

# Jesus, The Foundation

by Walton Weaver

The church of our Lord is often represented in Scripture under the figure of a house, a habitation of God, God's spiritual building (Heb. 3:1-6; 1 Cor. 3:9-17; Eph. 2:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:4-8; 1 Tim. 3:15). Other metaphors are used to describe the church, but this is a frequent one. At one place one aspect of God's building is emphasized, at another place another aspect. Here we wish to give some attention to the foundation of God's house, the church.

## The Foundation Stone

Christ as the living stone has been made the foundation of God's spiritual house, the church (1 Pet. 2:4-8). God Himself laid this foundation in Zion (v. 6). "Zion" here means spiritual Zion, the spiritual mount from which God rules from His throne, not the earthly mount on which Jerusalem was located. The prophets often referred to Zion in this spiritual sense (Psa. 2:6; 110:2; Isa. 2:3; Micah 4:2). The writer of Hebrews also gives it this meaning (Heb. 12:22). Several things are said here about Christ as the foundation stone.

*1. Christ is the chief cornerstone of the foundation (v. 7b).* The point seems to be the significance given to the cornerstone. It is the most significant stone of the entire structure because, as Lenski says, "it governs all the angles and all the lines of both the foundation and the building and is thus placed at the head of the corner, i. e., to form the projecting (not the inner) angle." Thus Christ is represented as the "capstone" (NIV) because He is the most important stone in the building.

*2. Christ is a chosen and precious stone (v. 4).* He is God's own choice for the foundation of His spiritual house. God both selected Him and laid Him as the foundation of the church, and as Paul affirms, "no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). As God's chosen (v. 4) and elect (v. 6) Christ is the only foundation God will accept, and no man has a right to offer a substitute. No right thinking Christian would want another foundation. The One whom God has chosen is also "precious," both to God and to all those who are the elect of God, which is all Christians. The word "precious" carries the idea of honored and esteemed. The terms "you also" (v. 5a) immediately following these words found in verse 4 may suggest that the readers, persecuted and rejected by unbelievers, share in this honor with Christ.

*3. Christ is a rejected stone (vv. 4, 7a).* The statements that Christ is a rejected stone are put in contrast with such words as chief cornerstone, chosen and elect, and precious. Even though Christ has been chosen and made chief cornerstone by God, and even though He is viewed as precious by both God and believers, He is rejected by those who are disobedient. Christians see Christ as God sees Him, but He is rejected by all others. "Which the builders rejected" (v. 7) suggests builders rejecting a stone which they think is

not suitable for the building. Jesus did not meet the specifications which some had made for the Messiah, so they rejected Him (see Jn. 1:11 with Mk. 8:31; Lk. 9:22). The very stone which they rejected God Himself chose and made the chief cornerstone of the building.

The reason given by Peter for this rejection of Christ is that men were "disobedient to the word" (v. 8b). This is the cause of their "stumbling," or why Christ was a "rock of offense" to them. Men reject Christ when they reject His word. Oat simply cannot haze respect for Christ while showing disrespect for His teaching (Jn. 12:48).

### **The Apostles and Prophets**

When Paul makes this same point about Christ being the corner stone in God's building, he also gives a place to the apostles and prophets in the foundation (Eph. 2:20). In some way, he says, God's household has "been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." The work of the apostles and prophets was that of revealing and making known the truth of God. They were appointed by God in the church for this work (1 Cor. 12:29). Since the church was founded and continues to be built upon the truth of God, the apostles and prophets who were used by God to reveal and make known the truth, are in the foundation of the church. Both apostles and prophets were guided by the Holy Spirit in making known God's will (Eph. 3:3-5).

### **Not Built Upon Peter**

The church was not built upon any one of the apostles alone. Some have misunderstood Jesus' statement in Matthew 16:18, "Upon this rock I will build my church," to mean that Jesus promised to build His church upon Peter. The "rock" (petra, feminine gender for bed-rock) upon which Jesus promised to build His church was not Peter (petros, masculine gender for stone), but the truth which Peter had just confessed, i. e., "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). There was a vast difference between the bed-rock upon which the church was to be built and Peter who was a stone. We have seen in our discussion in the above section that Peter understood that Christ was the foundation of the church. He quotes Isaiah 28:16 and applies it to Christ in more than one place (Acts 4:10, 11; 1 Pet. 2:3-7). Jesus also applied this prophecy to Himself (Matt. 21:42).

Peter was given authority to bind and loose (Matt. 16:19), but so were all the other apostles (Matt. 18:18). Peter was given the privilege to be the first to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, but privilege is not primacy. He did not have authority over the other apostles. If he did, what right would Paul have had to rebuke him to his face when he did not walk uprightly according to the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:11ff.)? Paul's statement that the church was "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the carnet stone" shows that the apostles were on the same footing. No one of them had more authority than the other.

## **Can Lay No Other Foundation**

When Paul was in Corinth he preached "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). This was how the church at that place came into existence. As a wise master builder, he said, "I laid the foundation" (1 Cor. 3:10). Since he laid the foundation by preaching Christ crucified, that church had not been founded upon human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:5). It had been built upon Jesus Christ who is the only foundation of the Lord's church that any man can lay (1 Cor. 3:11). Christ is God's choice for the foundation of the church, as we have seen, and no other foundation will do. If any should build a structure upon any other foundation, that structure would not be the Lord's church. It can be the Lord's church only when it is built upon Christ Himself. Paul, nor any other apostle, nor any prophet, had a say in what the foundation of the Lord's house would be. God alone made that choice, and man must abide by His choice if he is to build a church that is truly "of God."

Even though Paul had laid the right foundation of the church in Corinth, others would be building upon that foundation. Paul gives a warning that those who do build upon it must take heed how they do that work (1 Cor. 3:10). Some work (converts) will be able to withstand the test of fire when it comes, but other work (converts) will not be able to stand (1 Cor. 3:12-15). Every teacher must do his work as best as he can so his loss of those whom he teaches will be as little as possible. If some whom he has taught and encouraged do not endure, he will in this way "suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire." The "fire" is the manner by which work shall be tested in the day of the Lord.