

A Wise Master Builder

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Introduction

Writing to the Corinthians, who misunderstood the work of preaching and teaching, Paul emphasizes these are works of service and skill (1 Cor. 3:5-17). He said, “According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it.” What are the characteristics of a wise master builder?

1 Corinthians 3:5-17 (NASB95) — 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. 14 If any man’s work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

Builds With Quality Workmanship

A wise master builder skillfully uses the tools of his trade (2 Tim. 2:15). Having cleansed himself from all iniquity, he is sanctified and useful for the Master (2 Tim. 2:19-21). Through knowledge of God’s word and personal application of the truth, he is fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Accordingly, like Ezra of old, let us set our hearts to study the Law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances (Ezra 7:6-10).

2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB95) — 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:19-21 (NASB95) — 19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, “The Lord knows those who are His,” and, “Everyone who names the

name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.” 20 Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB95) — 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Ezra 7:6-10 (NASB95) — 6 This Ezra went up from Babylon, and he was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all he requested because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him. 7 Some of the sons of Israel and some of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. 8 He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. 9 For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him. 10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Builds On A Solid Foundation

A wise master builder will build on a solid foundation. In the parable of the wise and foolish craftsmen, Jesus emphasized the importance of a solid foundation (Luke 6:47-49). Paul stressed the same theme when he said, “According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:10-11). Only the church that is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief corner stone, is a suitable dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22). Is your life firmly grounded upon Jesus Christ? Are you obedient to His words?

Luke 6:47-49 (NASB95) — 47 “Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. 49 “But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great.”

1 Corinthians 3:10-11 (NASB95) — 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NASB95) — 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Builds With Quality Materials

A wise master builder will build with quality materials. In this context, quality is measured by their ability to withstand fire (1 Cor. 3:12-17). Testing is inevitable (1 Pet. 1:6-7). Wood, hay and straw will be consumed. Gold, silver and precious stones survive the flames. This refers to the quality of our labors. Some whom we lead to Christ will persevere, others will not. However, the remarkable thing is that wood, hay and straw can be transformed into gold, silver and precious stones. The application of the gospel to our lives produces an inward transformation. However, some are not willing to change. In such cases, a wise master builder will not waste his time on worthless materials (Prov. 9:7-12; Matt. 7:6; 10:5-15), but will seek out those with broken and contrite hearts (Psa. 34:18; 51:16-17; Isa. 57:15). Despite the fact that he was only able to save his family, Noah is counted as a faithful heir/preacher of righteousness (Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:5).

1 Corinthians 3:12-17 (NASB95) — 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. 14 If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. 15 If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? 17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

1 Peter 1:6-7 (NASB95) — 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Proverbs 9:7-12 (NASB95) — 7 He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself, And he who reproves a wicked man gets insults for himself. 8 Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, Reprove a wise man and he will love you. 9 Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser, Teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning. 10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. 11 For by me your days will be multiplied, And years of life will be added to you. 12 If you are wise, you are wise for yourself, And if you scoff, you alone will bear it.

Matthew 7:6 (NASB95) — 6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

Matthew 10:5-15 (NASB95) — 5 These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; 6 but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ 8 “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. 9 “Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, 10 or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support. 11 “And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city. 12 “As you enter the house, give it your greeting. 13 “If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace. 14 “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet. 15 “Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

Psalm 34:18 (NASB95) — 18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalm 51:16-17 (NASB95) — 16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Isaiah 57:15 (NASB95) — 15 For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, “I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.

Hebrews 11:7 (NASB95) — 7 By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

2 Peter 2:5 (NASB95) — 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Builds According To The Pattern

A wise master builder will build according to the pattern. Addressing the Romans, Paul said, “you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed” (Rom. 6:17-18). The Greek word **tupos**, here translated “form,” appears 16 times in the New Testament, and communicates the concept of a pattern. It applies to Moses: He was commanded to follow God’s pattern (Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5). We are under the same obligation: the gospel contains God’s pattern for everything we are required to do (2 Tim. 1:13).

Romans 6:17-18 (NASB95) — 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, 18 and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Acts 7:44 (NASB95) — 44 “Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed him to make it according to the pattern which he had seen.

Hebrews 8:5 (NASB95) — 5 who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

2 Timothy 1:13 (NASB95) — 13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

The I.S.B.E. says, “The New Testament uses **typos** (‘type,’ ‘pattern,’ ‘model’) in Hebrews 8:5 (quoting Exodus 25:40, LXX); Moses saw a representation of the true tabernacle in heaven (Heb. 8:2) after which the one on earth was to be modeled. It was clear that although people would make the tabernacle, God determined its shape and form. Since God would be approached through the tabernacle and its services, the pattern had to be followed in every detail. Any deviation would result in the people’s loss of the spiritual truths that a right approach to God would provide.”ⁱ

Exodus 25:40 (NASB95) — 40 “See that you make them after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.

Hebrews 8:2 (NASB95) — 2 a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.

Conclusion

Are you a wise master builder? Are you building with quality workmanship? Are you building on a solid foundation? Are you building with quality materials? Are you building according to the pattern? Are you a faithful steward of the Lord (Matt. 24:45-51; Luke 12:41-44)? Are you prepared to give account unto God (Rom. 14:12)?

Matthew 24:45-51 (NASB95) — 45 “Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 “Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 47 “Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 48 “But if that evil slave says in his heart, ‘My master is not coming for a long time,’ 49 and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards; 50 the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, 51 and will cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Luke 12:41-44 (NASB95) — 41 Peter said, “Lord, are You addressing this parable to us, or to everyone else as well?” 42 And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at

the proper time? 43 “Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. 44 “Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

Romans 14:12 (NASB95) — 12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

ⁱ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed. (1986), s.v. “Pattern,” by H. E. Fagal.