



The Importance of Context: Example, 1 Corinthians 3:10-13: The Foundation Is through Grace; The Building Is by Works: Divine vs. Human Good

- 29- The job of the pastor is not to interpret the Bible from English translations but from the writings of the original manuscripts.
- 30- Etymology deals with individual words and tracks the history of each by tracing its development from the earliest recorded occurrence in the language in which it is found.
- 31- Context refers to the environment in which the word or passage under consideration is located. Too often people become confused because they take words or verses out of context and in doing so construct false doctrines. One of the most common results of this is the notion that salvation is by works. Here's an example of a passage that has led some to this conclusion:

1 Corinthians 3:10 - According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it.

Paul is making reference to the church at Corinth which he founded on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The growth of that church became the duty of others such as Apollos ("I planted, Apollos watered, but God causes the growth." [1 Corinthians. 3:6]) Those who responded to the Gospel became the original members of the church and their duty was to build on the foundation of Christ by growing in grace. This is brought out in the next verse.

v. 11 - For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.

The foundation is identified as salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone. A foundation is a base upon which something is built. The foundation is the result of grace but the structure that rises from it occurs as a result of works.

Two sets of building materials are mentioned as those chosen by believers as they aspire to build on this foundation:

1 Corinthians 3:12 - Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood hay, straw,

The first set of building materials is presented by the metaphor of gold, silver, and precious stones. These represent works empowered by the filling of the Holy Spirit, inspired by reciprocity, supervised by knowledge of doctrine, and often executed through one's spiritual gift.

The second set of building materials is presented by the metaphor of wood, hay, and straw. These represent works empowered by the sinful nature's area of strength, inspired by self-righteousness, supervised by knowledge of human viewpoint, and often executed dependent upon one's talents and abilities.

Notice the context. The paragraph we are noting begins with verse 10 where we are introduced to a foundation. That foundation is identified in verse 11 as Jesus Christ.

Those who have the foundation—salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone—have the liberty to use their free will to build upon it. What they build will be determined by their attitude toward the Word of God. Some will choose to make Bible study a top priority while others will put it in second place or lower.



Those who advance will grow spiritually and will apply what they learn to life and circumstances. Others will not grow spiritually and their application will be distorted by traditional attitudes about what Christian behavior is, mixed with other notions from cosmic viewpoint.

Those who advance will submit to the system that produces works classified as gold silver and precious stones while those who do not will adopt a rationale they believe represents the Christian life but only produces works classified as wood, hay, and stubble.

It is often impossible to distinguish which set is being utilized by an individual since the very same action can be carried out using both sets.

Mark 12:41 - And Jesus sat down opposite the treasury [**in the Court of the Women**], and began observing how the multitude were putting money in to the treasury [γαζοφυλάκιον, **gazophulakion: thirteen trumpet-shaped chests into which the temple offerings of the people were cast**]; and many rich people were putting in large sums.

v. 42 - And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins [λεπτά, **lepta: “mites”; 1/8 of a cent each**], which amount to a cent [κοδράντης, **kodrantēs: 1/4 of a cent**].

v. 43 - And calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury;

v. 44 - for they all put in out of their surplus [**human good motivation**], but she out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on [**divine good motivation**].”

God knows (our motivations) and identification becomes evident to all at the Judgment Seat of Christ following the Rapture of the church:

1 Corinthians 3:13 - each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.

Notice that there is nothing in the context of the first four verses of this paragraph about sin, the lake of fire, loss of salvation, or access to heaven by means of works. The context shows that believers are the subject and that their works are classified into two categories which will be “tested” on a certain “day.”

The critical word in the passage is the word “day.” The correct identification of what day helps us understand what is being tested, where, and why.