

Firm or Flimsy?

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[0 : 00] Hello. Oh yeah. Now good morning New City in case you didn't hear.

Amen. I'm going to call your attention to 1 Corinthians 3 verses 9 through 15. For what it's worth, this is a passage that haunts me quite a lot.

And so we'll get into it. Oh yeah, let me. I don't want to go over time, so I'm going to time myself here.

1 Corinthians 15 verse 3, I mean chapter 3 verses 9 through 15. 1 Corinthians 15 verse 9. Which is Jesus Christ. Now here's the catch. If anyone builds on the foundation using gold, silver, causty stones, wood, hay, and straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light.

[1 : 55] It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.

If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss, yet will be saved, even though only one escaping through flames.

The word of the Lord. Thank you. Firm or flimsy?

Firm or flimsy? Anyone who knows the Bible knows five things. First, that God is perfect in righteousness.

Second, that God does not tolerate anybody who falls short of his perfect standard. Third, that anyone who falls short of God's perfect standard is condemned already.

[3 : 06] Fourth, that we all fall short of God's perfect standard. Fourth, that we all short of God's perfect standard. And fifth, that we are in deep, deep, deep, deep trouble with God.

You all know that. You know the Bible, you know that. On the other hand, anyone who knows the gospel knows five things.

First, that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves from God's condemnation. Second, that unless God himself takes the initiative to save us, there is no hope whatsoever.

Third, that God has indeed taken the initiative to save us by bearing our sin and our condemnation. Fourth, that salvation comes through grace, God's grace alone.

And fifth, God applies salvation to us by faith, which itself is a gift of God. Is that clear?

[4 : 21] I just want to make sure that you know I'm orthodox up here, okay? Okay. Now, the first group of five things shows us where we stand before, you know, before God without Christ.

And, of course, the second group of five things shows us our salvation in Christ. Ephesians 2, 8 and 9. For it is by grace that we have been saved through faith, and that is not from yourselves.

It is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. Now, so we got the salvation stuff straightened, right?

This morning, I want to focus on God's glory, okay? Or as the theologians would say, the doxological dimension.

Jesus himself tells us how to bring God glory. He said it in Matthew 5, 14 through 16. You are the light of the world.

[5 : 55] So, what is the purpose? What is our purpose on earth? After we are saved? The Apostle Paul backs this up and answers this question.

Ephesians 2, 10. For we are God's handiwork or craftsmanship, right? Created in Christ Jesus for to do what? Good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

So, now let's look at our passage a little closer here. First of all, in this passage, God gives us, Paul gives us a challenging picture of the quality of our work.

And the big question we must ask ourselves this morning is, are you ready for the question? Do you know what the question is? Is it? Or? Okay.

Is it live or is it Memorex? Remember that? All of God's people build on the work of Jesus Christ as a foundation.

[6 : 59] Ephesians 2, verses 19 to 20. You are no longer foreigners or strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

No other foundation is stable. Christ and his saving work is the firm rock that cannot be moved. And only on this rock will we find fulfillment. Now those who build their hopes on anything other than the foundation will build on an unstable sand of the riverbed.

I don't know. Those who know me, know me long enough. There was a time after I got saved and I thought I knew everything there was to know.

So, and in those days, I like to say my hope was built on nothing less than Scofield's notes and Moody Press. But one day I started reading the Bible.

[8 : 23] And the Bible messed up all my doctrine. You know, so I used to know, I've told you this before, I used to know the, I didn't know the day or the hour when Jesus would return, but I knew the week, you know.

But I don't know that anymore. Praise the Lord. All right. That was sand of the riverbed. Okay. On the one hand, if we leave out the foundation of Christ and his work, then all we are left with is flimsy futility.

We are still in our sins and condemned. And all of our hopes and aspirations will be laid waste. But on the other hand, the quality of the construction does not matter if it sits on unstable sand.

Okay. If we build with flimsy, if we build a flimsy shack, it is unstable. You know, why? On the unstable sand. Why? Because it will be destroyed by flood as it is swept away.

If we build a firm mansion on unstable sand, it will be destroyed by flood as its foundation collapses. You know, it's a blessing to have a firm foundation to build on, isn't it?

[9 : 53] But the kind of work we do will show how true we are to the foundation. Now, no, we cannot please God by our works.

You know that, right? You've got that. Okay. So don't run out here thinking that I'm talking about works righteousness. You know. We cannot please God by our works. Instead, we can only please God by faith.

However, good works are the means by which we are to bring God glory and to demonstrate our faith in our thanksgiving to God for a saving grace.

So if we are passionate for God's glory, then we will be passionate for good works. If we are apathetic about God's glory, then we will be apathetic about good works.

If we have firm faith, then we will have firm what? Works. In other words, faith without works is dead.

[10 : 59] A firm faith will build on the foundation using firm building materials, namely gold, silver, costly stones. The result will be a firm community where the people of God flourish.

And the message of that community will be prophetic. If we have flimsy faith, we will have flimsy works.

In other words, works without faith is dead. A flimsy faith will build on the foundation using flimsy building materials, namely, you know, wood, hay, and straw.

The result will be a flimsy group driven by empty religion. His message will not be prophetic.

His message will be pathetic. Okay. With a flimsy group, such a flimsy group will be plagued by bad motivations, beset by deceptions, consumed by internal strife, and all the rest of that.

[12 : 16] And our passage reminds us of three things. One, that we will be judged by our works. Second, that the quality of our works will be tested by fire.

And third, salvation will only come by God's grace. I love that last one. Firm or flimsy is not a matter of where we stand.

Firm or flimsy is a matter of what the fire burns. The fire will magnify some areas of our lives and embarrass us and others.

Ooh. But thanks be to God. Why? Because he is the fire. I'd rather have God as a fire than just some old fire.

Plain fire. You got it? And any works that please him will withstand the fire.

[13 : 21] Why? Because we are covered by God who is the all-consuming fire himself. Deuteronomy 4, 24.

The builders whose work is firm will be rewarded. Why? Because their work withstood the testing of fire. But by God's grace, by God's grace, this blessing is not restricted to perfect saints.

So if you're a perfect saint, I'm not talking to you. It's not restricted to perfect saints.

Okay? The builders whose work is flimsy will suffer loss. That's true. But why? Because their work will not withstand the testing by fire.

But by God's grace, imperfect saints will not be lost to the fire. Praise him.

[14:25] All right. Now, of course, I assume you all already know that, don't you? You know that. I'm not giving you anything new. But let's go a little deeper.

Let's look beneath the foundation. Let's look at God's grace. Let's look at God's grace.

What do you see? Do you see sovereign grace? Or do you see cheap grace? Oh. In other words, is it firm grace?

Or flimsy grace? Some people talk about greasy grace. You ever heard of that? Listen to a profound profession from a troubled prophet inside of a big fish deep under the sea.

Listen to his confession. Quote, salvation is of the Lord. I don't have to say who that troubled prophet was, right?

[15:33] I can say that he did not have first class accommodations in his travels. It is one thing to focus on our salvation.

It's quite another to focus on the Lord of our salvation. The Lord is more important than our salvation.

It's one thing to focus on the work of God's grace. It's another to focus on God who gives the grace. God's glory is more important than his grace.

Uh-oh. Why? Because God's glory is the basis of his grace. You may not believe me, but check out Scripture.

Ephesians chapter 1. He makes this very clear. Verses 5 through 6. God predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will.

[16:48] Why did God do that? It says it right here. To the praise of his glorious grace. Verses 11 and 12.

In Christ we are also chosen, having been predestined according to his plan, to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with his perfect will.

Why? It says it in the passage. For the praise of his glory. Okay. Verses 13 through 14.

When you believed, you were marked in Christ with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is the deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.

Why? Why? To the praise of his glory. It is God who took the initiative on our behalf in Christ.

[17:57] He predestined us through Christ. He chose us in Christ. And he has sealed us in Christ with the Holy Spirit. It's a pretty good deal.

Now all of this was done in spite of sinful motives we may not have even been aware of.

Because it's all by grace. Because it's all by grace. Because it's all by grace. With God as the center of our devotion, our work is firm.

Otherwise, our work is flimsy. Otherwise, you know what that is, right?

Our work is flimsy. If we focus on God, or as we focus on God, we must ask two foundational questions.

[19:03] First question is this. What is God to you? It's the height of foolishness to have faith in anything less than the personal creator revealed in the Bible.

God is not just merely some principle behind stuff, like luck or karma. God is not merely a force from a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

Faith in a force or a principle is flimsy faith. Why? Because this is nothing more than atheism. And I'm sure nobody here has fallen for that foolishness, right?

Psalms 14.1. What does it say? You know, the fool says in his heart, there is no God. Before I became a Christian, I used to use this verse to trip up Christians.

I said, you know, the Bible says there is no God. Okay, praise the Lord. A firm faith knows that God is the ultimate person.

[20:28] A firm faith will never see God in impersonal terms. The second question we must ask, not just what is God to you, but who is God to you?

It is the height of foolishness to have a faith in anyone less than the infinite creator revealed in the Bible. He is the one true God.

God. Is he? Is he? Or is he a God created in our own image? Oh. If he is a bigger version of our flawed self, then our faith in him is flimsy.

Why? Because this God is nothing more than an idol. When you think about it, we all do this, though.

We all do this. Whenever we think of God with any limitations whatsoever, outside of himself, then whatever we are calling G-O-D is an idol.

[21 : 31] It's so easy to fall into that. A firm faith will know that God is not limited by anything outside of himself. You see, the quality of our faith is not measured by the strength of our faith.

It is measured, the quality of our faith is measured by the object of our faith. If the object of our faith is flimsy, then our faith is flimsy.

If the object of our faith is firm, then our faith is firm. Farberbs 9.10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

The fear of the Lord is not just being scared of God. There's a lot of things to be scared of around here, right? But the phrase in the Scripture, do not be afraid, appears more than 70 times in the Scripture.

So it's not a matter of being afraid. True fear of God is a reverent fear. A reverent fear. The understanding that comes from the Holy One is not just information about how big God is.

[22 : 46] We all know God is big. All-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, everlasting, unchanging.

We know all that. But this understanding involves a constant reminder of how utterly dependent we are on God at all times.

Now, let me give you an illustration. This may, I don't know if this is going to be a good one or not, but... Imagine that you have a 50-pound weight out in front of you like this.

50 pounds, okay? And you've got to hold it like this, okay? All right. How long will it take before fatigue forces you to drop it? Okay, I'm going to see a show of hands.

One minute? One second. Ten minutes? Anybody? Do I have any takers?

Okay, all right. See somebody say. Thirty minutes? One hour? Two hours? Twenty-four hours?

[23 : 55] A week? A year? A century? A millennium? Eternity? I don't have any takers for that, do I? Now, I am not saying that God gets tired.

I'm not saying that at all. God never gets tired. Okay, we know that. Psalms 121, verses 3 and 4. He who watches over you will not slumber.

Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. My point is that to hold the weight in front of you requires your awareness of it.

And the instant you lose your awareness of the weight, it will drop. According to Scripture, Hebrews chapter 1, verse 3, that God upholds the creation by his powerful word.

God. God. This means that the creation itself is absolutely dependent on God being conscious of it.

[25 : 06] Think about that. God. It means that you are absolutely dependent on God being conscious of you.

Without God's absolute consciousness, you don't even exist. God. And hence, your very existence itself is an expression of God's active grace.

God pays attention to you. He knows how many hairs are on your head and knows that that number changes. God. God. God.

God. In the negative. Remember, God does not need us.

There is nothing in us that obligates God to uphold us, especially in our sinful state. God. Now, what does this mean for us today?

[26 : 14] Not only are we saved by grace, we all know that. But we also live by grace. And sadly, you've heard me say this before, but I'll say it again.

We even sin by grace. This is why a firm faith must be a repenting faith.

And any faith without repentance is a flimsy faith. This demands that we fear and reverence God.

And this fear and reverence gives us wisdom.

Well, there's a thing to think about. You know, sometimes I think that I do something wrong or I violate my ethical standards and I'm hoping that God is not looking.

Not only does he look, but he upholds me while I do it. I don't know about you, but if I was holding a child in my arms and he or she was trying to beat me with a hammer, I'd drop her quickly.

[27 : 26] Well, let's kind of wrap all this up. All of us in Christ are builders, whether we know it or not.

The question is not if we will build, but how we will build. Will it be firm or will it be flimsy? We all live our lives before God, the angels, Satan, the demonic hosts.

We all live our lives before the world. For example, when the children of Israel were having that orgy around the golden calf. Guess what? The Bible tells us that their enemies looked on with glee. I don't know about you, but I know this for a fact.

The world has seen enough of flimsy Christianity. Religious clubs disguised as churches.

[28 : 32] Establishments polluted by idols and ideology. What should the world see of us? It should see a community with fear and remorse for the Lord.

In other words, the beginning of wisdom. The world should see a community with the knowledge of the Holy One. In other words, understanding.

The world should see a community of beauty and love in the midst of our brokenness. A community that has the four characteristics of the first church in the book of Acts.

Acts 2, verse 42. What did they do? What was the church in? It wasn't the building that stood on the corner. It wasn't the group that met at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning.

Oh no, I'm sorry. 10.05. 10.05. What was it? It was a community that devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, namely biblical wisdom.

[29 : 41] To fellowship. To the breaking of bread. Sharing meals together as well as the Lord's Supper. And to prayer. Corporate and individual.

That was the church. All this other stuff we do is not necessary. All these characteristics revolved around, guess what?

The Great Commission. Now what's the Great Commission? To make disciples. To work toward the day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

That also was the Great Commission. If we forsake flimsy work before the fire, we will gain.

If we wait for the fire to burn it up, we will lose. If we build with firm work, the fire will reveal its beauty and strength.

[30 : 50] So as the passage tells us, let us build with care, saints. Let us build with care. We all have flimsy work that will not stand up to the scrutiny of the all-consuming fire.

All of us have that. Why? Because we are sinners. That's why. But thanks be to God, we are being refined by God's grace.

As my wife's, one of my wife's mentors says, thank God for Jesus. Why?

Because he will continue refining us and refining our works until they spread the knowledge of God's glory. And until he is able to say from his very heart, well done.

But remember, it's all his work. So I'll just leave you with this. And all you do. Now some of you all thought of the rest of that from a famous beer commercial.

[32 : 06] You know what the famous, this bud's for you. No, that's not what I'm saying. And all you do. Always clearly examine what is beneath your foundation.

Is it sovereign grace? Or is it cheap grace? And always ask the all-important question.

And challenge yourself with this. Is it firm? Or is it flimsy? Let's pray. Lord, thank you so much for your firm grace.

Thank you so much for the fact that we just don't live up to your standard. And we can't live up to your standard. But thank you for your grace.

That you will make us live up to your standard. Because you will make us perfect. But you give us credit for being perfect now. Thank you so much for this, Lord.

[33 : 10] And we ask that you will guide us. Make us your people in a renewed way. Save us from empty religion.

Save us from foolishness. Save us from thinking of you as anything less than the infinite personal Lord and creator of everything.

Empower us. Toward firm work.

For we ask it in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.