

Where God Dwells

By Ginny Larsen

“And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17 KJV). “This is none other but the house of God; wherefore he afterwards called it Bethel, which signifies the house of God; and so the church of God is often called, Psalm 23:6; which is of God's building, where he dwells, and his family is, of which he is the master and governor; which he beautifies and adorns, fills, repairs, and defends.” - John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

There is one house of God, and there is one foundation that house is built upon. The house of God must be built upon the sure and solid foundation of Jesus Christ alone and His true Gospel. There are many who try to enter into the house of God and teach and build upon it, but if they are not building on the true foundation, all is a loss, and there is destruction.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself 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 him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:10-17)

What is the “house of God” or the “temple” but the place where God dwells? Under the old covenant, the Jewish Temple was the dwelling place of God. Now we, the Church, are God's temple or “dwelling place.” He dwells in His church with His “called out ones” – those called out of this world to be indwelt by His Spirit, to be made new, and to become His children. HE gives the power to be children of God to those who believe, not by the will of man but by that power of God (John 1:12-13, Romans 8:28-30). The foundation of that dwelling place is the righteousness of Christ alone. That dwelling place must be holy, clean, and pure. False concepts of Christ's salvation and His Gospel corrupt and pollute the Church. In the church of the Corinthians there had come in false apostles who were corrupting the house of God, trying to lay another foundation. Only that which is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ will stand in the end, for He is the foundation of every structure that shall stand firm in every test of fire. How very important it is, then, that we are careful not to add to or take away from the true understanding of that foundation, but that we understand the work of our Savior and what that salvation is. Without the understanding of that foundation, the house becomes polluted. There's no true “obedience” to Him if not based on the true Gospel, the foundation of our relationship with Him, and faith in His righteousness alone. Some Christians work to build upon that foundation of grace. Some work to build another foundation of grace plus works. Where does God dwell? He dwells only in the house He builds.

As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and

precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1 Peter 2:4-8)

The Jews totally missed Jesus because they stumbled over their own self-righteousness, that of "law-keeping," and did not understand or accept the righteousness God provided - that is by grace through faith alone, in which by believing, His Law is put into their hearts. To them He became a stumbling stone. They "disobeyed" the Word...the Word of salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. They were so sure and so ingrained in the Law that they failed to see its purpose and fulfillment. The same can happen to us when we become so ingrained in a way of seeing things. It is those who simply believe "into" Him who become His dwelling place. How difficult it is for us humans to receive this Word! Even those in the Church – those who have been born-again by faith – have difficulty completely receiving that it is not by any works of their own that they are made a dwelling place of God forever. They say they believe in His grace, yet they fear they must keep themselves by their works. They contradict themselves, but they don't see it. It is so hard for our pride to fully accept and trust in the full grace of God and the power of His salvation. They fear a message of grace will mean "lawlessness," because they fail to understand the power of His salvation and what it is. But it is actually quite the opposite - it is failing to see this that leads to defeat in our Christian life.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? (Galatians 3:1-3)

The house of God will only be perfected in the same way that it was begun. Anything we add to it will be wood, hay, and stubble. *"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving" (Colossians 2:6-7).*

There are those who feel they must warn those who are born again against "lawlessness," claiming to believe our salvation is all of grace through faith, yet contradicting themselves by saying we must live under a fear of condemnation if we do not have works that are good enough to keep us. On one hand they speak of grace and on the other nullify it. They build straw man arguments against those who trust in Christ alone as the sole means of their salvation, so they build wrongly upon that foundation. There is no victory in our lives over sin other than that power which comes through faith in the true foundation of our salvation, which is forever. If not for faith in the security and hope of that salvation being in Him alone, we are weakened in our walk, and our faith becomes self-focused rather than a true leaning on that which is already accomplished in Christ. In Christ we are a new creature, with a new heart. We have a new nature that is His indwelling Spirit in us, which raises us up to newness of life. It is that power in us alone that continues in us and never leaves us, and Who conforms us to the image of Christ. When we understand that, we are set free from "lawlessness" and empowered to walk by that

same rule of life, of faith in Him. The fear that if I trust in the security of my salvation in Christ, I will give in to lawlessness is a straw-man argument and shows a misunderstanding of His salvation, what it is, and the power of regeneration of the Holy Spirit. We are His house. He dwells in us. He keeps us. And true faith in that sets us free to live in true obedience...the obedience of faith.

A “straw man argument” according to Wikipedia: “A straw man is a common type of argument and is an informal fallacy based on the misrepresentation of an opponent's argument. To be successful, a straw man argument requires that the audience be ignorant or uninformed of the original argument.” The so-called typical “attacking a straw man” argument creates the illusion of having completely refuted or defeated an opponent's proposition by covertly replacing it with a different proposition (i.e. “stand up a straw man”) and then to refute or defeat that false argument (“knock down a straw man”) instead of the original proposition.

“Lawlessness” or “license to sin” as being the consequence of believing we are secure in Christ is the straw man set up to defeat. When there is a misrepresentation of what salvation is and what it entails, assuming that one who is born-again is no different in nature than one who is not born-again, other than “belief” in Jesus, then it's easy to argue that they must keep themselves and fear losing their salvation. It's as though one can be “in and out” of Jesus, based on strength of will or performance or “enough faith.” But when one fully understands what the salvation that Jesus worked in us when we were born of His Spirit, put “into Christ,” and given a new nature/heart/will, cleansed wholly and imputed with the righteousness of Christ, this is seen clearly to be a straw man argument. The right foundation is laid and built upon. We are “in Christ” forever, sharing His death and resurrection. We are transferred from death to life forever and have “eternal life.” Every understanding of the Gospel and of Scripture has to come from the true foundation. And that foundation is sure, strong, and stable, and will not fail. Every false teaching comes out of a misrepresentation of that foundation. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life”* (John 5:24). The Holy Spirit is given to us “forever” and never leaves us: *“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever”* (John 14:16). *“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”* (1 John 3:9)

How are we to build upon the true foundation? The true foundation must be understood in order to build upon that alone. We build on it only by reinforcing the same as our foundation of every teaching and every work we do in Christ and for His service, by faith in Him alone and our assurance in His finished work. That foundation is ALWAYS central in our entire work and walk. In assurance of His work we are strong. In faith in His indwelling us, we walk and we work, not *so that* we are kept but because we are kept. Our life, our power, our hope, and our faith springs from His indwelling us. The house of God, then, is being continually built up and nurtured in that strength and in a true faith where He dwells. As John Gill said in the quote at the beginning of this article, “Which is of God's building, where he dwells, and his family is, of which **he** is the master and governor; which **he** beautifies and adorns, fills, repairs, and defends.”

In my own experience, when others had misunderstood and miss-taught that foundation to me in my early Christian life, my struggle with sin was a defeated struggle. When I no longer was under fear of condemnation but relied on and had security and assurance of the full power of His finished work, sin was overcome, love took over, and my life and growth in Him sprung from the right foundation and was nurtured, built up, and strengthened. Though they thought their

warnings would produce holiness in me, they only produced lack of faith and understanding in the power of His salvation from which the only real power and love to walk in victory comes. That misunderstanding caused nothing but “wood, hay, and stubble” in my own Christian life, as it will in the house of God.

F.B. Meyer, *Through The Bible Day By Day*, on Ephesians 2:1-10: “Notice, also, the past tense which describes the finality of Christ’s work, Ephesians 2:5-6. In the purpose of God we have been raised from the grave of sin and are seated with the risen Lord in the place of acceptance and victory. We were one with Christ when He lay in the grave and arose. In God’s thought we have already taken our seat with the glorified Christ upon the throne; only the pity is that we do not believe this or act as if we had done so [emphasis mine]. All this is the gift of God’s unmerited love. By grace have we been brought into this position, and by grace are we maintained in it. We are of God’s ‘making;’ such is the Greek word for *workmanship*, Ephesians 2:10. We have been created for good works; they have been planned for us and we have only to walk in them.”

May the Lord open our eyes of understanding to have a revelation of the true power and completeness of His salvation for the Body of Christ to dwell in and through which He dwells in us, that same power that rose Christ from the dead, which raised us up also to be seated with Him in the Heavens. It is that power which works in us, conforms us to His image, and keeps us. We are not *created by* good works, but we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus...UNTO good works which He prepared for us (Ephesians 1:13-2:10). What wonderful joy in His salvation and power to walk in those works by true faith in Him we receive when we understand this! Then the house of God is truly blessed!