

# Building Paneled Houses

Neil Girrard

In what we commonly refer to as the Old Testament (or Covenant), the Lord said through the prophet Haggai, “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this [My] temple to lie in ruins?” (Hag. 1:4) As we grapple to understand how this word of the Lord would apply to modern twenty-first century followers of Christ, there are several aspects of this word that need to be considered.

When the Lord spoke this word through Haggai, He immediately instructed them to “consider their ways” and to recognize that even though they worked hard, they gained nothing and whatever they did get never satisfied. (Hag. 1:5-6) Money trickled through their fingers, food and drink went into their bellies, clothes were on their bodies – but none of it was satisfactory and left the Israelites feeling empty and unfulfilled. This is the inherent nature of wealth gleaned or used apart from obedience to God. So long as the Israelites sought their own comfort, ease and convenience while God’s house was in ruins, the physical, material things would not fill the spiritual longings God was stirring deep inside their beings.

As we apply this word to our own day – a day when much of God’s house also lies in ruins – we must first recognize that *we*, the people who name the name of Christ as our own name, are the house that is being built and we must also recognize that because God is Spirit (Jn. 4:24), the house that is being built is a spiritual house made of living stones. (1 Pet. 2:5)

There is no clearer indication that God’s house, His people, is in ruins than the proliferation of lavish, extravagant, otherwise useless “church” buildings. These *are* the paneled houses of our day! But equally telling are the huge, rich houses so many “Christians” live in and the huge collections of things – guns, DVDs, computers, even Bibles – that fill these houses and even storage units! God still reserves the harshest judgment for those who are wealthy in any of this life’s resources who have no compassion or care for their poorer brothers who come into their life. Let he who has ears hear – and may his eyes also be opened to all the subtle ways he has hoarded to himself rather than share to build up God’s house.

We must also recognize that Jesus said, “*I* will build My house [Greek, *ekklesia*, poor English word choice, *church*]...” (Mt. 16:18) and nowhere else in Scripture does it say that anyone else will build it for Him. In fact, Jesus clearly said, “Apart from Me, you can accomplish nothing.” (Jn. 15:5) Though most “church” leaders today practice some form of *delegated* authority over their flocks, surely this statement includes *all* actions done in His name – especially in roles of leadership!

The question then arises, if Jesus says He alone will build His house, why then does Paul write about building the temple of God, and describe himself as a “wise master builder” and describe those who would build on the foundation of Christ Jesus with “gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw” and then go on to conclude his analogy of building by warning his readers, “If anyone defiles the temple [house] of God, God will destroy him.” (1 Cor. 3:10-17)? That is, if Jesus is the only one who is building His house, why is Paul here talking about building? The answer is found in Paul’s opening statement that leads into this analogy: “For we are God’s *fellow workers*...” (1 Cor. 3:9) Another rendering is *co-laborers*.

Apart from him we can build “church” buildings in which God will never dwell (Acts 7:48, etc.), we can draw in as large a crowd as our eloquence, charisma and aura of infallibility can seduce, we can travel miles or hold countless Bible studies and teachings or maintain our own blog sites to display our intellectual and spiritual “superiority” and “prowess” to as many as

will seat themselves at our feet – but if we are acting apart from Christ, our works will burn away on the day when He judges our hearts, lives and works with fire. (1 Cor. 3:13-15) If our works – even though they be prophecies, deliverances and miracles – if all we have done is right only in our own eyes and not in His, He will say, “Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.” (Mt. 7:22-23) It is a largely ignored precept of the New Covenant that righteousness (what is right in God’s eyes) has no fellowship (unity, commonality) with lawlessness (what is right in one’s own eyes –2 Cor. 6:14)

So, how do we build as a master building, wisely using genuinely valuable building materials? In a word, *together* with Christ. Only as we *co-labor* with Him – jettisoning our own methods and understandings and seeking only His light and truth – will we be able to do this. And how will we know when we are truly building in cooperation with Him?

In about the only other place in the New Testament that speaks directly about our role in the building process, Paul tells us that the body builds itself up *in love*. (Eph. 4:16) Before we examine the process and events that causes this build-up, let us recognize how appropriate this attribute is as the primary confirmation that we have truly co-labored with Christ in building His house. As surely as God is Spirit, John also tells us that God is love. (1 Jn. 4:8) Though we do all manner of religious things, if we have not love, it is nothing. (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

So then, if our efforts to build the body of Christ are producing relations truly and deeply characterized by genuine, divinely-enabled love – sacrificing self, sharing, caring, giving, receiving, bearing one another’s burdens, etc. – then we can indeed be confident that we are truly co-laboring with Christ. If our relations are characterized by squabbles over questions of doctrines or the meanings of words or by testosterone-driven contests of who will stand up and teach (or lead “worship”) and who will sit at whose feet, then we can know with certainty that we are operating apart from Christ.

Now let us look back at just how the body (temple, house, people) of Christ is built up in love. Paul wrote, “From [Christ] the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” (Eph. 4:16) Let us note first and well the necessity of an inter-acting bond and unity with Christ! And let us note equally well that the Lord’s house will continue to lie in ruins until *every part* of the body takes His supply and does their own share of the work!

It is precisely those who sit behind a “church” door, having their ears soothed and stimulated with Greek-styled (pagan) oratory and rhetoric (sermons) so that they think themselves rich and in need of nothing while the Lord sees them as they really are – wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked – who will be vomited out of the mouth of the Lord’s body. (see Rev. 3:16-17, 20, 2 Tim. 4:3-4) Those who prefer the unrighteousness of a passive “church” experience to the way of righteousness (the way that includes active obedience, persecution and hardship) will be given over to strong delusion that enables them to believe that the lie they prefer is really God’s way and will for their lives. And these will take their rightful – and eternal – place among those who perish. (2 Ths. 2:11-12, Heb. 5:9, 2 Tim. 3:12, 1 Pet. 4:19) It is those who sit idly and passively at the feet of their favorite teacher/priest who have neglected to do their share of the work and it is these – and not those who have fled the Babylonian (with its Greek, Roman, Egyptian and even Hebrew elements and traditions) “church” system – who are forsaking the assembling (building) together of the body parts. (Heb. 10:25, Rev. 18:4, 2 Cor. 6:17, 1 Cor. 5:11)

In the *only* place where Jesus specifically promises to be actively and intimately among His people, He says, “Where *two or three* are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” (Mt. 18:20) This is where every part does its share – when there are only two or three people present!

Those who might rely on Jesus’ promises, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age,” (Mt. 28:20) or God’s promise, “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” (Heb. 13:5) have made a mistake similar to those who interpret Jesus’ promise that the gates of Hades (death and darkness) would not overcome His ekklesia (temple, house, people –Mt. 16:18) as applying specifically to all the trying circumstances that come upon *individuals*. This individualism, though somewhat applicable from these passages, is a modern way of thinking. In these passages, God does not specifically promise these things to all individuals – He promises to be with all those who are His people. Similarly, Jesus does not specifically promise that individuals (especially those off doing their own things in His name) will not be overcome by the gates of Hades but rather that His body (which indeed includes all individuals who are truly part of His body) will not be overcome by the realms of darkness and death. There is more than mere semantics at work here – in view here is the difference between genuine faith and blind presumption.

Perhaps the deepest complaint God has with us regarding our propensity to build our own paneled houses (whether personal or denominational) at the expense of His house is that we have attained to such a level of philosophical expertise that we no longer even grasp the idea of a corporate unity. We have been so trained in individualisms – I, me and mine – and we have no common goals, experiences or agendas (that are not tainted and driven by someone’s individual pursuits) that there is no longer even the concept of a corporate *we* that transcends the wishes, wants and, at times, even the needs of *I* and *me*. When the “pastor” stands in the pulpit to speak down to his listeners, he commits three errors:

- he puts forth the idea that he is *supposed to be* over his brothers and sisters in Christ (see however Mt. 23:8-12);
- he puts forth the picture that a good Christian is one who is schooled and articulate with Greek-styled rhetoric and eloquence, in short, a good speaker who tells funny jokes and good stories drawn in some measure or fashion from the Bible; and
- he puts forth the picture that doing the work of the Lord is done by *one man* who should then be paid for how well he can scratch ears with his words. (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4)

The picture the body of Christ needs most right now is the last parable Jesus gave about the kingdom of God. He said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away.” (Mt. 13:47-48)

This is a precise parallel to Paul’s description of building the body of Christ. What men have most often failed to see is that, over the two millennia we commonly call church history, Christ was quietly tying together unbreakable knots of two and three cords (Eccl. 4:12) to form a net that would capture men’s souls even while Satan deceived men of God into building his

outwardly visible, counterfeit “church” (the whore of Babylon/Rome and all its denominational descendent daughters –Rev. 17:5) that would develop into the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith, that would enable Satan to sit as God in the temple of God and show the world that he is God. (2 Ths. 2:3-4)

The true body of Christ must recognize the following three things if we are to build wisely the house of God and have results that will endure the judgment of Christ and God. (1 Cor. 3:12-13)

- In God’s economy, gold is indicative of righteousness and godliness, silver indicates peace and agape love, and precious gems are those things which bring about in our hearts a purer faith in the finished work of Christ. Wealth, as this world measures it, has only a minute and miniscule role to play in our life of obedience to God and the wise son or daughter of God will do well to stop measuring their obedience to God in terms of dollars and cents and percentages. We have been bought with a price – His blood! (1 Cor. 6:20) *All* that we are and have is already His. And if He tells us to sell or give away a portion (or even *all* as He did with the rich young ruler –Mk. 10:21) that is His right and prerogative as our Lord, King and God. Those who cannot obey His commands where their money and material resources are concerned should not deceive themselves into thinking that He is either their Lord (Mt. 6:24) or their Savior. (Heb. 5:9)

- God’s house will continue to appear to lie in ruins until He vomits the lukewarm out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16) and He sends out His angels to “gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness [what is right in their own eyes].” (Mt. 13:41) It is the responsibility of the genuine people of Christ to simply continue to co-labor with Christ by building up one another in love when there is only one or two others with us. We are not called to draw followers after ourselves or our doctrines – that is the counterfeit “church” system’s way. (see Acts 20:30) We are not called to use any particular method (i.e., Bible study, teachings, house meetings, “revivals,” etc.) to build His body except as He specifically directs and leads. It is the practice of these things apart from His headship that is the epitome of lawlessness (doing what is right in our own eyes).

- A genuine follower of Christ can live in a palace, a mansion, a hut, a hovel or even have no home at all and still be precisely within God’s perfect will for their life! But still the call of the Lord goes out, “Consider your ways!” (Hag. 1:5) If there is a divine dissatisfaction with your physical status, seek out the heart of the Lord as to what changes He would have you make. If you are lavishing too much on your self or your own family and too little on the needs of others, He is very able to correct you. God still speaks directly and compassionately to the one who recognizes that he truly is poor, who has a contrite spirit, and who trembles at God’s word even as he knows that God still reserves judgment for those who practice their “Christian” religiosity with an evil and unrepentant heart. (see Isa. 66:2-4) In fact, it is our vows and efforts to be significant or important or special or different in the eyes of others that most often

lead us into some religious bondage that causes us to build our own paneled house at the expense of God's house. It is only as we come to see how deep our own wretchedness goes that we can truly say, "I once was blind but now I see." And then – and only then – are we able to follow after the Lord and co-labor with Him in the building of His house. So long as we think we have (or must have) something special or unique or better than anyone else to bring with us to His table spread for His people, we remain worse than useless in God's kingdom. We actually stand in opposition to what God would otherwise do in our midst.

The word of the Lord for this day is this: "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." (Rev. 22:11) Let everyman take stock of his own life and determine before God if he truly is what he thinks himself to be – and let all those who their righteousness is found in themselves or in their "church" practices continue on in their arrogant blindness and deceit.

Let he who has ears hear.

Neil Girrard  
Paidion Books  
P.O. Box 327  
Capitan, NM 88316

Website – [www.paidionbooks.org](http://www.paidionbooks.org)

Email – [paidion@paidionbooks.org](mailto:paidion@paidionbooks.org)

This article - <http://paidionbooks.org/girrard/deeper/bph.html>