

1Sep2024 Mt5

Proverbs 8:1-13

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand;

beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

'To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

O simple ones, learn prudence; intelligence, you who lack it.

Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right;

for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

They are all straight to one who understands and right to those who find knowledge.

Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold;

for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion.

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil perverted speech I hate.

1 Corinthians 3:11-17

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

1Sep2024 1Cor3.11-17 Building God's church

We're going to be looking at what the excerpt from Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth says to us today so you might like to turn to it in your Bibles. I really like Professor Tom Wright's translation of the last two verses:

16Don't you see? You are God's Temple! God's spirit lives in you! 17If anyone destroys God's Temple, God will destroy them. God's Temple is holy, you see, and that is precisely what you are. (Tom Wright translation)

We can only understand this in English if we realize that the 'you' in the Greek here is plural all the way through. You (all together) are God's temple. God's Spirit lives in you all together. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person.

This is very serious, so what can we understand Paul to be speaking about in this passage? Paul here is talking about building God's temple as the church, God's people. He begins by declaring it can only be built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. If it is not built on the foundation of Jesus Christ it is not the church. But what else is involved in this building of the church.

The building materials Paul mentions in verse 12 were things you might use to adorn or build up one particular building: the Temple. Solomon's Temple was resplendent with gold, silver and precious stones, and when Herod the Great and his heirs rebuilt the Temple they did their best to make it just as spectacular once again. Though Paul doesn't mention the Temple explicitly until verses 16 and 17, he almost certainly has it in mind throughout this passage. This is the 'building' that he and other Christian workers are putting up.

The idea of the 'Temple' as a community of people, rather than a building of bricks, mortar and suitable adornment, was not invented by Paul. The Dead Sea Scrolls speak of their community in the same way. Many Jews in this period believed that the present physical Temple in Jerusalem was under God's

judgment, and that God would do a new thing, which might or might not involve a new physical building but which would certainly involve a new community, made up of people transformed by God's saving power. Just as God's own presence dwelt in the Temple (known as the Shekinah, the 'tabernacling presence'), so God's spirit dwells, Paul says, within the Christian community, making them the functional equivalent of the Temple within the new 'age to come' that has already arrived. So Paul is saying that the community of God's people who follow Jesus is where people can meet God, where God's spirit dwells.

Who is Paul speaking about when he writes of those who are building? In this particular context he is talking about both the teachers like himself, Cephas (Peter) and Apollos who have fed into the church in Corinth but also those who are in the church, quarrelling about who they most listen to. If we read what Paul says about building elsewhere, we can get more of an idea of how Paul speaks about those involved in building up the church.

Later in the same letter he speaks to them in 1Cor4:12 'since you are eager for spiritual gifts, strive to excel in them for **building** up the church.'

And in 1Cor 14: 'When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for **building** up.'

In Ephesians 4 also he speaks of the gifts that 'some are apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ' to maturity. And later about each part of the body 'working properly to promote the body's growth in building itself up in love'. In this context he emphasizes 'speaking the truth in love' and in Ephesians 4:29 'Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for **building** up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.'

So when Paul speaks of those who build God's temple, the church, he regards all those who are members of the body as having the role of building, especially in what they say.

The emphasis of the passage is therefore still on those who build up this Temple, and on the danger not just that they will build with the wrong materials (verses 12–15) but that they will actually pull the building down altogether (verse 17). If the building is indeed God’s Temple, destroying such a holy place is an act of sacrilege. Faulty builders may get away with ‘singed eyebrows’ when the fire comes. But destroyers may end up being destroyed in their turn.

But what is all this business about fire? Paul is warning that it’s possible to do such work well or badly, and that one day the results will be made known. To make the point vividly, he describes two types of building material one might use. The first—gold, silver, precious stones—would all be able to stand up to a fire, while the second—wood, grass, straw—are all notoriously combustible. Into this picture he brings the regular Old Testament warning of a coming fire. Israel had known many times of actual fire, when foreign nations had swept down and wreaked havoc, sometimes even on the Temple itself. The question here is whether the ‘building’ of the church, the work that he, Apollos and the rest are undertaking, will in the end be seen to be of lasting value. ‘The day’ which is coming, and which will show what sort of work has been done (3.13), is clearly ‘the day of the Lord’. Then and only then it will be seen what each one has actually accomplished. Different workers have been at work on the building, using different materials; the ‘fire’ will burn up some parts and leave others enhanced. Those whose work is burned up will ‘suffer loss’. (The word Paul uses for this could refer to the fines that would be levied when a builder was sued for shoddy work.)

Once we have grasped that the picture here is basically about different types of ‘building’, i.e., working to ‘build up’ the church, we can also read this passage as indicating something at least of what Paul would say about God’s judgment of each person ‘according to their works’ (see Romans 2.5–11; 14.10–12; 2 Corinthians 5.10).

When the 'fire' does its work, he says, builders who have used the wrong material will 'suffer loss', but they themselves will still be saved. This seems to be Paul's way of preserving his view of Christian assurance ('those whom God justified, he also glorified', Romans 8.29), while maintaining also a serious view of Christian responsibility for what one does with the new life which begins, as the spirit's gift, with faith and baptism.

The main point, of course, is the seriousness with which Paul takes the various tasks and responsibilities of Christians. We are not playing games. There are serious and lasting issues at stake. It is possible to build wisely, well, and with the right materials. It is also possible to build badly, or with the wrong materials. It is possible actually to pull down the building altogether. God takes these possibilities very seriously. Do we?

So how do we build up the church, build up the people of God, especially with what we say?

Many of you grew up in an age where you were only supposed to speak when spoken to. This is really unhelpful to us now because the first thing that we need to think about in building up the church is really taking the time to speak to one another, even to go out of our way to speak to those who may not be who we would normally speak with, those who are not already our friends, those who are not with others, those who may be less important or even un-lovely in the eyes of the world. As we take an interest in those who are members of the body of Christ and speak with them we maintain the unity of the Holy Spirit, and strengthen the bonds of peace.

And then what do we say to build up the body of Christ? We are to affirm and encourage whatever is, as Paul says in Philippians 4, true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise. If someone is serving us in the church think about what it is that they do, and go and thank them for it and encourage them in what they do well. Think about what you can commend in anyone you go to speak with and do so. EGs As we affirm the good in others we

build them up in that area of their life and so build up that part of the body of Christ. And then speak about that same commendable thing to others in the body. As we make that sort of speaking a habit, a way of life, we become one of those who builds up the body with precious materials. A church that is full of that sort of talk will be a body full of the presence of the Holy Spirit. People will meet God in that body. That temple will be constructed with jewels of truth, honor, purity, excellence, praise.

But if we speak negatively about someone else in the body those who are listening are not built up. Instead those listening will feel negatively about that member of the body. They will find it harder to build up that member themselves. If that sort of speech becomes common in the body then members will become anxious about what is said about themselves as well. Those who come into the body will not experience a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Those who are there may even end up leaving. That is why so often the Bible speaks against slander, gossip, the malicious tongue. James puts this well. 'With the tongue we can bless God yet curse those who are made in the likeness of God. This ought not to be so.' And as Paul said in Ephesians 'Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for **building** up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

So how we do develop the habit of building up the body of Christ with our speech. Practice. Go to that person you don't normally speak with and commend whatever you can to build up that member of the body. Do it again. Take an interest in each other and enjoy together that joy of unity as you focus on what is good and right before God. Don't be hesitant to give a complement or go out of your way to thank someone for what they do. And God's Spirit will be pleased to dwell among us.

And remember how seriously God takes it when someone tears down the temple of his spirit.

Let us pray.