began refusing to go to war in order to stay with their wives. Therefore, this day has been named St. Valentines Day. I found that little tidbit of history interesting. But I don't think it would make for a very romantic Valentines Day card though (I lost my heart over you. And if you love me, you'd lose yours too). Valentine was a priest, so I expect during the wedding he asked the couple to commit to the biblical standard of love; the good foundation that helps a marriage endure the hard times.

It takes a good foundation for anything to endure. Build a marriage on the foundation of biblical love, and it has a far better chance of surviving than a marriage build upon the selfish motives found in our society. I mean, last night there was probably some guy out there trying to find anything just so he didn't have to suffer the consequences ("You don't love me. You never care about me"). So he comes home with Contact Solution and flowers, as if that would make up for all the times he acted like she didn't exist. Guys, do you really think a box of chocolates and a card from Hallmark will make her forget all the times you ignored her? That marriage will be lucky to survive its first crisis because it lacks a good foundation.

The same has been said about Christianity. A good foundation makes all the difference. Jesus says that *"everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock."*¹ (Matthew 7:24-25). Notice that Jesus has said the storm will come. This person will endure a time of testing and trials. But the right foundation will keep them from falling. A person's faith

¹New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Mt 7:24-25). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

must be built upon Christ Jesus in order to endure trials; not selfishness, indifference, or pride.

From what Paul says in 1 Corinthians, I gather that part of their problem surrounded the fact that Jesus was no longer the foundation of their faith. It's evident that something else has become more important to them; something other than what Paul had taught. *Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you? God will destroy anyone who destroys this temple. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*² (1 Corinthians 3:10-17)

I know it's easy to get caught up in the whole reward thing here, but reward is not the point Paul is trying to make. In fact, if you follow Jesus simply because of what you might get out of the relationship, you're probably in for a big surprise. A selfish attitude between people is doomed to fail. So too is a selfish relationship with Jesus. The moment Christ tells us no, or the moment He disciplines us because of our sin, we, who are selfish, will walk away. Actually, Jesus is looking for people who will follow Him with a self-less attitude and a servant's heart. Paul is actually talking about establishing a good foundation. And not just any foundation will do. It must be Agathos; the good foundation found only in Jesus Christ.

This is the Good Foundation upon which a Christian works. All that they do or say must be built upon the central truth of Jesus. And on That Day, what a Christian has done *In Service For the Lord* will be tested. We Christians will stand before the

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

Lord and He will reveal which of our deeds were self-less and which works were selfish; whether we worked with today in mind, or with our minds set on eternity.

Paul is telling this church to take a long, hard look at what they were doing. He tells them of a time when all Christians will stand before God and their works for God will be tested by fire. His advice is to stop being so selfish, arrogant, and indifferent; to consider their works today, and start doing the things that build upon the foundational message of Jesus. These are the Good Works; works that are Agathos.

This lesson is just as important to us today. I know it's not always easy, but we must examine the things we do for the Kingdom and ask God to reveal to us whether they are constructive (building up the Kingdom), worthless (things that are meaningless), or destructive (things that destroy the Kingdom). We must ask ourselves at all times, "Will what I'm about to say or do, what difference will it make in light of eternity? Will it build up the church and my fellow believers, or will it tear them down?" It is the healthy Christian and the healthy church that takes the time to examine attitude, motive, and focus in everything. Are they good (Agathos), meaningless, or destructive. Better to find out now, before it's too late.

A church that builds its foundation upon things other than Jesus will have a tough time enduring any trial it may face. And you know, I suspect God puts a church through a test just to expose the things that are not of Jesus. The more Jesus is at the foundation of that church, the less destructive that trial becomes; there is little consumed by the fire.

I've seen my share of church conflict. It's never an easy thing to witness. But through conflict, a church can learn an awful lot about what lay at its core; what its foundation truly is. Conflict can help a church see what things are good and what things are not. I'm not that naive to think that a church will never face a trial. Jesus has said they will come. But I do know that after the trial (the testing by fire) what remains are the things that have truly been built upon the foundation of Christ our Lord. Work with eternity in mind, for it is the only Good Work that will endure.