

Having a Firm Foundation

A New Testament Word Study based on two New Testament Greek words:

- **themelios** - (something) belonging to a foundation, or laid down as a foundation
- **themelioo** - to lay the foundation of; metaph.: to make stable, to establish (something)

This study is divided into two sections:

- Physical foundations - sometimes used to teach us spiritual truths.
- Our spiritual foundation - the basis of our salvation and eternal hope; also, the relationship of that foundation to various aspects of our spiritual life.

ALWAYS CHECK THE CONTEXT OF A VERSE, IN ORDER TO GET AN ACCURATE UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THE TEXT SAYS. The word "foundation" may be used with an emphasis that is slightly different, in different passages.

PART 1 - Physical Foundations

A. The foundation of a building (or some other structure)

1. *A good foundation vs. no foundation: Being built on a rock foundation vs. on the sand*
 - Being built on rock (a firm foundation)
 - **Matthew 7:25** - The house *founded/built* on the rock did not fall down.
 - **Luke 6:48** - The house *founded/built* on the rock did not shake ...because it was well built. [KJV (etc.): ...because it was *founded/built* on the rock.]
 - Being built on sand (no foundation)
 - **Luke 6:49** - The house without a *foundation* collapsed and was totally destroyed.
 - This illustration is used to teach us the need to pay attention to Jesus' words. It shows the contrast between those who hear/obey and those who don't.

2. ***A foundation that was never finished***

- **Luke 14:29** - Once he [the builder] has laid the *foundation*, and then discovered that he cannot finish the project... others will laugh at him.
- This illustration is used to teach us the need to "count the cost" of being a disciple of Jesus, *before* we decide to become one.

3. ***A foundation that was shaken***

- **Acts 16:26** - The *foundations* of the prison were shaken by an earthquake, causing the doors and the prisoners' chains to come loose.
- This account is an illustration of how God providentially works in the circumstances of life, to accomplish his purposes. [Read the entire passage, to see what happened. In the end, because of everything that occurred, the prison guard became a disciple of Jesus.]

B. A city's foundation: Part of the description of the "eternal Jerusalem"

1. ***This city is worth waiting for***

- **Hebrews 11:10** - [Abraham was content to live in a tent (something that does not have a foundation)] ... because he was looking forward to a city with *foundations* - one designed and built by God.
- There are many illustrations in the book of Hebrews, which contrast what is temporary (example - the tent) to what is permanent (example - the city).

2. ***A description of the foundations***

- **Revelation 21:14** - The wall of the city (the new, eternal Jerusalem) had 12 *foundations*. (Inscribed on them were the names of the 12 apostles.)
- **Revelation 21:19** - The wall of the city... its *foundations* were decorated with many kinds of precious stones. The first *foundation stone* was... (a list follows, describing the precious stones on the 12 foundations).

C. The earth's foundation: built/laid by God

- **Hebrews 1:10** - You (the Lord) laid the *foundations* of the earth. You also made the heavens... [v. 11 - They will perish/wear out, but you will remain forever.]
 - Note the contrast between creation and the Creator.
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PART 2 - Our Spiritual Foundation

A. What is the foundation?

1. *The Person: Jesus Christ*

- **1 Corinthians 3:11** - No other *foundation* can be laid, except Jesus Christ. [At Corinth, Paul had already laid this foundation.]

2. *The message:*

- The message of the apostles and prophets [with Jesus as the "cornerstone" - the one who holds it all together]
 - **Ephesians 2:20** - You are built on the *foundation* of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. [In this passage, God's people are described as the building.]
 - The Old Testament prophets did not understand as much about Jesus, as did the apostles, since he had not yet been born. Some of their writings have direct reference to Jesus (example - many of the prophetic writings); at other times, their focus on Jesus was *indirect*. But either way, their message would complement - not contradict - the message of the apostles. (The apostles, on the other hand, would reaffirm the message of the prophets - along with revealing what had not been previously made known.)
 - Note: Since the message is Jesus Christ, perhaps this verse could also fit under the previous heading, "The Person: Jesus Christ."
- The basic teachings of the faith
 - **Hebrews 6:1 (+)** - The *foundation* (basic teachings) of the faith... includes the following: repentance, trust in God, baptisms, the laying-on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, eternal judgment. [The focus: We must go *beyond* these basic teachings: We must grow-up. (See Hebrews 5:12 and following.)]

B. It's integrity- a firm foundation for our faith

1. *Those on this foundation can never be moved*

- **2 Timothy 2:19a** - God's solid *foundation* is one that stands firm - contrasted with the easily-destroyed faith that some have - v. 18. (Compare this to the "good foundation vs. no foundation" illustration, in the first part of this study.)

2. *It is based on God's sovereign knowledge:* What he knows to be *true* - such as the identity of those who belong to him - cannot become *untrue*.

- **2 Timothy 2:19b** - God's foundation... is sealed (indicating its authenticity and integrity) with two inscriptions. The first is: "The Lord knows those who belong to him." (He's not fooled by fake expressions of faith.)

3. *It is based on a specific human response:* Turning from evil.
 - **Timothy 2:19c** - The second inscription on this solid foundation is: "Everyone who claims to belong to Jesus must turn from his wicked conduct." (The *necessity* of a changed life: This is the concept of "repentance" - changing the way one thinks and acts.)

C. An eternal foundation vs. a short-lived one

- We need to focus on an eternal foundation: We must change from our short-lived focus on love for self and for possessions, to a focus that has eternal significance: a genuine love for other people.
- The context of the verse (1 Timothy 6:19): Those who are rich in monetary wealth have a wealth that comes and goes - there is no guaranteed certainty that it will continue to exist. [Indeed, at the point of death, it is *all* lost!] Such people should change their focus to one of being "rich in good deeds."
- **1 Timothy 6:19** - In doing this, they will be storing-up (like a treasure) a good, strong *foundation* that will be of value in the coming age. They will be taking hold of real life - a life that *does* have certainty (in contrast to a life focused on money and possessions).

D. The role of preaching/teaching: a "construction project."

1. *The foundation - the introduction to the good news about Jesus and what he has done*
 - **Romans 15:20** - Paul's desire was to preach the good news where Christ was not already known, so that he would not be building on someone else's *foundation*.
 - This was the primary focus to which God called him. His description of this calling is seen in the quotation from Isaiah 52:15 - which he mentions in Romans 15:21.
 - **1 Corinthians 3:10a** - [At Corinth] Paul laid the *foundation*...
2. *The building - everything after the foundation*
 - This involves everything that follows the introduction to the good news
 - **1 Corinthians 3:10b** - [At Corinth, Paul laid the *foundation*...] ... someone else [Apollos] is building on it.
 - Warnings to the builders
 - **1 Corinthians 3:10c** - Each person needs to be careful how he builds.
 - **1 Corinthians 3:11** - First, there is only one legitimate *foundation* (Jesus Christ); none other can be laid.
 - **1 Corinthians 3:12-13** (+) - Second, everything a person builds on this *foundation* will be tested by fire... [This will test the quality of what he has built.]
 - See the previous verses in this passage. Using a different analogy (planting and harvesting), Paul tells us that it is *God* who is responsible for the ultimate success of these endeavors. *Don't take the credit for yourself!*

3. **Correcting a misconception, concerning the "building materials"** - 1 Corinthians 3:12-15
- This passage focuses on the success (or failure) of the leaders (such as Apollos), in helping the people of the church to "grow up" and mature in the faith.
 - If a leader does a poor job of building-up the believers in the faith, his efforts will be of no value. But that does not mean he becomes unsaved (v.15). He just won't be rewarded for accomplishing anything (since he *didn't* accomplish anything). This is one of the reasons why a leader must be careful to do things the way Scripture tells him to do it.
 - This passage does *not* refer to the "spiritual fruit" of a saved person.
 - Some people attempt to use this passage to justify (or excuse) sin in their lives. They claim that their sinful actions are the "wood, hay, and straw," mentioned in v.12. Then they say that v. 15 "proves" that they are saved, in spite of their continued sinful lifestyles, and their unwillingness to repent.
 - The Bible, in contrast, says that their "fruit" (their sinful lifestyle) actually shows that they do *not* belong to God. They may strongly insist that they are saved, but according to Scripture, their so-called "salvation" is not genuine. Compare to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, which shows us that a changed lifestyle is a part of salvation. Paul reminds the Christians at Corinth that people with such sinful lifestyles *cannot* inherit the Kingdom of God. It's just plain impossible! It is only because *God changed their lives*, that the Christians at Corinth were now able to have a part in God's kingdom.
 - The fact that a change occurs in one's life does *not* imply that Christians have no struggles with sin, and or that they don't experience "temporary setbacks." The Corinthians were definitely *not* sinless! The flesh (which desires to live the old way) continues to fight against the spirit (which desires to follow the way of God). But when the changes occur (that is, when a person becomes a disciple of Jesus), the sins, which were once enjoyed like friends, now become full-scale enemies. (See Romans 7, which focuses on this struggle.)

E. Establishing a foundation of faith and love

1. *Faith/trust*

- The key emphasis of this passage (Colossians 1:21-23) is our reconciliation to God.
 - What this means: In the past, we were enemies of God (because of our sins, our rebellious hearts, etc.). But now, we have become friends of God, because of what Christ has done. And because of this, we will be able to stand before God (at the Day of Judgment), holy, blameless, and free from accusation.
- This wonderful promise and future hope applies only to those who have a type of faith that endures - those whose faith is firmly built on the strong foundation, which is found in the message that Paul proclaimed:
 - **Colossians 1:23** -...if you continue in the faith, *firmly established* and steadfast, not moving away from the (message of) hope, which is found in the good news that I/we have proclaimed to you.
- See also Colossians 1:5, for more about this good news. See the section (above) about 2 Timothy 2:19, for more about this type of faith that remains steadfast. (See also 2 Timothy 2:18, which makes reference to the opposite: a "short-lived" faith.)

2. *Love*

- This love (Ephesians 3:17) is associated with Christ, who dwells in us, and whose moral character is seen expressed in our lives. (Of course, this passage only applies to those who belong to Christ - those who have changed lives.)
- In this passage, we see one of Paul's prayers for the people. Two of the things he prays for are:
 - (Ephesians 3:17a) - ... that, through God's power, Christ will be dwelling in your hearts (as you trust him).
 - **Ephesians 3:17b** - ... that you will be rooted and *grounded / firmly established* in love, so that (v. 18) you will begin to comprehend the incomprehensible greatness of Christ's love.
- It may be debated, as to whether this "love" focuses on *God's love for us* (an unchanging love which provides a firm foundation for our salvation), or on *our love for God and other people* (a love which is sometimes weak, and needs to be reinforced - made stronger - as we grow in our salvation). As the impact of God's love increases in our hearts (as we become more aware of its reality and effect), our love for others (and for God) will also increase... and so, *both* expressions of love will be present!

3. *In some respects, these two concepts - faith and love - could be considered a summary of the entire Christian life.*

F. Being kept on a firm foundation... by God - 1 Peter 5:10

- The background (the recurring theme in 1 Peter): God, the source of all undeserved kindness (grace), has called us to share in his eternal glory in Christ. And because this is true, we have the following promise to look to, when we are experiencing trials:
- **1 Peter 5:10** - After you have suffered for a while, God himself will restore, support, and strengthen you, and will *establish* you (= place you on a firm foundation).
- Note that the source of our salvation (= God, who will enable us to share in Christ's future glory) is also the source of our strength (so that we can endure and overcome trials in this present life).