

Building Instructions

by Arno Stegen

The sermon encourages believers to mature in their faith by building their lives on the foundation of Christ and actively participating in God's work.

Duration: 1:01:14

Scripture: Matthew 5:23, 1 Corinthians 3:9

Topics: "Instruction"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of building our lives on the foundation of Christ Jesus. He emphasizes that this foundation is not a one-time event, but a principle that should guide us throughout our Christian journey. The speaker also addresses the issue of jealousy, urging listeners to overcome it and move on to more substantial matters in their faith. He warns against getting too close to sin and emphasizes the need to continually grow and distance ourselves from it. The sermon references various Bible verses, including Matthew 5:23, to support these teachings.

Transcript

Lord Jesus we would like to hear you speaking to us. We like to hear what is on your heart. Help us to listen carefully that we may then also be able to put it into practice that we won't just be hearers but also doers of your word.

So please bless this time, please bless your word. May it be new to us. May it bring life and please breathe your life into it through your Holy Spirit.

For your name's sake we ask it. Amen. We'll read some words from 1st Corinthians chapter 3. 1 Corinthians 3 and we'll start reading from verse 9. While you're looking for it, the beginning of the chapter Paul starts by saying, brethren I speak not as to spiritual men but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ.

I gave you milk to drink, not solid food for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed even now you are not able for you're still fleshly. For since there's jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and are you not walking like mere men? So there's a difference.

You can be a Christian but you can be a babe and stay a babe even though you're a man. A person is a Christian 10, 20 years but the Lord has to speak to us as if we were just babes, still babies in the faith because that's how far we've got. We've never got any further.

We haven't grown in the faith. Let's test ourselves and search ourselves whether the Lord has to speak to us as to babes. Whether the Lord has to say to us that there's still jealousy in your heart, there's still strife among you, you're but just mere babes.

If I still have to speak about those elementary things, about overcoming jealousy, about overcoming strife in your midst, then you're still a baby in the faith. You got converted 20 years ago, you were fighting a certain sin in your life. 20 years later, you're still stuck on the same note like a record that's stuck, playing the same tune all the time.

And the Lord says that you should have been eating solid food already but you're still drinking milk like a newborn baby. How long have you been a Christian? Are you still drinking milk? Still busy with the A of your Christian faith? Like a child in grade one, it's 20 years old but still learning how much one plus one is. You just can't get it right.

Paul says you should be much further in your Christian life by now. You should actually be at the point where you can be busy with much more important things, if I can say, or substantial things maybe, and how you can build the kingdom of the Lord and be a blessing to others involved in God's work, but you're still grappling just with jealousy in your life. You just can't overcome it.

But then he goes on to speak of other things, and which also help us to grow in the faith if we apply them, but at the same time it doesn't help we get to the next phase and we haven't overcome that jealousy yet. What does it help us if we can deliver the most wonderful message, or we can sing the most beautiful songs, or give a wonderful testimony, but there's jealousy in my life. There's still strife.

There's still fighting for position. I can't get on with my brother. I need to make sure that I get past the milk stage.

I hope you understand what I mean. One needs to grow. One needs to get past, go from one stage in our spiritual lives to the other, that our growth can even be evident to all.

Otherwise we'll be like retarded people who grow physically, but the mind stands still, and we act like little babies even though we are fully grown. And as you know, with many of those children, you often find that the head gets very big. And it's a tragic state, and one can only feel sorry for such children.

But it's a phenomenon you find among the Christians as well. You just see the head growing and nothing else. Totally out of proportion, deformed.

A person just has a big head, and that's all. So he goes on, and in verse 9 he says, for we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

According to the grace of God which was given to me as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation, and another's building upon it. But let each one be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than that, than the one which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.

Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident for the day he will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. So we have read now how each man is part of God's building, but he himself is also building the building of his own life. Now I wish I was a master builder, because maybe I could then tell you in much clearer terms what it really means, but with the limited

knowledge that I have, I'd just like to share a few thoughts about how one goes about putting up a building.

The first step when one puts up a building is to lay a foundation. That foundation is imperative, it's desperately important. Without a foundation, you're wasting your time.

If you don't get the foundation right, then the best building is of no use. And Paul says that foundation is Jesus Christ. There is just no other foundation.

Now we know that in the time that we live in South Africa especially, we often hear contradictory things to that. But I believe we are all here because we believe that Jesus Christ is the only true foundation. But by acknowledging that, we haven't got to the end of the road.

Knowing that and saying that isn't going to get us into heaven. In fact it places great responsibility upon us. Even in Timothy, in second Timothy we read that the firm foundation of God stands firm, immovable.

And it has this seal. The Lord knows those who are his. And let everyone who knows, who names the name of the Lord abstain from wickedness.

See what responsibility comes with acknowledging that he is the true foundation. It's not enough just to proclaim it. But it must be evident in our lives.

And how do we recognize that a man has made Christ his foundation? The seal of God is. The Lord knows who are his. And we do know that.

That that is what is important. That God knows us. That God acknowledges us and confesses us.

What does it help if I say I know the Lord? And then one day we get before his throne and we say Lord, Lord and he says but I don't know you. And there will be many who will be coming that day who will say Lord, Lord, I did this for you, I did that for you. Then we'll try and remember very hard what we've done for him.

Even though today we may have difficulty remembering what we did for him just this last week. But on that day, our minds will go into overdrive. We'll remember things that we perhaps have forgotten long ago and we'll try our level best just to find an excuse to be able to stand before him.

And the criteria is that God knows me. That he will acknowledge and confess me before the angels and say I know this man. I know this woman.

I know this boy, I know this girl. Does he know us or do we only, do we only claim to know him? And one will know when he knows us because there will be fellowship with him. We will have contact with him.

When one prays, one will know and have the assurance that God has heard my prayer because he replies, he answers. When I ask him to speak to me, he speaks to me. When I read his word, God speaks to me through it.

He knows me. He speaks to me. There's a personal relationship between us.

And he also says that he who has this foundation, who has Christ in his life, this is the next seal that's on this foundation, that he who names his name departs from iniquity, from wickedness, from evil. Is that a

trait in our lives? Do people recognize, does our life have this inscription on it that everyone can testify and say I know so and so. He departs from evil.

He makes a wide turn around it. He doesn't get near it. And when you depart from something, you start relatively close to it or at it at a point, but you move away from it further and further away.

But sadly with many Christians, when they get converted, they make a radical turn. They make a radical break with evil, with sin, with ungodliness, but they instead of moving further and further away from it, you see them moving ever closer to it. The challenge in their lives is not how far can I get away from sin, but how close can I get to it without going to hell.

And this foundation which is laid doesn't just get laid once and you forget about it ever after. No, it becomes a foundational principle, something which you need to have as a basis throughout your life. Whatever you do in your Christian life needs to be built on this foundation.

So it becomes a principle for me which I apply every day of my life. That even when I start serving the Lord and I'm doing things for Him, like we find in Matthew 5, verse 23, where the Lord teaches us that even when I come with an offering, when I come to present something to the Lord, I say, Lord I want to do something for you. And my, how good that is.

If only we had more Christians who say, Lord, what can I do for you? Are you a Christian that looks for opportunities to do something for the Lord? If we are really Christians that are alive spiritually, we will be such Christians. We'll always be looking for an opportunity. But even there the Lord says, if you want to bring your offering, and you're presenting your offering at the altar, and then you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

So you see that a purified, a sanctified, a holy life is the basis for anything that you want to do as a Christian. That's the foundation. I hope it's enough.

Beautiful thought. Now we start building. And as we mentioned early on, we need to start building.

We can't just be satisfied with, okay, the foundation's there, now I can sit back and relax. The foundation is just the beginning. And very often the foundation you don't even see.

It's below the ground. It's below ground level. You have to dig down.

And that's what it's like when you first become a Christian. You first have to dig a bit. Because your old life is full of sin.

The things that you've done wrong. Things which God isn't pleased with. And it takes some digging.

It's hard work. But those things have to be gotten out. Christ is that foundation.

And you can't say, okay, Lord, here I'm going to build my house. I want you to be my foundation. But, Lord, there are lots of other rocks and stones and rubbish inside this trench where the foundation must be laid.

But just please excuse them. Just make space for yourself as much as you can. And we try and make do in that way.

No, the Lord won't share that space with anything else. He won't share it with sin. That sin must be gotten out.

For Christ died to remove those sins. And those sins need to be brought to the cross. So when the foundation is laid, as we start building, what's the first thing we need to do? So as you start building on the foundation, the first thing you need to do is lay the cornerstone.

And we shared a few of the thoughts about a cornerstone with the schoolchildren that day. That is the stone that you put down as a very first point as you start building your house. And that stone is then your point of reference.

As you build, you always use this cornerstone as your point of reference to make sure that you're building your house in the proper way. And so God gives us his plan for our lives. And we need to make sure that we build according to God's plan for my life and you build it according to his plan for your life.

And it doesn't help that I try and copy someone else's plan. God has his unique plan for me and I need to build accordingly. We often make that mistake.

I look at my brother and I expect it to go exactly like it does with him. And then I start trying to preach like he does, I try and talk like he does, I try and shake hands the way he does, and I even try and nod my head the way he does. We don't need to do that.

And that's where jealousy often comes in too. Because the Lord has a plan for my brother and when suddenly I realize that for me it's not working out the same way, then I get jealous. Look what he's got, I don't have it.

He can do this, he's there, I'm not there. We need to know what God's plan is for our own lives. So do you know what God's plan is for your life? If you don't, you need to get to know.

Because if you don't know his plan for your life, then obviously you're busy with your own plan. You'll plan your life and live your life the way you want to live it. But you'll feel very guilty one day when you stand before God and God says, well you did that, that's a house you built, but let me just show you the plan that I actually had for you.

And woe if there's a difference. So build according to God's plan. Go to the chief architect who's greater and better than anyone else.

He has the perfect plan for you. Get that plan from him. But then you also make him to be the chief cornerstone, that he's not just the chief architect but also the chief cornerstone.

So whatever I do in my life, I always look and do it in relation to him, using him as my point of reference. I use him like the sailors of old who used the stars as their points of reference to guide them through the dark nights. He helps me find my way through this dark world.

And it's so wonderful because he is the morning star. Immovable. He's always there.

In the darkest night when I need him most, he's there. But even when things go up a plain sailing, even when it goes well and things seem to be going along so happily, he's there too. He's always there.

But it'll only help me if I keep my eyes on him. What does it help if he's there but I don't use him as a point of reference? Then we know better than those people who were captaining the ship, the Titanic. They say that they did receive warnings about icebergs.

But it was such a clear, calm night. It was so lovely sailing in this wonderful ship. They were so engrossed in the splendor of it all that they ended up on the rocks.

So it doesn't help me just to be going my own way and saying, oh no, the Lord is there. When I need him, I'll call on him. And he's talking to me, he's warning me, and I just disregard it.

So he needs to be our point of reference. And it's wonderful to know while we're going through this time in our history where so much is changing, maybe it comes with a lot of insecurity, and for others it comes with huge opportunities. So whether this time for you presents problems, insecurities, or whether it presents opportunities and a bright future, whatever it presents for you, you still need that guiding star.

You still need that cornerstone that is Christ in your life. And usually the risk is greater when the future is bright, and the sea is calm, and everything looks rosy. That's when you really need.

That's when you need Christ more than ever. Because human nature always points you to Christ when you're in need. But it's when things are going well that you tend to think you can go it alone.

Do we have Christ as our point of reference? If we don't make him the cornerstone, we'll make someone or something else the cornerstone, or maybe even make ourselves the cornerstone. If you make yourself the cornerstone, everything just revolves around yourself. Whatever situation you get yourself into, you will think of yourself.

How can I get the most out of it? How can I get off most lightly in this situation? You don't think of others. You don't even spare a thought for the Lord and his kingdom and his glory. No, it's just how can I protect myself or get the most out of this situation for myself.

And then this cornerstone also is an anchor. This is what holds the house together. This is what brings the walls together, binds them together, that it stays intact even in a storm.

And blessed is the one who makes Christ to be the anchor in his life, the cornerstone, and he will surely hold it all together. He's the one you can trust to hold it together even when the storm comes. You put anything else to be the cornerstone or even yourself, you know how easily you change your mind.

Today you think one way, tomorrow you think another way, the next day you're thinking something else already as the wind blows. Now imagine if you are your own cornerstone. You'll be in a very insecure situation.

And then you can get the third scenario where Christ can even become a stumbling stone to you. In 1 Peter 2 verse 8, a stone of stumbling, a rock of offence, for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word. It's interesting where the Lord can be the cornerstone in our lives, the anchor, the point of reference, but if we choose to be disobedient, he will become a stumbling block to us.

And so it is. If we don't want to serve the Lord wholeheartedly, if we don't want to make him the very centre of our lives, my, what a stumbling block he can be. He'll always be in our way.

He'll always be in our way. Because when I want to go my own way, there he'll be and I'll stumble over him every time. I want to follow my lusts, but just as I think I want to go, then my conscience pricks me and I stumble over the stone.

I want to go into the world, the world attracts me so, but just when I think I want to do it, or even if I then eventually go and do it, but I'll always know that I'm doing the wrong thing. What is Christ to you? Is he the cornerstone? Or is he a stumbling block to you? A stone of stumbling. Because you don't want to follow him.

You want to go your own way. And he's always in your way. And he will be there because of his love to you.

You can go your own way. Throw him overboard. Go your own way, but because of his love to you, you won't have peace.

And the Bible says here, he'll be a rock of offence. He'll be a stumbling block to you because you're disobedient. If he's your cornerstone, he'll be your joy.

Like someone who loves the Lord, the law of the Lord even becomes something which is as sweet as honey to us. We delight to do his will. But if we don't love the Lord, then the law of the Lord becomes a heavy yoke.

It becomes a burden. Why must I do this? I don't want to do it, but I have to and I don't want to. So the Lord can mean different things to us.

But it's amazing, it's through disobedience. Obedience makes a big difference in our lives. If we just think of Samson, how the Lord could use him.

And he didn't use him because he had long hair. He wasn't strong because he had long hair. Because there may be many strong people in the world today.

But he was strong because he was obedient to what God had commanded. And the day he became disobedient, he lost his strength. May that be a lesson to us Christians, never to be disobedient to the Lord.

And then we must be living stones in this world. As we are in the church, as we are part of the congregation, every one of us must be a living stone. As we find here in the same chapter in Peter, in verse 5, where it says, you also as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house.

Are we living stones in the congregation? And as we need to make sure that as we build even the house of our own lives, that we make sure that we build with precious stones, as we read in Corinthians, that we don't build with hay and stubble and things which won't stand the test of fire, which we still have to go through. And which we even have to go through before that final test. And while we are on that point, let's make sure that we build with the correct things in our lives.

With gold, with precious stones, which is genuine. We know that's the most difficult, it's not easy to find gold. Silver and precious stones, you've got to work hard to find those things.

But it's worth it in the long run. Because that will stand the test which God will put us through. The great test one day, but even throughout our lives.

Every day we have to go through tests. Do our houses stand the test that God puts us through? Or do we just take it lightly and make life easy? We take just any old rubbish or hay or straw and we build with that just because someone else has said, come on, you must serve the Lord. Then I say, okay, if you say so, and I do it grudgingly, and I just take the very first thing I can find and I say, okay, that's what I'm doing now for the Lord.

The preacher says, you must be a Christian, you must do something for the Lord. Then I say, oh, well, okay, I better do something that next Sunday if he asks me, at least I can show him something. Or the teachers, they tell me, serve the Lord.

Make sure your life is right with the Lord. And then I do a few things just to bluff them. And I'm building with straw.

It'll never stand the test. What you do for the Lord has to be genuine. And it won't always be the easiest thing to do, but if it's genuine, it'll last.

So we need to be genuine in what we do for the Lord. And then we also need to be genuine as part of the congregation. As part of God's church, his body.

Am I as a stone in this church, am I just made out of straw, out of rubbish, or am I really a precious stone in God's building? Am I perhaps a weak link in God's building? Am I maybe that crooked stone in the wall? Or am I firmly placed on that foundation, in line with the cornerstone made out of precious stones in gold and silver? A vessel unto honour that brings glory to God. And so while we're building our own houses, spiritual houses, and God's building, so also let us help one another, building each other up. You get master builders, but you also get master demolishers.

They're professionals. They're not just Mickey Mouse operators. They are specialists in demolishing buildings.

And the better they get, the more they go for these fantastic structures, huge buildings. They go for the bigger ones each time, the better they get. And so you find them in the church as well, and people outside the church too.

That's their job. They're professionals. They're experts at breaking down what other people have built up.

And so while we're building our own houses, spiritual houses, and God's building, so also let us help one another, building each other up. What are you part of? A construction team or a demolition team? And I say a team because very often they work in teams. They always try and get their pals and their colleagues to join them to create even more destruction than they could on their own.

But the Lord teaches us that we should be people, like in Romans chapter 14, verse 19, where we are told, So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. That our aim in life is to build up others, to assist them, to help them, or is it our job just to break them down? To break them down, even in the eyes of others. And in Ephesians chapter 4, it even says, It says we should be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We must be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Are we diligent at doing that? We can be diligent in many things, but here the Bible says we should be diligent at preserving the unity of the Spirit, that we are one with another. We need to work at it, that we are one in the Lord and that we should pursue that in our

lives.

Working diligently at it. I hope that there is something you can take home with you today. May God help us to be faithful builders.

Building on the right foundation. Distancing ourselves from evil. Using Christ as the cornerstone in our lives, every moment of our lives.

Always making sure that we are in fellowship with Him, in tune with Him, in line with His will. And that we will be diligently involved in building God's church, His body. Building with that which is genuine.

Not just a bluff. Not that we build something and it's all just a bluff. Just a check.

Something which will not last. And we can even build something which looks respectable. We plaster it well and it looks good from the outside.

But that's not the ultimate test, the looks. It's going to be put through the fire. And that's when the true colors come out.

Will our lives stand the test which God puts us through and that ultimate test which we still have to go through one day? And always remembering while we are about it, that if we do it with our own lives, we will also be there to help others, to build them up, not to break them down. Let us pray. Lord Jesus, there's so much we could say.

Lord, may these few thoughts be a blessing to each one of us. May they be a building. May they be a help that we can build our spiritual houses to God's glory, to the honor of His name.

Help us, Lord, and keep us faithful to You right to the end. Amen.

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