

Building Up The Church

2Corinthians 13:1-10

When we think about belonging to the church we should have two ideas clearly fixed in our minds.

We should have the idea of the *Universal Church* and the *Local Church*.

The *Universal Church* sometimes called the *Invisible Church* is made up of every true Christian. Every man, woman, and child who has been acted on by the Holy Spirit is such a way so as to call them from death to life.

The Bible teaches us that from the moment we are conceived in our mother's womb, which is the moment we become a living human being, we have a nature that is opposed to God.

In that nature we grow and develop in our ability to disobey the LORD.

We are, therefore, enemies of God and objects of His terrifying and eternal wrath.

That is what it means to be dead in our sins.

In the face of that hostility God, according to His glorious grace, acts in the power of the Holy Spirit to make people dead in their sins alive in Christ.

Being made alive we believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus to pay the debt of our evil deeds freeing us from God's judgment and wrath forever, which is what we call *Justification by faith alone*.

Being made alive we also have new desires to hate the evil we formerly loved and to love the godly things we formerly hated, which is what we call *Sanctification*.

Everyone who has been transformed and is being transformed from death to life through the power of God in Christ is part of the *universal church*.

The reason some call this the Invisible Church is because we don't have the capacity to see into the hearts of other human beings.

The *Local Church*, on the other hand is very visible. It is a group of people who meet regularly together to worship in Jesus Name through the singing of hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19), the reading and preaching of God's Word (2Tim 4:2), the celebration of the sacraments which are the Lord's Supper and Baptism, fellowship, and cooperation in the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Not everyone who belongs to the local church belongs to the universal church.

It is possible to sit in a pew week after week for years and remain dead in your sins!

That said, it is clearly God's design to build the *Universal Church* through the gathering of the *Local Church*.

One of passages that describes that work is in **1Peter 2:1-6**.

That is a glorious picture of the Universal Church being built through the Local Church.

In my younger years I had the opportunity to witness a house being built with stone and though I was far from a happy participant at the time I am thankful for the insight it has given me into this text.

One thing I observed was that the mason is the one to decide which stones go into the wall.

A good mason is always selecting stones anticipating which stones are yet to be laid.

Stones often requires pieces to be broken off and reshaped in order to suit the purposes for which they are chosen.

Some of the most important stones in the wall are the stone chips which are often completely unseen and are used to hold other stones in their proper position to give maximum strength to the wall.

The LORD is doing all those things with living stones (people made alive in Christ) being built into a spiritual house that we call the church.

[Hopefully everyone here this morning wants to be a part of that. Hopefully all of us want to be used by the Lord to build up the church. The scriptures have a great deal to say about being a local church that is helping to build the universal church and our text this morning is an example of that. As the apostle Paul is bringing this letter to a close he reminds the Corinthians that his desire is the build them up rather than tear them down. As he expresses that desire here in **2Corinthians 13:1-10** he shows us some important lessons about being a local church that is seeking to do the same. He gives us three important lessons, the first being that...]

Point #1 – Building the church requires dealing with wrongdoing biblically. (Verses 1-4)

For as long as we are living in a fallen world people will do things against the moral will of God; therefore, within the church we will be faced with the need to deal with evil and do so in the manner that the LORD prescribes in His Word.

In Verse 1 the apostle clearly points the church to the Scriptures.

This comes from Deuteronomy 19:15 which says that the word of two are three witnesses is required to establish someone's guilt in any matter of offense.

There are at least three bits of wisdom that I believe we can glean from that.

First, this offers at least some protection against false accusation, secondly if more than one person sees the offense in the same way it increases the chance that the situation is being assessed correctly, and thirdly persistent sin usually becomes noticeable by several people.

Now while this instruction is both wise and valuable in terms of establishing justice, it is not an absolute guarantee of perfect justice.

We see even in the pages of scriptures evil people inflicting harm on others and escaping punishment despite the goodness of the LORD's instructions.

It is possible to be a lone voice and be right and it is possible that two or three band together with false accusation.

Always remember the LORD is the final judge of everything and justice will be served from the glory of His throne in eternity.

Paul knows that very well having suffering a great deal of injustice himself, but he also knows that the church cannot ignore its responsibility to deal with wrongdoing on account of our shortcomings as human beings.

That means dealing with people who are persistent in evil deeds. He explains further why that is necessary in **verses 2-4**.

Notice that multiple warnings have been given here. Bringing discipline against these people is the last resort rather than the first.

If he comes to find people persisting in their sin he believes it will be because they viewed Paul as weak.

He admits that is the way it appears, but he reminds them that Jesus appeared the same way to the people who saw Him crucified.

He was mocked by several people who said, "Save yourself and then we will believe you."

They thought His dying meant that He was too weak to save Himself.

Listen, it was not the weakness of Christ that kept Him on the cross it was His passion for the glory of God to be displayed through perfect justice and immeasurable love.

His resurrection from the dead leaves no doubt concerning His power.

That is the power at work in the gospel ministry of the apostle.

If Paul is judged by appearance people might see him as weak, but in reality he is living and ministering in the power of God and it is according to the power of Christ that he is going to deal with those who persist in sin.

Jesus gives clear instructions on this in Matthew 18 which is consistent with Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 19:15.

Jesus says if someone sins against you go and show him his error.

If he refuses to listen take one or two others with you and try again (Deuteronomy 19:15).

If he still doesn't listen, Jesus says, take it to the church and if he doesn't listen to the church he gets put out of the church.

At the end of that passage he says, "...where two or three are gathered in my name there am I among them."

He says that in the context of dealing with wrongdoing in the church meaning He is there to bear witness Himself against the one who is persisting in evil.

If people name the name of Jesus and think they can use His grace and a means to justify persisting in things that God hates, then Christ Himself is opposed to such people and if Jesus is opposed to a local church then it is NOT being used to build the church.

Wrongdoing cannot be ignored, neither should it be dealt with in whatever way we may feel is ok.

It needs to be dealt with according to God's Word trusting in the power of God keep His promise to build the church to His eternal glory.

[How many of you have ever had the check engine light come on in your car? Cars are so complicated these days that lights can come on for all kinds of reasons some being more serious than others. One way to deal with a check engine light is with electrical tape. Just put in on the dash so you can't see the light anymore. The problem with that is that the problem continues to be a problem and often times leaving that problem leads to other problems.]

I think we can fall into that trap in dealing with sin in the church.

We see it but ignore it thinking it will be better, but it doesn't get better, it gets worse.

Just think of how people deal with sin in unbiblical ways.

How about gossip? Instead of going and talking to someone people talk about that someone to everyone else.

I can tell you more often than not that feed self-righteousness, slander, and hypocrisy.

Not dealing with wrongdoing often leads to bitterness, anger, and resentment.

It can lead others to embrace wrongdoing. People think since no one has said anything to them their actions must be acceptable.

[None of that does anything good in terms of building the church and that is why Jesus gives us a pattern to follow in His word to deal with wrongdoing. Believe me I know that is hard, but it is necessary. That prepares the way for another lesson the apostle gives us. This is one I

believe many people in our own time have failed to pay attention to and the church is worse off because of it. The lesson is that...]

Point #2 – Building the church requires perseverance instead of presumption. (Verses 5-6)

I believe the LORD wants His people to be fully confident in the work of Christ as our hope for eternal life and He wants that confidence to be based on the evidence of a transformed heart.

One of the most common questions I get as a pastor is, “Can someone lose their salvation?”

There is not a doubt in my mind that the Bible answers that question with a resounding, “No!”

As I said at the beginning of our time together, being a Christian is the result of God making people dead in alive in Christ for the eternal praise of His glorious grace.

When God makes you alive you don’t go back to being dead.

A person in Christ is immovably secure, held fast in the power of Christ forever.

Rightly understood, this truth is a good gift to individual believers and the church as a whole.

Sadly, many people have both misunderstood and misapplied this truth.

Some have reduced salvation to praying a prayer, signing a card, raising a hand, getting baptized, or some other external affirmation of repentance and faith.

All of those things may indeed be affirmations of being ‘made alive in Christ’ but they can all be done by someone who is still dead in their sins and therefore on their own can do nothing for anyone.

We do a terrible disservice to people if we tell them to have confidence in their eternal destiny because they mouth a prayer, raised a hand, or sign a card.

If we turn the gospel into a get out a jail free card, then we are setting people up to believe they are on their way to heaven when they are really on their way to hell.

Paul tells us something very different here in **verses 5-6**.

The idea here is a thorough testing of yourself to so that the reality of your being in Christ is revealed.

No believer ought to presume they have been born again, instead we should be regularly looking at our lives for the evidence that Christ is at work in us.

That is what he is driving at when he asks the question, “...do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?”

His point there is that if you have been made alive in Christ by the power and work of the Holy Spirit then something is going to be happening in your life.

The examining/testing here isn't creating faith it is revealing faith.

[A few years ago I watched several episodes of a show called 'Forged in Fire'. It was a show about blacksmiths who competed with one another making knives, swords, and other similar weapons. In order to see who had made the best weapon each of the blades was subjected to a series of tests. They chopped through all kinds of things like blocks of ice, nails, sheet metal, thick wood posts, and alike. They even fired a bullet at one type of sword. Not one of those tests made the quality of steel good or bad they simply revealed it.]

It is the same idea with examining ourselves to see if we are in the faith.

This is something everyone who truly believes should want to do.

We should want to see if God has made us "alive in Christ."

If we are truly in Christ there is no fear in this examination, but instead there is a building up of our confidence in the irreversible and transforming work of almighty God upon our hearts.

So, how do we do that? How do we set about examining ourselves to see if we are in the faith?

We ask questions about ourselves to see if there is evidence in our lives of the qualities of genuine faith that the bible describes.

First, we must examine our confession of faith.

Confession simply means to agree with God.

Have we agreed with God that we have failed to live up to His standards and deserve eternity in hell?

Have we agreed with God that the only way to meet His standards is to trust in the death that Jesus died for us, to believe in the power of His resurrection, and to have Jesus' perfection applied to us on account of our faith?

Do we believe the Bible is the Word of God and do we desire to have our lives determined by it?

In other words do we have the right kind of faith? We need more than simply to have faith in something, everybody has that!

He says examine yourselves to see if you are in *the faith*.

We must believe rightly, but there is more than that. Being made alive in Christ changes our affections and desires.

Do you love God? Do you delight in His Glory? Do you delight in His worship? Do you have any desire to obey Him because you want to and not because you have to?

If you do there is only one place that can come from and that is the Holy Spirit living in you.

Do you have any affection for other believers? That is the chief way in which Jesus said we would be known as His disciples that we love one another?

The Bible says the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Do you see those things increasing in your life?

None of these things save us! That happens by faith alone in Christ we never add to Jesus work in any way.

These things don't save us they reveal the reality of our salvation.

These are some of things that God does in the hearts of His people and if you are truly 'in the faith' you will be able to see His work and you will want to continue in it.

[Salvation is not something genuine believers presume based on raising a hand or offering lip service to God. Salvation is something genuine believers persevere in because they have been transformed by the power of God through the grace of God. If we want to be used by God to build His church we need to call people to perseverance rather than presumption. That brings us to one more lesson from this text about building the church. We have to handle wrongdoing biblically, we have to call people to perseverance, and thirdly...]

Point #3 – Building the church means caring about people not appearances. (Verses 7-10)

We need to care about people living in obedience to the LORD for the sake of God's glory and their highest good rather than how their behaviour one way or the other makes us look.

Appearances had become a big issue in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians.

From what we read in this letter it is safe to say a good number of people in the church had bought into the lie that presentation was more important than substance.

It is a very easy thing to fall into the trap of valuing how people perceive us above what is really real.

Paul doesn't fall into that trap with these believers. **(Verses 7)**

At the end of verse 6 he expresses his hope that they will be able to see that he and his fellow gospel workers are indeed genuine.

But he has a bigger priority in mind. He prays about their wellbeing, that they would do what is right, instead of praying about what they think about him and his fellow workers.

It is like he is saying, “If you are living rightly but don’t see us in a very good light, I’m good with that.”

He gives his reason for this in **verse 8**.

Because of His call as an apostle and because of God’s grace at work in him, he is concerned about God’s truth rather than himself.

That is such a gift to be able to rest in the truth of God without being worried about what other people think about us.

One of the things that this frees us to do, is to care about the wellbeing of people who don’t think much of us.

He makes that clear here in **verse 9**.

He seems more than ok with looking weak, in fact he says it makes him happy when he is weak (probably meaning perceived as weak) and the Corinthians are strong (that is doing well).

Why say that? **Verse 10** has the answer for us.

The whole reason he has written all that he has is so that when he comes to the church things will already be set in order and he won’t have to flex his spiritual muscle as one commentator has put it.

He doesn’t care if the church thinks he is timid and weak if they have turned from their sins and are growing spiritually.

That is the whole reason God gave him his authority as an apostle, to build up the church rather than tear it down.

He is concerned about the people rather than appearances.

[Remember the parable of the Good Samaritan? Jesus wanting to teach a lesson about being a good neighbor tells a story of a man who gets beat up by robbers and left for dead and three men come along the way. The first is a priest. Who remembers what the priest does? He passes by. Next a Levite comes along. What does he do? He also passes by. Finally, a Samaritan comes along and cleans the guy up takes him to an inn and makes sure he is looked after. To the original hearers that would have been extremely offensive because priests and Levites were the supposed to be the godliest most well respected people in society and Samaritans were thought to be lowlives. Why don’t the Levite and the Priest stop to help? It may be that they are just heartless, but more probably they were concerned about making themselves ceremonially unclean and how that would make them look to other people.]

That is an easy thing to fall into.

If the church is full and people are giving lots of money, but they are godless in their affections would most of us be happy with that?

If we are up to our neck in sin and hurting people close to us but most people think we are awesome people is that enough for us?

If people think we are fools because we spend our time and money on helping other people to know the Lord can we rejoice in that?

Are we willing to risk people spreading rumors and lies for the sake of calling them to righteousness?

Do we care more about people than we do about appearances?

If we want to be used by God for the purposes of building His church then we have to.

We know from the promise of Christ that He will build His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

This is a work of God and it will not fail, the only question we need to ask ourselves is, do we want to be a part of it.

If we do then we have to want to be a local church that deals with wrongdoing biblically, we have to call people to perseverance rather than presumption, and we have to care about people instead of appearances.

It is a glorious task and I pray that by God's grace we would trust in Him doing things His way for His glory and the eternal good of His people.