**I CORINTHIANS 3:12 – 13**

**INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, AFRICA 2021**

**THEME TEXTS**

“Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: Every man’s work shall be made manifest, for this 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.”

Let us read the context for these verses 3:9-17 –

“For we are laborer’s together with God, you are God’s husbandry (field), you are God’s building.

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if any man build upon this foundation 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.

If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

If any man’s work shall be burned he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?

If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

NOW TO EXPLAIN THESE VERSES:

We are laboring as servants of God with Him to help find and develop the Bride of Christ, the 144,000 members of the Body of Christ.

One picture is that each Christian is a separate building. Even though separate, they each have the same foundation, the ransom merit of Jesus Christ.

Each of the potential members of the Bride Class have to first believe that Jesus died and provided the price (ransom price), for their sins (inherited sinful nature from father Adam).

Based upon this they have each responded to the heavenly Call (Eph. 4:4 “THERE IS ONE BODY, AND ONE SPIRIT, EVEN AS YOU ARE CALLED IN ONE HOPE OF YOUR CALLING”), in consecrating themselves, as the Apostle Paul wrote in Rom. 12:1, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God , that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto to God, which is your reasonable service.”

It is these whom the heavenly Father would spirit-beget and work with as sons and daughters in the spirit as New Creatures.

Thus the building process begins.

Let me again emphasize – Paul states that “you are God’s building”. In other words, that which is to be built is to be constructed in conformity to God’s instructions or criteria.

We find these instructions very simply expressed in Romans 8:28, 29:

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed (copies), to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

As we know, we cannot be copies of Jesus perfectly in our fallen flesh. However, we can desire and intend to be just like Jesus in our heart of hearts. This means that we will WORK to change our way of thinking and change our way of feeling (our emotional reactions), as we read in Romans 12:2:

“And be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind (the way we process our thoughts), that you may prove (ascertain), what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

So then, we are to start our building process by the study of God’s Word, where we read of His standards for righteousness and holiness. We read of how Jesus conducted himself, how the Apostles and brethren behaved under trial. We learn what God expects of us by spending time in a careful, thoughtful daily study of His MIND as found in His Word.

It is here that we learn that He provides the necessary building materials -

gold, silver and precious stones. These all represent TRUTHS. Truths are strong, durable and beautiful. Each of these give off a beautiful radiance when they are in the light. By contrast, wood, hay and stubble do NOT reflect the light.

Part of the lesson for us is that our Father has provided us with the truths we need to better understand His character. That is how we know God, by understanding His Plan of the Ages. We understand and comprehend the depth of His LOVE by understanding that He has provided the Ransom for All, to be testified in due time, in giving the greatest gift possible, that is, His Son. We understand He has provided this as the basis for the Restitution of All Things, in large part by bringing all who have ever lived out of the condition of death. He then imparts to them the KNOWLEDGE of the truth, so that they can make informed, instructed, educated decisions pertaining to life everlasting. This allows for a far greater possibility of success due to their previous experiences with the horrible effects of sin and selfishness, that are a result of fears, as well as having the blindness by Satan removed.

These precious items are Truth doctrines, prophecies and proper Christian living and practice.

If we choose these precious truths to build our CHARACTER SUPERSTRUCTURE with, then like those truths, our Godlike, Christlike, characters will shine forth the light of true principles that will survive any fiery trials that will come upon us.

In fact, the fiery trials will only enhance the characteristics of those who are rightly exercised:

I Peter 4:12, 13:

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ’ s sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed you may be glad also with exceeding joy.”

Peter is telling us not to be surprised when we are ridiculed or spoken evil of, misrepresented and persecuted for our efforts to be faithful to God and the Truth. This is how Jesus suffered and was developed as a New Creature. We are to both expect and be glad for such experiences because they are indicators that we are in the Narrow Way of sacrifice and self-denial. Again, they are indicators that we are being educated in our development in the spirit of Christ.

If we persevere we shall have the greatest happiness imaginable! The greatest privileges of serving our God with our Lord!

Even though God has provided these Truths, yet, we have to choose to “purchase” them so to speak. Yes, these building materials are costly, in the sense that to obtain these truths and to accurately understand how to apply them to our lives, IT WILL COST US TIME AND EFFORT, to SACRIFICE both by spending less time and effort for the things of the world and the flesh, and instead INVESTING by study, prayer, reflection, attending meetings and in service to these truths.

To properly reflect the light of present truth like the gold, silver and precious stones do, we need to make the truth our own. What does that mean? It means that each of us have to prove to ourselves that the doctrines and prophesies that explain the Divine Plan of the Ages, are actually found in the Word of God. This is what gives the truth it’s power. We do have teachers. However, it is not enough to just accept what someone has presented. We each must study and reflect on our studies so that we can present the Plan of God to others. If not in detail at least in an outline form using Scriptures. We may need notes, that is OK, but let us each make our own notes from what we study. The Harvest Message has been provided by our returned Lord so that each of those who are sincere in heart can have all the tools necessary in order to obtain the truths necessary for proper Godlike character building.

Simply put, it is truth doctrines that demonstrate God’s loving and just character. So also, by our thoughtfully thinking on truth concepts, we should also reflect a just and loving character, as best we can.

Notice here in context, back to verses 1 Cor. 3:1 and 2:

“And I brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for hitherto you were not able to hear it, neither yet now are you able.”

Paul is explaining that they are still only able to understand basic truths and not advanced truths. This is not acceptable. He felt they should have been much more developed in the spirit, but apparently they were not investing the time and energy into their studies o,r if they were, they were not being rightly exercised because of their fleshly thinking.

Paul taught similarly in Hebs. 5:11 – 6:2.

This is an example to us that we can attend meetings but we might not be properly developed because of fleshly or worldly thinking.

Another aspect of the gold, silver and precious stones is that they are very hard substances, metal and gems. This means that they take more effort to work with or build with. This added effort though will result in a substantially stronger, more durable building, one that can withstand the storms (trials), that will come.

As for the wood, hay and stubble construction materials, these represent erroneous and false doctrines and practices. These are the doctrines of demons (see I Tim. 4:1, 2:

“Now the spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron.”).

These false teachings might be worldly, for instance that God wants you to be materially successful, rich in the things of this world.

Or they can be the dark-age doctrines of hellfire and eternal damnation, to be tortured for all eternity!

Since our Lord’s return and the provision of the “meat in due season” (note it does not say the “milk” in due season), anybody who is spirit-begotten will have the opportunity to have the present truth on these basic doctrines brought to their attention, no hell fire, no trinity, no immortality of the human soul, that there is to be an opportunity for all. If someone does not have sufficient interest to pursue or investigate these beautiful truths (the gold, silver and precious stones), then they are left with only the nominal Church teachings from their priests, ministers and such clergymen.

This is the wood, hay and stubble. These are cheap to obtain, just go to most any Church or denominational website and you will find all the wood, hay and stubble you want!

These construction materials are easy to work with because they are flimsy, but they are very flammable. They cannot stand the heat of the fiery trials!

They do not reflect the light of truth.

To construct one’s character around these false doctrines and practices when present truth is so readily available demonstrates a weak and distorted view of what God is expecting of His children.

As an example, how would you feel if most of the people who knew you were saying that you were going to burn everyone who had ever lived if they did not accept you in their lifetime, even though you had the power to do differently?

Would this make you feel closer to them?
Or what if they said that you were really your own son, and that you were three different persons in one person? That you had died, but not really died? That you talked to yourself all the time? That you worshipped yourself? Would this make you feel close to these people?

NO, it would not. Undoubtedly it would make you feel that they did not understand you at all!

But more than that, you would feel that these people who would still associate themselves with you were not really very nice people! Why would they want to think that about you when they could know better?

So too brethren, we have left those terrible errors behind us and we gladly present the truth of God’s loving and just character to any and all who might have an ear to hear! This is our highest privilege, to vindicate God’s righteous character by sharing the truth!

Paul brings to our attention that there is a specific DAY, that will demonstrate what each spirit-begotten’s character is made of.

That DAY is the thousand year DAY OF THE LORD (II Peter 3:8 – 10).

It began in 1874 upon his return to earth’s atmosphere (I Thess. 4:17).

Our returned King brought his kingdom with him and he is going about setting it up, which is driving the Prince of darkness into greater efforts to try to darken the LIGHT OF PRESENT TRUTH ON EVERY SUBJECT! This is why it has been and will continue to be for the near future a time of trouble and great distress so that men’s hearts fail them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven (the nominal Churches), shall be shaken. Luke 21:26.

This is shown on the Divine Plan of the Ages chart in the over-lapping of the Gospel Age ending and the Messianic Age beginning. It is the time of the great TRANSITION described in Rev. 11:15 – 18. The sounding of the Seventh Trumpet, the great message of Present Truth!

“And the seventh messenger trumpeted, and there were great voices in heaven saying the kingdom of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God.

Saying, we give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty which are and was, because thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned. And the nations were angry and thy wrath is come and the time of the dead, that they should be judged and that thou should give reward unto they servants the prophets and to the saints and them that fear thy name small and great, and should destroy them which destroy the earth.”

I quote from Rpt. 5916 written in 1916:

“Nevertheless, both the King and the Kingdom are not only coming, but are here; and the present troubles and shakings in church and state, and the general awakening of the people are the results of the influences emanating from that King and Kingdom. Though men know it not, it is the smiting of the kingdom of God that is even now preparing for the wreck of all the kingdoms of the earth, that the way may be opened for the establishment of righteousness in the world, that men‘s hearts may be humbled and prepared for the righteous government which is to take control of earth. Worldly men cannot realize this, for this kingdom cometh not with outward observation – with outward show and display. Therefore they cannot say, “Lo, here” or “Lo there”. “

The Apostle Paul tells us that it is the fire of this Day that shall reveal or make plain (to God and the individual), what kind of character each has attained to.

Fire in Scripture usually represents trouble, a consuming trouble. In some Scriptures it specifically symbolizes anarchy, that is, the absence of government, every man for himself, or every man’s hand against his neighbor. This we think is the final phase of utter destruction of the old order and is still ahead of us.

It seems that the Little Flock will be spared all or most of that most terrible time of trouble.

However, fire might also represent trials and trouble in a more general sense. For example in II Peter 3:10-12 we read:

“But the day of the Lord will arrive as a thief, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy living and godliness.

Looking for and awaiting eagerly for the Parousia (presence), of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”

Yes, the old heavens symbolic of the current social order, financial order, governments, and the old heavens symbolic of false religion primarily the nominal Churches, are to be removed through various troubles that create tremendous heat and continues to melt away all of fallen mankind’s selfish efforts to rule themselves and others, both in temporal and religious matters.

This fire starts small but widespread and it will test how all of the spirit-begotten will conduct themselves. As the heat or fire increases in intensity, each ones conduct, words and thoughts will demonstrate if they have successfully constructed a godlike, Christlike character. This includes all of the fruits of the Spirit, which best demonstrate the effect of knowing and living the TRUTH.

With these the fire is like that of the great refiner, melting away any dross (impurities of character flaws), through the trials.

Malachi 3:2, 3:

“But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and he shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”

They say the refiner knows when the gold or silver has had just the right amount of fiery heat, when he can see his own REFLECTION in the molten metal!

So brethren that is our goal, to reflect the image of Christ as best we can by our lives.

Returning to I Cor. 3: 14, 15 we want to consider a most unusual part of these verses from Paul.

Those who have developed the proper character to withstand all of the trials and severe testings of this DAY, shall receive the reward! What is this reward? It is to receive the divine nature upon being resurrected in heaven with Jesus and all the Saints, the Bride of Christ! It includes working with God and Jesus in the complete restoration of all the willing and obedient of the human family and their home – the planet earth!

These are to be “kings and priests” with Jesus (Rev. 1:6, 5:10).

These are to share Jesus’ throne with him as his Bride (Rev. 3:21).

But the most unusual part is that those that fail the testing of fire and have their character revealed to be “inferior”, are those referred to elsewhere as the “Great Company”. Yet this group is “SAVED”!?

They have lost the chief prize of being a member of the Bride of Christ, a member of The Christ Body, to which they had consecrated to become.

But yet they are “saved”, even by or through the “fire”.

We will look at other Scriptures for more detail on this, but do not let this startling thought escape you – there are TWO groups of Christians saved! No one else can explain these Scriptures unless they understand the Divine Plan of the Ages.

This shows both the high standard to be of the Bride of Christ, but it also demonstrates the depth of the love of God! His mercies endure forever.

This Class tried to maintain their inferior character structure even through the fiery trials of this Day. They did not abandon their FOUNDATION – Jesus’ their ransom!

We read about the Great Company’s final experiences in

 Rev. 7:9, 10, 13-17:

“After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in the their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

And one of the elders answered , saying unto me, what are these which are arrayed in white robes? And whence come they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me: These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore are they before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more: neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat.

For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them into living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

The Apostle John describes that after the 144,000 are gone from the earth, this Great Company of spirit-begotten brethren are depicted as having gained a LESSER VICTORY. They did prove faithful to God and the Lamb during the greatest tribulation, the hottest time of the fire of world-wide anarchy, when the fallen angels were fully un-chained.

These had previously allowed their robes of Christ righteousness to become soiled with fleshly living, or wrinkled from lack of zeal (see Eph. 5:27), but during this sever testing time, they prove that they love God, Jesus and Truth more than anything else.

These are not on the throne with Jesus, like the Bride Class, but are before the throne, still privileged as servants.

They gain life everlasting as spirit beings, like the angels, but not one of the Immortals.

These verses also demonstrate what we learned in I Cor. 3:15. There is a group of consecrated, spirit-begotten Christians that are not part of the Bride Class. They are greatly disappointed in their loss, but by God’s mercies and their willingness to suffer for righteousness’ sake during the greatest time of trouble that has ever been, they do gain eternal life in heaven.

What would happen to any who are spirit-begotten but deny God or Jesus, or return to WILLFUL LIVES OF SIN? These die the Second death, which is non-existence for eternity, oblivion. See Hebs. 6:4-8, 10:26-30).

These two Classes of the spirit-begotten are also shown in Jesus’ parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins of Matt. 25:1-13.

All were Virgins (and must remain so unto death), but the lesson is that the Foolish choose not to take advantage of the golden opportunities God made available to them to learn the truth doctrines and thereby to learn how to develop more of the FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, which in effect, gives one more of the Holy Spirit, symbolized as having the oil in their lamps (the Word of God), and in their vessels (their own hearts and minds).

Hence they fail the testing of being worthy to be of the Bride of Christ and enter into the Marriage of the Lamb.

The further lesson is that no one can give the Holy Spirit unto another. All we can do is demonstrate or explain how we obtained more of the Spirit of a sound-mind and of holiness. The Wise told the Foolish they would have to go to the marketplace and purchase for themselves. Can you see the connection to purchasing the gold, silver and precious stones as our building materials? Yes, it does cost us in time and energy to learn and prove the truth and to put these truth principles into practice in our daily lives, especially during trials.

Returning to I Cor. 3:16, 17:

“Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”

We are the potential temple of God. We are “living stones”, “a spiritual house” – I Peter 2:5.

First, each of us have to have consecrated our ALL to be dead to self-will and to live for God and Jesus, to do God’s will.

Next we have to continually study and put into practice what we have learned (James 1:22-25:

“But be you doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like into a man beholding his natural face in a glass (mirror), for he beholdeth himself and goes his way and immediately forgets what manner of man he was. But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work (work of changing our thinking), this man shall be blessed in his deed (efforts).”

We will not be able to develop a God acceptable character if we continue to hold onto false doctrines or erroneous practices or willfully practice sinful living. That would be defiling the temple. The Holy Spirit cannot grow or develop in such a fleshly environment.

Make no mistake, God holds us responsible for what we COULD KNOW if we just made the effort and worked hard to overcome our own weaknesses.

It will cost us – friends, family, wealth, worldly reputation, comforts and worldly entertainments. Not that there would not be any of these, but we will be in situations where will have to make CHOICES on how we will spend our time and energy.

The faithful builders, the Wise Virgins, the Bride of Christ will not wait until they are put into situations where they will have to decide to sacrifice or not, no, these will ZEALOUSLY decide on their own to sacrifice where they can to have more time in study and in service.

A step of knowledge followed by a step of grace. Our heavenly Father does NOT make us do anything, it has to be of our own FREE WILL, OUR OWN CHOICE, to be in His service.

Dear brethren, let us each be wise builders.

End.