

The Trial by Fire of Every Man's Work

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of building one's life on the foundation of Christ, and the need for a worthy superstructure that corresponds to the foundation.

Scripture: Isaiah 28:16, Matthew 16:17, 1 Corinthians 3:12, 1 Corinthians 6:19, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Judgment Day"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the importance of building our spiritual lives on the foundation of Christ, emphasizing the need for a superstructure of faith, hope, and love that is in harmony with the foundation. He warns against the dangers of legalism, self-righteousness, and false religion, likening them to wood, hay, and stubble that will be consumed by the fire of God's testing. Philpot urges believers to ensure their spiritual building materials are gold, silver, and precious stones, representing valuable and enduring truths, graces, and manifestations of God's love.

Transcript

Preached on July 31, 1853, at Eden Street Chapel, by J. C. Philpot

"Now if any man builds upon this foundation using gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest - for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." 1 Cor. 3:12,13

Paul preached a free-grace gospel. The sovereign, free, super-abounding grace of God, as revealed in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, was the joy of his heart and the theme of his tongue; and against nothing did the holy zeal that burned in his bosom flame forth more vehemently than against any perversion or adulteration of this pure gospel. It was with this gospel in his heart, and with this gospel in his mouth, that he went forth into different places, as he was led by the blessed Spirit, preaching Jesus Christ and salvation through His blood and righteousness. God owned his testimony; the Holy Spirit accompanied the word with divine power; and many Gentile sinners, formerly worshipers of idols, and abandoned to every lust, were brought to repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was the "foundation" which he, as a wise master builder, instrumentally and ministerially laid as he speaks, "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation" 1Co 3:10. Paul is speaking here not so much of the foundation which God has laid in Zion, though that is included, as of his own ministry. Let me explain this point, for some people seem to mistake

Paul's meaning here. God has actually, truly, of His own sovereign good pleasure, laid a foundation on which the Church is built. This foundation is His own dear Son, "the Rock of Ages", and against the Church built on this foundation the gates of hell shall never prevail. But when a minister preaches this free-grace gospel, when he sets forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the only foundation of the Church, then he lays this foundation ministerially. He is thus, as the apostle says, "a laborer together with God" 1Co 3:9 ; for the same foundation which God laid in Zion he lays instrumentally in a sinner's soul.

But this glorious work, whereby through Paul's preaching, sinners were saved, the churches edified, and God glorified, raised the spleen and enmity of Satan. He could not bear to see glory brought to God and salvation to man; and therefore he stirred up erroneous men to follow in Paul's track in order to adulterate this precious gospel by mingling with it sometimes the requirements or the spirit of the law, sometimes the tenets of heathen philosophy, sometimes will-worship and a voluntary humility. The first was the case with the churches of Galatia; the two latter with the church of Colosse.

It was the legal spirit thus introduced into the Galatian churches which drew forth from the breast of the apostle that Epistle to the Galatians, which will ever be a bulwark against a Galatian gospel while the world continues. Matters were not quite so bad at Corinth. The believers in that city were too well instructed to receive a Galatian gospel, for they were "enriched by Him in all utterance and in all knowledge", and "came behind in no gift" 1Co 1:5-7. And it would appear that the preachers who followed Paul were, some of them at least, good men, for the apostle speaks of their ministerial work being burnt, but they themselves being "saved, yet so as by fire" 1Co 3:15.

They therefore in their ministry did not seek to root up or intermeddle with Paul's foundation. There they and Paul were fully agreed. But where they differed was about the superstructure. "I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereupon." Then comes the solemn caution, "But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon." We are agreed, says Paul, as to the foundation. None of the builders who have come after me have dared to meddle with my foundation. He then adds the words which are sometimes misunderstood, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"--meaning, as I understand it, "You wise and well-instructed Corinthians would not tolerate it. If a man were to come to Corinth and lay any other foundation than that is laid among you by my hands, you would not hear him for a single moment; and those who have come among you being, as I hope, good men, would not attempt it. There you and they and I are all agreed. There is no difference nor dispute between us and them about foundation work. The foundation is so far safe. But now comes the hardly less important question, What about the superstructure which these men have built on my foundation? Is that right or is it not? Here we may widely differ; for the superstructure must either agree with and be worthy of the foundation, or it must disagree with and be unworthy of it."

Now let us read our text in the connection as thus explained, and then let us see what is the apostle's meaning in it. "Now if any man builds upon this foundation using gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest - for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

In looking at these words, then, and attempting, as the Lord may enable, to open up and lay before you their spiritual meaning, I shall, with God's blessing, and looking to Him for strength in body, soul, and spirit, endeavor to show-

1. What is the foundation which God has actually and truly laid in Zion, and the foundation which every true servant of God lays ministerially in the Church.
2. The superstructure built upon this foundation, which may be either gold, silver, precious stones, or wood, hay, stubble.
3. The fire which is to try every man's work of what sort it is.

I. Our first main point is to show the FOUNDATION on which the Church of God stands. Here we are called upon to be very clear and plain, and not darken counsel by words without knowledge.

Let us hear, then, God's own word by the mouth of His prophet Isaiah. "Therefore, thus says the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation" Isaiah 28:16 . This foundation is no other than the co-equal and co-eternal Son of God. Therefore when Peter made that noble confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", the Lord Jesus answered, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona - for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I say also unto you, You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" Matthew 16:17,18.

Let us dwell for a moment on Peter's confession, for it is not on Peter that the Church of Christ is built, but on the Son of God; and it is not on the person of Peter or the pope, but on the confession of Peter and the truth therein expressed, that Christ at the right hand of God ever builds the Church. In Peter's confession there are two points, which separate and together embrace the Lord Jesus.

1. He is, "the Son of the living God." There is His Deity and eternal Sonship.
2. He is, "the Christ", the Messiah, the anointed One. There is His humanity in union with Deity. For though it was His human nature which was anointed by the blessed Spirit, yet it was so, as in union with His Deity. This, then, is the foundation which God has laid in Zion--the Person of the Lord Jesus as God-Man Mediator, Immanuel, God with us.

But the apostle speaks as if he had laid the foundation. "According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation." Is there not an apparent inconsistency here? Does God lay one foundation and man another? "No" says the apostle, "we are laborers together with God. You are God's husbandry, you are God's building." 1Co 3:9. God has laid the foundation actually, and we lay the foundation ministerially. I came to Corinth. The Lord Himself told me He had 'many people' there Acts 18:10. There I preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified, for I desired to know nothing else among you. God blessed the Word to your souls; 'for my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power' 1Co 2:4. Thus ministerially, by preaching Christ and Him crucified, I laid the same foundation in the church at Corinth and in your hearts, which God has laid in Zion." There is, then, no contradiction, but a blessed harmony of purpose when the servant of Christ is a laborer together with God in laying by his mouth the same foundation which God has laid by His hands.

But be it ever borne in mind that it is one thing to hear of this foundation and another to be built into and upon it. It is one thing to hear of a rock, it is another to stand upon it. It is one thing to assent to the truth that there is a foundation laid by God in Zion, but it is another for your soul to be taught and brought by a divine power to rest upon that foundation. The one is theory, the other is fact; the one is notion, the other is

experience; the one is the teaching of man, the other the teaching of God; the one a religion that stands in the flesh, the other a religion that stands in divine power.

Now on what foundation do we stand naturally? Self. And what foundation is that? Sand. Thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, myriads, have no other foundation than sand! A quicksand, a sand bank, a shoal of mud--poor miserable, fickle, false, and faithless self--on this they stand to meet the rushing waves of judgment. Now if our house be built upon the sand it must fall when the storm bursts forth; but if our house be built upon a rock it will stand unshaken amid the storms that desolate the world. But as we all naturally from ignorance and self-righteousness build on the sand, we must be brought off one foundation before we can stand upon another.

And how is this to be done? What a description God has given of the way whereby a soul is brought off the sandy foundation self to stand upon the rock Christ! Read it, mark it, digest it, and see whether you have any personal acquaintance with it. "Because you have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through it shall not come unto us"--here is carnal security here is empty profession, here is a religion that stands in the flesh--"for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves" Isaiah 28:15.

How the Lord here lays bare the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of a religion which stands in creature righteousness, putting as it were into the mouths of its professors His own view of it. This then is their language, "We have made a covenant with death." Death and we have shaken hands, and are thorough good friends. Why need we fear it then as an enemy? We have a religion to die by. "And with hell are we at agreement." Why then need we fear hell? Our religion will surely deliver us from going down to the pit; and our own righteousness will surely give us an entrance into the gate of heaven. Yes, though God Himself declares it to be a lying refuge, yet having once taken shelter in it we are well satisfied with it, and do not want to be driven out of it; and though under falsehood we have hidden ourselves, yet we would sooner take our chance and live and die in it than suffer the pain and annoyance to be beaten out of it. Such is man, such the wisdom of the flesh; such all creature religion, such the pride and obstinacy of the human heart; such the deadly enmity of the carnal mind against salvation by grace, that it would sooner die and be damned in its own way; than live and be saved in God's way.

But will the Lord let His people live and die in these false refuges? He Himself shall answer the question. "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place" Isaiah 28:17. That is God's way of bringing the soul off the sandy foundation of self, preparatory to building it upon the Rock of Ages. The figure employed is that of a builder who works by line and plummet, and by applying it to the wall at once detects the least deviation from the perpendicular.

What corresponds to this in grace? The application of the law to the conscience, that holy, unbending, condemning law which demands perfect love to God and man. This is laying judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, for the law is as strict and as unerring in detecting the least deviation from its commands as the line and plummet in detecting the least deviation from the perpendicular. And what follows? The thunderstorm of God's indignation against the transgression of this holy law. "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place." The idea is of a person taking shelter in vain from the storm and hail which in those countries was often composed of large pieces of ice, but the storm and hail battering the shelter down, and the flood drowning him out of his hiding-place.

This thunder-storm and its attendant flood breaks up carnal security. "Your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then you shall be trodden down by it" Isaiah 28:18. The covenant with death that it should have no sting--and the agreement with hell that it should have no victory--are broken up and disannulled; and the soul stands naked and guilty before God, as a consuming fire. Under these distressing sensations what sighs and cries go up out of the heart! "What shall I do? Where shall I flee? How shall I escape the wrath to come? O eternity, eternity! How shall I grapple with eternity? How shall I endure everlasting burnings? O why was I ever born into this miserable world, to be an everlasting monument of God's displeasure? O that I were anything but what I am--a dog, a worm, a toad--any vile reptile that had not an immortal soul!"

As the fire of God's holy law thus burns and smoulders in a sinner's conscience, it scorches up his agreement with death, and it falls out of his hands a defaced and useless scroll. It seems at first sight, hard that such severe measures should be needful to divorce the soul from self; but so close is the union, so grown together, interlocked, and interwoven are the two, that nothing but a divine power can rend them asunder.

Now when the Lord Jesus Christ is made known to the soul by the blessed Spirit as the Rock of Ages, the foundation which God has laid in Zion, and there is a view by faith of His glorious Person, atoning blood, and justifying righteousness, there is a coming unto Him as such, as the Apostle Peter speaks - "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious--you also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" 1Pe 2:4,5. Christ is the living stone, and believers are living stones. Thus stone comes to stone, the sinner to the Savior, and cleaving to Him becomes cemented into Him, by the Holy Spirit, and thus obtains a living union with Him. It is in this way that a guilty sinner, a desolate soul, is brought off the sand, and built on and into the rock which God has laid in Zion.

II. Having thus seen what the foundation is, and how the soul is brought to it, and built in and upon it, we may now look at the SUPERSTRUCTURE; for there is a building to be raised as well as a foundation to be laid; and this superstructure may either be worthy of the foundation or unworthy of it--in other words, according to the expression of the apostle, be either gold, silver, precious stones--or wood, hay, stubble.

When a minister spiritually and experimentally preaches the Lord Jesus Christ as the only object of a sinner's hope, he instrumentally lays Christ as the foundation. But he must go on to build up the Church on her most holy faith, and rear up a superstructure worthy of, and corresponding to the foundation. Is it not so in nature? It is a frequent circumstance that when a noble building is to be erected, the foundation stone is laid by some distinguished person with great ceremony. But is not this a pledge that the superstructure shall correspond to the foundation, and be in harmony with it? A foundation for a palace, and the superstructure a hovel! What a contradiction! What an inconsistency! Thus the apostle assumes there may be built upon Christ the foundation, either a worthy, harmonious, consistent superstructure, as gold, silver, precious stones--or an inconsistent, unworthy, disgraceful one, as wood, hay, stubble. We will examine them both separately.

1. A WORTHY superstructure. What are we to understand by gold, silver, precious stones? Evidently something valuable, weighty, enduring, and above all incombustible. What in grace possesses these invaluable qualities? First, the grand truths and leading doctrines of the gospel may be said to bear these features. God's eternal choice of His people in the Son of His love, their personal and particular

redemption by the blood of Christ, their justification by His imputed righteousness, and their full and perfect salvation in Him, are all weighty, valuable, precious realities which fire cannot destroy, nor water drown.

So the promises of the gospel, which are all yes and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God, are gold, silver, and precious stones, weighty, valuable, and enduring. Nor are the precepts of the gospel, and the ordinances of God's house, to be omitted from the harmonious superstructure. All that the gospel reveals and proclaims, all that it promises and enjoins, all the holy obedience to which it calls, must be built up by Zion's true builders as a superstructure on Christ the foundation.

But I think we may apply the words more particularly to the work of the blessed Spirit in the soul, whereby He builds it up for a temple for Himself to dwell in, as the apostle speaks- "What! Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own?" 1Co 6:19. If this be the case, then the three things here spoken of--gold, silver, precious stones, will have special reference to the teachings and operations of the blessed Spirit.

What may we then understand by GOLD? Evidently faith. The Lord Himself compares faith to gold in His address to the Laodicean church, "I counsel you to buy of Me gold tried in the fire," Re 3:18 and that this means faith is plain from the language of Peter, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" 1Pe 1:7. Well may this tried, this precious faith, be compared to gold, for it enriches the soul by putting it into possession of all the riches of Christ. Therefore the apostle says, "All things are yours." Why? Because "you are Christ's."

As gold is the grand medium of exchange, whereby, according to the amount which we possess of it, we obtain all we need, so faith is the believer's medium of exchange, whereby he receives out of Christ's fullness a supply for all his needs. Thus the Lord says, "Come--buy, and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" Isaiah 55:1. This divine, this living faith, is not the exercise of any natural faculty of a man's mind; it is not the same thing as credence given to some historical event, as I believe there is an Australia, or that there was a Bonaparte. But it is a special fruit and grace of the Spirit, a new covenant blessing, the gift of God, and wrought in the heart by a divine power.

A minister builds this gold up into the superstructure when he points out and insists upon, describes and unfolds the origin and nature of this faith; and when the blessed Spirit owns his testimony and raises up faith in the hearer under his testimony, He inlays it into the soul and builds it up into Christ. Such was the faith of ABEL, the first martyr; such the faith of ENOCH, who walked with God; such the faith of NOAH, whereby he built the ark; such the faith of ABRAHAM, whereby he became the manifested friend of God; such was the faith of JACOB when he wrestled with the angel; of DAVID, when he went out against Goliath, and such was the faith of that glorious band of whom the world was not worthy, whose sufferings and exploits the apostle records in Heb 11. This faith is worthy of the foundation, for it is the work of the Holy Spirit alone which agrees and is in harmony with the person and work of God the Son.

But the apostle mentions SILVER as forming a second constituent of a worthy and suitable superstructure. We should not strain figurative expressions too far, lest we fall into wild and fanciful interpretations. A rein is here needed rather than a spur, lest we should be carried away into the trackless region of imagination instead of the green pastures of gospel truth. But I think, without being fanciful, we may explain silver as referring to the grace of hope. Is not this a part of the superstructure to be built upon Christ the

foundation? As the hymn says,

My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

What is our hope worth if not built on the Person, work, and blood of the Son of God? But a good hope through grace is the work of the blessed Spirit, and therefore in harmony with the finished work of Jesus. But how does a minister build this silver as a constituent part of the superstructure? By preaching the gospel in its purity and fullness; by setting forth the freeness of grace; by tracing out the work of the Spirit on the heart; by holding up the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's Savior and Friend; by describing the character of God's poor and needy family, and bringing forward the promises, invitations, and declarations of God on their behalf. This good hope through grace, being built on the Person, work, and blood of Christ, and being wrought in the heart by the blessed Spirit, is a part of the superstructure worthy of and suitable to the foundation.

But PRECIOUS STONES are also mentioned as a part of the spiritual building. These, it is evident, surpass in rarity, beauty, and value, gold and silver. But can anything surpass faith and hope? Yes. Precious manifestations of God's love, precious visits of Jesus, precious applications of His blood to the conscience, precious smiles from His face, and precious words from His lips. These are indeed rare. It is not often in a man's life that he has special manifestations of the Lord Jesus.

Faith and hope, like gold and silver, are more for every day, for by faith we live, stand and fight, and therefore need it continually; and by hope we are saved from despair, and therefore need it every hour. But precious stones glitter on but few fingers, and are only for high days and festivals. Yet, what worth is lodged in a small diamond! So one manifestation of Christ, one discovery of God's pardoning love, and one application of atoning blood to the conscience, though it may not be great in extent nor long in duration, yet how unspeakably valuable and precious it is! These precious stones a minister builds up as a part of the superstructure when he describes them, enforces them on the conscience, insists and contends for them.

Now take a glance at this building, foundation and superstructure. The glorious Person of the Son of God with His atoning blood, justifying righteousness, and finished work is the foundation. The work of the Spirit, the graces He produces, and the manifestations of Christ which He gives--that is the superstructure. As the Lord Jesus is the only foundation on which the soul can rest, so by the work of the Spirit is it alone built up. Thus we see the Trinity all here engaged. God the Father lays the foundation; God the Son is Himself the foundation; and God the blessed Spirit builds up the glorious superstructure. Those ministers, therefore, and those ministers alone, are "laborers together with God" who work according to the rule of this pattern, and whose ministry, as being in accordance with His word and will, He owns and blesses to the building up of His church.

2. An UNworthy superstructure. But there were those in Paul's day, as we find from his epistles, and such there are also in our day, who have no eyes to see nor hearts to value the gold, silver, and precious stones. And yet they would be master-builders, would put their hand to the work; though instead of a temple they build--what? A Babel. One brings "wood", a second brings "hay", and a third brings "stubble".

There is doubtless a spiritual meaning in these materials. The leading idea which pervades the whole is of course that they are all highly combustible--dangerous materials in a fire. Their second character is, their

utter worthlessness; the third, their unsuitability to such a foundation. But let us examine them a little more closely.

WOOD. This forms the main portion of the false superstructure. A well-compacted system of creature duties just meets the idea of a wooden steeple. There are the sawn timbers of various lengths, the posts, rafters, and all the apparatus so neatly fitted, joined, morticed, glued, nailed, and dovetailed--a duty here and a rule there; a prayer for Monday and a chapter for Tuesday; when to fast and when to feast; when to stand and when to kneel! - what can be neater and more compact than our nice wooden spire?

But as it is, it is hardly rain-and-weather-tight. There are breaches now and then made in these duties and observances. Conscience becomes uneasy, as the light breaks in through the gaps. Well; what then? Bring some HAY to stop up the holes. A bundle of resolutions, vows, determinations to do better the next time, mortification at the lack of success, and a fixed struggle not again to be overcome by sin and temptation--this is the "hay" which the false builders thrust into the huge cracks of creature obedience.

But the building still has gaps; the wooden frame, with its holes filled up with hay, begins to look somewhat ruinous. It is not water-tight. What must next be done? Thatch it with STUBBLE to keep out the rain. Go into the field of human merit, collect the stalks, put them together, smooth them down, water them with a few tears, and lay them on as a covering for the wooden roof. Fleshly holiness, creature piety, a demure visage, a pious voice, a soft walk, a solemn garb, and a choice selection of scriptural phrases--put all this feigned humility and mock religion well and neatly together, and lay the whole on as a covering to thatch in the wooden steeple.

By these striking figures does the apostle describe and expose all that legality and Pharisaism, which, in all ages, ignorant builders have heaped upon Christ, allowing indeed Him to be the foundation, yet rearing upon Him this miserable and worthless superstructure.

But will this superstructure stand? No! What is to overthrow and destroy it? Fire. This is God's appointed mode of proving the work, whether it is to perish or to abide. "Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." What is the work here spoken of? It is mainly ministerial. "Every man" here signifies, generally, every minister, for it is of them the apostle is chiefly speaking. Now, the work of every minister is to be made manifest, whether it be the work of God, or whether it be the work of man. Every minister of truth who stands up before a people has a work to do; and this work is to be made manifest; it is to be revealed and brought to light of what sort it is. And how does God make it manifest? The apostle tells us here in the clearest manner, so that he who runs may read. He says, "The day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." By this "work" here, we may understand not only the religion enforced by the minister, but the people also who receive his ministry, and are instrumentally built up by him, either in faith, hope, and love--or in legality and fleshly holiness.

By the FIRE sent of God to prove the work we may understand several things.

1. PERSECUTION is a fire, and when it rages a sharp one too. Peter seems to allude to this as a part of the furnace, where he speaks of "the fiery trial"; for to be a Christian in those days was often a furnace which burnt off the body, and sent the soul to heaven in a chariot of fire.

2. But TEMPTATION also is a fire, and a hotter furnace for the soul than the bonfire is to the body. Peter speaks of "the elect strangers" as being "in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" 1Pe 1:7.

Temptation is to our fallen nature what a match is to shavings, wood, and coal laid in the furnace. Sin in our nature lies dead until temptation sets it all on fire. What overthrew David? Temptation. What cast down Peter? Temptation. What moved Moses to anger, Job to curse the day of his birth, and Jonah to turn his back upon doing God's work? Temptation. And what often makes us stagger and reel, and fear where our wicked hearts may not carry us headlong? Temptation. Well might the Lord say, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation;" and again, "Lead us not into temptation," for if led into and left in it, who can bring us out unharmed?

3. But the ANGER OF GOD AGAINST ALL SIN is also a fire. The flashes of His holy indignation against the pride, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and other abounding evils in our hearts, are a part of the furnace which the Lord has appointed in Zion.

4. FEARS of death, stings of conscience, gloomy apprehensions of what a dying bed may be, painful views of our miserable shortcomings, distressing discoveries of the depth of sin and iniquity which dwell in us, a continual struggle with the risings and boilings of inward corruption--this, also, is part of the fire which is to try every man's work of what sort it is. For you will observe I chiefly confine myself to those fires and furnaces which burn up the wood, hay, and stubble of the false superstructure.

Now observe the EFFECT of the fire which is to try the work of what sort it is.

1. First, the gold, silver, and precious stones--faith of God's giving, hope of God's inspiring, love of God's shedding abroad--can or will these graces of the Spirit be burnt up? No! They are unconsumable in the hottest furnace. They may, indeed, seem at times lost and buried in smoke and ashes, when the wood, hay, and stubble are set on fire; but they are absolutely indestructible, though the furnace be heated seven times more than it is used {See Da 3:19}

2. But how do the wood, hay, and stubble fare? Where now is creature obedience, fleshly holiness, rounds of forms and duties? Where now is the well-compacted frame of wood, the bundles of hay, the thatch of stubble? Well might the roof have been put together; well the cracks filled up; well the thatch laid on. But will the fire of persecution, of temptation, of sin, of God's holy indignation, of guilty doubts and fears, spare this man-made superstructure? No! It burns, it flames forth in clouds of smoke, it sinks, it falls, however high it reared its lofty head, into black ashes and dismal ruin.

But what of the foundation? Is that burnt up too? No! That is Christ, therefore it abides, the same yesterday, today, and forever. For observe that the apostle is speaking here of those that are eventually saved. "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" 1Co 3:15. His work is to be burned, and thus he suffers loss; but he himself is saved, yet so as by fire, that is, like a man pulled by force out of a house in flames, though all his property is consumed.

Now this casts a mysterious light on some ministers and on some hearers. They are right as to the foundations, but wrong as to the superstructure. They rest really and truly on Christ, and yet, misled and beguiled by a legal, self-righteous spirit, they bring in the doings of the creature. In mercy to their souls, God sends a fire to burn all this up. In nature sometimes a fire is the best thing that can happen. The great

fire of London was the greatest blessing London ever had. Until then it was from time to time desolated by the plague. But the fire burning old London down with its narrow, pestilential streets, burnt the plague out. And thus the best thing that can happen to some people's religion is for it to be burnt up. There is then some hope that out of the blackened ruins and smouldering ashes a new and better religion may spring.

III. Application. Having thus pointed and feathered my arrow, let me now put it on the string that I may aim it at some of your consciences. There are several distinct and marked steps laid down by the apostle here. Let us see how far we can place our foot upon them.

1. The first is, the being taken off the sandy foundation. As all by nature build on the sand, and as all before they are built on the rock, are brought off the sand, this is an event not to be slurred over, as something done one knows not where, when, or how. To be quickened into spiritual life, to be convinced of sin, and brought out of carnal security into apprehensions of the holiness, justice, and majesty of God is the greatest event in all our lives.

2. The next step is to be built on Christ as the only foundation of a sinner's hope. But this cannot be without a spiritual discovery of the Person, blood, righteousness, and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the especial work of the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus and exalt Him in the heart, by taking of the things of Christ and revealing them to the soul. This, therefore, is a thing which cannot be done in the dark, when a man is asleep and knows nothing about it, the when or how. To be brought from the law to the gospel, from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion, from self to Christ, from unbelief to faith, despondency to hope, and fears to love, is an event in a man's spiritual life which can no more be forgotten than an escape from shipwreck.

3. Next comes the question of the superstructure. Here evidently sad mistakes are made by blundering workmen. To build up the tower requires the main skill of the architect. Let him look well to his materials, and guard against one point particularly, the introduction of rubbish. Wood, hay, and stubble may do for a hovel or a stable, barn or outhouse, but not for a temple. "You are the temple of the living God," in which He dwells and walks. Therefore let it be a mansion worthy of His abode, a temple of which God Himself is the builder, Christ the foundation, and the graces of the blessed Spirit the superstructure.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/the-trial-by-fire-of-every-mans-work/>

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