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God is the Master Builder

3: 9b-15

A dwelling not made with human hands DIG: Since Yeshua is the Master builder, what was Paul's job description? How is Yeshua the foundation? Was Paul jealous of those who built on his foundation? Why? Why not? Who are the building materials? How is each person's work tested? What will happen at the bema seat of Messiah? Are believers judged? Why? Why not? In what three ways will we be tested? What kind of crowns will we be given?

REFLECT: Given the clues about what makes for good "building materials," what is one "concrete" way you could contribute to the building of the congregations of God in your community? How careful have you been on building on Messiah's foundation? How do you feel about not being judged, but rewarded, at the bema seat of Messiah? When you look at your motives, conduct and good works, what kinds of crowns do you think you might receive?

We should not look at the bema seat of Messiah as God judging our sins; but rather, a reward for the good works done in our lives.

In a series of three paragraphs, using images from agriculture to architecture, **Paul** proceeds to address three closely related issues. Beginning with a farm metaphor (**to see link click At - Only God Makes Things Grow**), **he** takes up the question of how **the Corinthians** as a whole were to regard **their shepherds**. Here, **Paul** changes to **a construction metaphor** and speaks directly to those who were responsible for **the leadership** in the church at **Corinth**. In the strongest possible terms, **he** warns **them** to **build** the church with eternal **materials** that **the Master Builder** has already **laid**.⁹³

We must build on the right foundation (3:9b-11): First, **Paul** says to the leadership of the church: **You are God's building (3:9b)**. **Paul** shifts the metaphor to that of **a building** in which **ADONAI** now becomes **the One** who lets

out a contract for a construction project and serves as **the Master-Builder**. **He** inspects to see if all is built correctly, **according to** specifications, and without fraud. The competence of each worker will vary, and **God** will **reward** and punish the difference in quality.⁹⁴ Although dealing with the same general topic of the church and its leadership, **he** clearly shifts emphasis. Picking up the theme of **each will be rewarded according to his work (3:8b)**, **Paul** is concerned to warn, in the strongest possible language, those who were currently “**building** the church.”⁹⁵

Using the grace God gave me, I laid a foundation, like a skilled builder, or *architekton* in Greek. This is where we get the term architect. But the word in **Paul’s** day carried the idea of **a builder** as well as a designer. **He** was a combination architect and **general contractor**. So, like a **general contractor**, **Paul laid a foundation (3:10a)**. As **an apostle**, **Paul’s** specialty was **foundations**. Over the years since **his** conversion (see the commentary on **Acts Bc - Sha’ul Turns from Murderer to Messiah**), **Paul** had been used by **ADONAI** to establish many churches across Asia Minor, and in Macedonia and Greece. But lest anyone think **he** was bragging; **he** began by making it clear that **his** calling and effectiveness were only by **the grace of God given to him**. The fact that **he** was a **skilled builder** was **God’s** doing, not **his**. In the year-and-a-half **he** had **labored** among **the Corinthians (Acts 18:11)**, **he** had faithfully preached and taught **the gospel** and nothing else (**First Corinthians 9:16**). **Paul** knew that he was sent to **Corinth** to **build the foundation** of the church, and that is what **he carefully** and **skillfully** did. **He** had the right motive, the right message, and the right authority.

But after **he** left, **another man** began **building on it (3:10b)**. In the case of **Ephesus**, that person was **Timothy (First Timothy 1:3)**. In the case of **Corinth**, it was **Apollos**. **Paul** was not jealous of those who followed **him** in ministry. **He** knew that, as one who **laid foundations**, **he** would be followed by **other builders**. Most of **the Corinthians**, for example, had been baptized by later pastors. **Paul** was glad for that, because it gave less excuse for **the Corinthians** to develop fleshly loyalties to **him (1:14-15)**. **He** was quite concerned, however, that those who **built upon the foundation he had laid** would work as faithfully as **he** had worked. **So, let each one be careful how he builds (3:10c)**. The Greek form of the word **builds** is the present active indicative, which stresses continual action. **Each one** primarily refers to evangelists, Messianic rabbis, pastors, and teachers who have continued to **build on the foundation laid** by the apostles. These are given special and the most direct responsibility for **teaching sound doctrine (Titus 1:9)**. **Paul** later instructs **Timothy** that men who **build** should be faithful and

capable (**Second Timothy 2:2**).

But the context makes it clear that a broader and more inclusive application is also in mind. The numerous references to **each one** and **anyone (3:10-18)** indicate that the principle applies to every believer. All of us, by what we say and do, to some extent, teach the Good News. No believer has the right to be careless in representing our **Lord** and **His Word**. Every believer is to be a careful **builder**. We are all responsible.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Yeshua the Messiah (3:11). Paul was **the general contractor** whose primary task, as **an apostle**, was to **lay the foundation** of the Good News. But **he** did not design **the foundation**; **he** only **laid it**. **The only foundation** in the Church is **Yeshua Messiah**. Period. **The foundation** is *not* ethical teaching, many of which are found in other religions. Nor is it in the history, traditions and decisions of churches and church leaders throughout the centuries. **Yeshua Messiah**, as the metaphor would suggest, is **the cornerstone** of the Church: **You have been built on the foundation of the emissaries and the prophets, with the cornerstone being Yeshua the Messiah Himself (Ephesians 2:20)**. The framework of **the building** must conform to the pattern of its **foundation**. Otherwise, it will be crooked and unstable. In a sense, **the foundation** is all of Scripture, for all of Scripture is both from and about **Yeshua Messiah**. The TaNaKh predicted and prepared the faithful for **His** birth. **The gospels** tell the story of **His** earthly ministry, and **Acts** the history of **His** Messianic Community in its early years. The epistles are commentaries on **His** message and ministry, and the book of **Revelation** is the final testimony of **His** reigning and imminent return. What **Yeshua** said of the TaNaKh is even truer, if that were possible, of the B'rit Chadashah: **You search the Scriptures . . . and it is these that bear witness of Me (John 5:39 NASB).**⁹⁶



We must all be tested: For all of us will stand before **the bema seat of Messiah** (Greek: *bema* meaning *a step or raised place*) . . . and we will have to **give an account of ourselves to God** where we will **receive the good or bad consequences of what we did while in the Body of Messiah (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10b and 12)**. Forgiveness does not exclude responsibility. **The bema seat of Messiah**, therefore, involves us **giving an account of our lives**. The imagery that **Paul** uses in these verses would have been abundantly familiar to **his Corinthian** readers. It was the custom during the Isthmian games for winning athletes to receive their **crowns** on an elevated platform in the middle of the city, much like the Olympic athletes today receive their medals on just such a platform.

The passages above make it clear that the testing that will take place at that time will *not* be for **condemnation** for sin, but reward for **good works**. **Messiah** judged sin on the cross, and because we are **in Him (Ephesians 1:1-13)**, we will never be **condemned** for our sins; **He** was **condemned** for us (**1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:4; First Peter 2:24**). **He** took the penalty for all our sins upon **Himself (Colossians 2:13; First John 2:12)**. **ADONAI** has no more charges against those who trust in **His Son**, those who are **His** elect, and will allow no one else to bring charges against them (**Romans 8:31-34**). **Therefore, there is no longer any condemnation awaiting those who are in union with the Messiah Yeshua (Romans 8:1).**⁹⁷

The building materials do not represent wealth, talents, or opportunity. Nor do they represent spiritual gifts, all of which are good and given to each believer by **the Spirit** as **He** sees fit (**12:11**). **The building materials** represent our responses to what we have – how well we served **the Lord** with what **He** had given us. In other words, **the building materials** represent our **good works**. We cannot

be saved by **good works**, but every believer has been **created in Messiah Yeshua for good works, which God has prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10)**, and we are to bear **fruit in every good work (Colossians 1:10)**. **Good works** are not the source of our lives, but **good works** are **the spiritual fruit** of our lives (**James 2:14-17**).

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for being such an Awesome **Father** and **Creator!** **You** created the world with such precision and beauty! The perfect microscopic snowflake and the huge boiling hot sun - both created out of nothing by **Your** spoken word. The vast array of colors is magnificent! The huge variety of animals, insects, and plants is amazing. Though there are so many different trees and shrubs to see and admire, yet the crowning glory of trees is their **fruit**. In a similar way good deeds are good, but the crowning glory is **the fruit** of **love** from the deed done kindly. **But the fruit of the Ruach is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control** God **designed us to produce fruit-fruit that will last (Galatians 5:22-23a)**. **I selected you so that you would go and produce fruit, and your fruit would remain. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name (John 15:16)**. Thank **You** that as we serve **You** with a heart of **love** and gratefulness we often pray to **You** asking **Your** help and guidance for a particular situation. It is wonderful that as we produce beautiful **fruit** for **You**, **You** hear our prayer and give us whatever we need in **Yeshua's** name. It is a joy to serve **You**, to please **You** and to produce **fruit** that will last! In **Yeshua's** holy name and the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

At the end of **his** life, **Paul** looked forward to mounting the steps of **the bema**. With absolute confidence **he** wrote: **For as for me, I am already being poured out on the altar; yes, the time for my departure has arrived. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. All that awaits me now is the crown of righteousness which the Lord, "the Righteous Judge," will award to me on that Day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for Him to appear (Second Timothy 4:6-8)**. That includes me and that includes *you*. May we face death with the same confidence with which **the apostle** faced **his** as we anticipate receiving our **rewards**.⁹⁸

We must build with the right materials (3:12-15): **Paul** explains that the basis for **testing** is **the works** of the believer. **Some will use gold, silver or precious stones in building on this foundation; while others will use wood, hay or straw (3:12)**. The **building materials** mentioned here are in two categories,

each listed in descending order of value. The first category - **gold, silver and precious stones** - clearly represent high-quality **materials**. **They** are not graded and are all of equal value. The second - **wood, hay and straw** - just as clearly, represents inferior **materials**. **They** will be **burned up** because **they** are worthless. Nothing will be left but cinders. **Wood, hay and straw** cannot stand the test.

But each believer's work will be shown for what it is. The Day that we stand before **the bema seat** in heaven **will disclose it (3:13a)**. This will probably happen sometime after the Rapture (see the commentary on **Revelation By - The Rapture of the Church**) and before the Second Coming (see the commentary on **Isaiah Kg - The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**). At that time our **works will be revealed by fire - testing the quality of each one's work (3:13b)**. **We will be tested in three different ways:**

First, we will be tested by our motives: *Why* we do something is just as important as *what* we do. A campaign of neighborhood visitation done because of pressure is **wood**. But visiting the same people in love to win them to **the Lord** is **gold**. Singing solo in the house of **God** and being concerned about how the people like your voice is **hay**, but singing to glorify **ADONAI** is **silver**. Giving generously out of duty or pressure is **wood**, but giving generously with joy to extend the Good News and to serve others in **the Lord's** name is **a precious stone**. **Work** that on the outside looks like **gold** to us may be **wood, hay and straw** in **God's** eyes. **He** knows **the motives of people's hearts (4:5)**.

Secondly, we will be tested by our conduct: **We will have to give an account of ourselves to God** where we will **receive the good or bad consequences of what we did while in the Body of Messiah (Second Corinthians 5:10)**. **Bad** (Greek: *phaulos*) is here best understood as *worthless*. It produces no spiritual fruit. Our conduct, therefore, can be good, evil or just plain useless - like **wood, hay and straw** when tested by **fire**. As a result, things we do can be either **gold** or **wood**, either **silver** or **hay**, either **precious stones** or **straw**.

Thirdly, we will be tested by our good works: The way we use our **spiritual gifts God** has given us (see **Cd - The Diversity of Spiritual Gifts**), the way we minister in **His** name, is of supreme importance in our **building** for **Him**. **He is the Master Builder**, and we represent **Him** in this world. We should strive to minister in what we are called to do; rather than what others think we should do, only

producing **wood, hay and straw**.⁹⁹

This passage says nothing about the nature of the **reward**; however, other passages do. They speak of these **rewards** as being **crowns**. The Greek language has two words meaning **crown**. The first word is *diadem*, which is a king's **crown**. It is the **crown** of sovereignty and of a person who is royal by his nature and by his position - a king. This is the kind of **crown** that **Jesus** wears. The second Greek word is *stephanos*, which is a **crown** given to an **overcomer**, a victor, one who has won a race. These are the kinds of **crowns** available to believers because **they** overcame in the spiritual warfare with **Satan** and are now **crowned at the bema seat of Messiah**. There are five such **crowns** mentioned in the Bible (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Bc - For We Must All Appear Before the Bema Seat of Messiah**).¹⁰⁰