

Faith, Obedience, Grace

Building Your Spiritual House

The Bible employs the powerful metaphor of constructing a house to illustrate the life of faith—a spiritual edifice built for God's kingdom, where faith, obedience, and grace interweave as essential pillars. This imagery unfolds progressively across key passages, beginning with Jesus' foundational teaching in Matthew 7:24-27, expanding through Paul's practical instructions in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15, unifying believers in Ephesians 2:19-22, and culminating in Peter's depiction of living stones in 1 Peter 2:4-8. Together, these verses create a seamless ebb and flow: from wisely choosing the immovable foundation that withstands storms, to carefully selecting building materials that endure judgment, to becoming part of a holy household knit together by grace, and finally to aligning as vibrant components around Christ the chief cornerstone. This study, inspired by the author's dream that prompted a deep biblical exploration, reveals how obedience to God's word constructs a resilient spiritual house that honors Him and withstands eternity.

The Wise Foundation: Hearing and Obeying (Matthew 7:24-27)

Jesus begins this architectural metaphor at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, contrasting two builders to emphasize the primacy of obedience rooted in faith. "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock," He declares (v. 24). The rains descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against the house, yet it did not fall because its foundation was secure—symbolizing a life anchored in trusting and applying God's truth. In contrast, the foolish builder hears the same words but does not act on them, building on sand; when the storm strikes, "it fell—and great was its fall" (v. 27). This parable establishes the critical starting point: the foundation is Jesus Christ Himself (as Paul later clarifies in 1 Corinthians 3:11), and obedience is what secures the house upon Him, ensuring endurance through life's trials.

Building with Enduring Materials: Tested by Fire (1 Corinthians 3:9-15)

Flowing directly from Jesus' emphasis on wise building, Paul extends the metaphor in 1 Corinthians 3:9-15, addressing divisions in the church and stressing responsibility in construction. "For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building," Paul writes (v. 9). He explicitly identifies the foundation: "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (v. 11)—perfectly aligning with the immovable base of Matthew's parable. Upon this sole foundation, each builder must work carefully: "If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light" (vv. 12-13). Fire will test the quality of each person's work; enduring materials—acts of faithful obedience, eternal-minded service, and doctrine rooted in Christ—will survive and bring reward, while perishable ones will burn away, though the builder will be saved "only as one escaping through the flames" (v. 15). This builds on Jesus' teaching by adding accountability: not just laying the foundation correctly, but constructing with lasting integrity.

United as God's Household: Growing into a Holy Temple (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Paul further develops the imagery in Ephesians 2:19-22, shifting to the corporate dimension where grace unites believers into one divine dwelling. No longer "foreigners and strangers," Gentiles are now "fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household" (v. 19), "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (v. 20). In Him, "the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord" (v. 21), and believers are "being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by

his Spirit” (v. 22). This flows seamlessly from the prior passages: the foundation is Christ (Matthew and 1 Corinthians), now detailed as including apostolic and prophetic teaching, with Christ as the chief cornerstone that perfectly aligns every part. Grace is the binding agent—Christ's reconciling work joins Jew and Gentile, preventing division and enabling steady growth into God's sacred habitation.

Living Stones Aligned with the Cornerstone: Acceptance or Stumbling (1 Peter 2:4-8)

Peter brings the metaphor to vivid life in 1 Peter 2:4-8, portraying the house as a dynamic, spiritual reality. “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but in the sight of God chosen and precious—you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house” (vv. 4-5). Believers become a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Peter quotes Scripture to affirm Christ as “the stone the builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone” (v. 7, from Psalm 118:22), and “a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall” (v. 8, from Isaiah 8:14). For those who believe and obey, He is precious alignment and honor; for the disobedient, He is the point of stumbling. This culminates the progression: the foundation (Matthew/1 Corinthians), the unified temple (Ephesians), now animated with living participants actively fitted around the cornerstone through ongoing obedience.

Weaving It All Together: A Cohesive Spiritual Edifice

These passages interlock with perfect harmony, revealing God's comprehensive design for the spiritual house. Matthew 7:24-27 establishes the imperative: hear Christ's words and obey, securing the house on the immovable foundation (explicitly Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 3:11). 1 Corinthians 3:9-15 adds depth, urging careful construction with materials that withstand fiery testing, emphasizing personal responsibility upon that sole foundation. Ephesians 2:19-22 expands to the communal scale, showing how grace joins believers—built on apostles and prophets—with Christ as the chief cornerstone that ensures perfect alignment and growth into God's temple. Finally, 1 Peter 2:4-8 infuses vitality, transforming static materials into living stones actively built around the living Cornerstone, where faith yields priesthood and honor, while disbelief leads to stumbling. The unified message is clear: Jesus Christ is the exclusive foundation and chief cornerstone; obedience constructs enduringly; grace unites and sustains; the result is a holy, living temple indwelt by God, resilient against every storm and judgment. Disobedience at any point risks collapse or loss, but full alignment with Christ produces an eternal dwelling that glorifies Him. This integrated vision, born from the author's dream-inspired study, calls every believer to build wisely and obediently for God's kingdom.

The Foundation: Christ, Apostles, and Old Testament Prophets

The spiritual house rests on a foundation of Christ, the apostles, and the Old Testament prophets (Ephesians 2:20). Each plays a distinct role in anchoring believers' faith and guiding obedience.

- **Christ, the Cornerstone:** Jesus is the cornerstone, aligning the entire structure (Ephesians 2:20; Isaiah 28:16). His life, teachings, and sacrifice are the basis for faith and obedience. As the divine Word (John 1:1), He underpins all scripture, though He did not write it Himself (2 Timothy 3:16). Every aspect of the spiritual house aligns with Him to remain true.
- **Apostles:** Chosen by Christ, apostles like Paul, Peter, and John laid the foundation through their inspired New Testament writings (e.g., Gospels, epistles) under the Holy Spirit's guidance (2 Peter 1:20-21). Their teachings instruct believers in righteous living and obedience to God's will (John 16:13-14).
- **Old Testament Prophets:** Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Moses, inspired by God, wrote scriptures foretelling Christ's coming (e.g., Isaiah 53; Deuteronomy 18:15). Their writings, alongside apostolic teachings, form the foundation of faith (Ephesians 2:20). Obedience to their inspired message aligns believers with Christ, while rejecting it leads to stumbling (1 Peter 2:8).

Examples of Cornerstones and Foundations

Here are some examples of Christ's teachings, layered with the teachings of Apostles or Prophets.

Cornerstone	Foundations
Matthew 7:24-27	1 Corinthians 3:9-15, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:5-8
Matthew 13:33, Matthew 16:5-12	1 Corinthians 5:6-13, Galatians 5:1-15
Matthew 5:5	Psalm 37
Matthew 5:43-48	Proverbs 25:21-22, Romans 12:20-21
Matthew 5:21-30, Matthew 15:18-20, Mark 7:20-23	Galatians 5:19-21, Romans 1:29-31, Proverbs 6:16-19

With much reading, the reader can discover more.

Faith – πίστις - *pistis*

- 1) *conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervour born of faith and joined with it*
 - a. *relating to God*
 1. *the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ*
 - b. *1b) relating to Christ*
 1. *a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God*
 - c. *the religious beliefs of Christians*
 - d. *belief with the predominate idea of trust (or confidence) whether in God or in Christ, springing from faith in the same*
- 2) *fidelity, faithfulness*
 - a. *the character of one who can be relied on*

Psalm 14: 1

- Faith isn't just an option, it's an attitude of the heart.
- You can be religious and yet still be a practical atheist. (Do you live as though there's a God?)

Hebrews 11: 1-3

- Faith isn't just "believing in something you know isn't true anyway"!
- It's not just a leap into the dark. (It's a leap into the light!)
- It is spiritual certainty.

Hebrews 11: 6

- It is impossible to please God without faith.
- We can and must believe that God exists.
- He is there, and we will find him if we earnestly seek him.

James 2: 14 26

- Faith without actions is useless.
- Striving to be righteous: deal with sin. • Striving to have a relationship with God: prayer, Bible study.
- Striving to help others: church, evangelism, caring for the needy.
- Faith is complete only when it is active faith.
- Abraham's faith and actions worked together. In Genesis 22, God knew Abraham had true faith only at the moment of obedience (22: 12).
- No one is justified by faith without deeds (James 2: 24).
- Note: Because of his belief in "justification by faith alone" and "once saved, always saved," Luther (1500s) rejected the entire book of James. He also rejected Hebrews, since this book repeatedly states that it's possible to lose our salvation. (Luther disagreed.)

Hebrews 11:4-10

- By faith Abel *offered* an acceptable sacrifice to God (**Hebrews 11:4**)
- By faith Noah *built* the ark to save his family after being warned by God (**Hebrews 11:7**)
- By faith Abraham *obeyed* and *went* to a foreign land because he understood that God was calling him to an even better home (i.e., heaven) (**Hebrews 11:8-10**)
- Faith in action is the righteous response to the living words of God

Faith in God's Promises (Faithful action is defined by fulfilling the conditions of God's promises)

1. God Desires to Bless Us

- A. God's dealings with humankind has always been characterized by gracious offers of divine blessing with conditions of faith and obedience to his will—i.e., promises in the form of conditional statements (if... then...)
- B. Abraham, known in the Bible as the 'father of those with faith,' left everything behind and followed God to the Promised Land—receiving the blessing was dependent on his obedience (**Genesis 12:1-4**)
 - a. These promises would later be described as God's covenant with Abraham

2. The Old and New Covenants

- A. As mentioned in the previous lesson, the Bible is divided into two major divisions: The Old Testament and *The New Testament* describing the two different covenants found within them
- B. In history, God has made covenants with two very specific groups of people: the first with the people of Israel called out of Egypt, and the second with Christians *called out of the world* (**Hebrews 8:6-13**)
- C. Although the Old Covenant is most often thought of in terms of commandments, it is actually the promises behind those laws that are the foundation of the covenant (**Deuteronomy 7:12-15**)
 - a. Unfortunately, the Israelites lack of faithfulness voided their eligibility to receive God's blessings (**Isa 1:2-7**)

3. Some Examples of the Better Promises of the New Covenant

- A. *If* we seek God's kingdom and righteousness first, then God will take care of all our physical needs (**Matthew 6:33**)

- B. *If* we come to Jesus, take his yoke and give our burdens to him, then we will find spiritual rest (**Matthew 11:28-30**)
 - C. *If* we repent and are baptised, then we will receive the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of God's indwelling Holy Spirit (**Acts 2:36-39**)
 - D. Perseverance in doing God's will assures us of God's blessing (**Hebrews 10:35-39**)
4. Obeying God's Teaching Leads to a Knowledge of the Truth
- A. By faith Abraham obeyed and went to a foreign land because he understood that God was calling him to an even better home (i.e., heaven) (**Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16**)
 - B. By faith Abraham obeyed and offered Isaac because he believe that God could even raise the dead (**Hebrews 11:17-19**)
5. Our Lives Need To Be In Agreement With What We Believe (**1 Timothy 4:16**)
- A. We must believe the right things and live the right way
 - a. Both receiving salvation and sharing the message effectively are connected to our life and doctrine
 - b. Spend time this week reflecting on what you believe and how well you are living out those beliefs

Obedience - ὑπακοή - hupakoē

- 1) *obedience, compliance, submission*
- 2) *obedience rendered to anyone's counsels, an obedience shown in observing the requirements of Christianity*

Obey - ὑπακούω - hupakouō

- 1) *to listen, to harken*
 - a. *of one who on the knock at the door comes to listen who it is, (the duty of a porter)*
- 2) *to harken to a command*
 - a. *to obey, be obedient to, submit to*

Old Testament teaching—Let's examine three people under the old covenant.

Saul—1 Samuel 15 (selected)

- 15:1–3: Saul is asked to obey a specific command.
- 15:7–9: Saul only *partly* obeys the command.
- 15:12–31: He puts up quite a fight before admitting he has sinned. Rationalizations!
- Conclusions:
 - a. Partial obedience is disobedience!
 - b. Selective obedience is disobedience!
 - c. It's possible to be completely deceived about whether or not we have been obedient.

Uzzah—2 Samuel 6:1–7

- God views disobeying his word as serious!
- Sincerity does not remove guilt (1 Corinthians 4:4).
- Does this sound unfair? David thought so too, until he learned what God’s word said (see 1 Chronicles 15:12–15).

Naaman—2 Kings 5:1–15

- 5:10: God’s word is plain and straightforward.
- 5:11: Beware an emotional reaction to God’s word.
- 5:11: Surrender preconceived ideas.
- 5:12: No, there are not any alternatives to doing what God says.
- 5:13: We need help to be objective and reason things out.
- 5:14: God blesses obedience.
- 5:14: *Approximate* obedience is insufficient (five dips in Jordan, or seven dips in Pharpar).
- 5:15: We learn to appreciate and reverence God once we actually begin to obey him.

New Testament teaching: Let’ see what Jesus and his followers taught about obedience.

Matthew 7:21–23

- These people were religious, active, and possibly sincere—but lost.
- Only those who obey God will make it to heaven.
- It’s possible to believe that you have a saved relationship with God yet not be saved at all.

John 14:15, 23–24

- Obedience isn’t just part of the old law; Jesus and the New Testament discuss obedience again and again.
- Love and obedience are virtually equivalent.

1 John 2:3–6

- 2:3: You can be sure of your salvation if you’re living as an obedient disciple of Jesus.
- 2:4: If you claim you know him but are disobedient, you are a liar.
- 2:6: We must follow Jesus’ lifestyle! Obedience is a central part of Christianity.

Conclusion

As we see, obedience was not rendered optional by the cross. It has always been crucial for a true follower of God. What has been keeping you from obeying?

Grace – *ἀρις* - charis

1) *grace*

a. *that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech*

2) *good will, loving-kindness, favour*

- a. *of the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues*

3) *what is due to grace*

- a. *the spiritual condition of one governed by the power of divine grace*
- b. *the token or proof of grace, benefit*
 - i. *a gift of grace*
 - ii. *benefit, bounty*

4) *thanks, (for benefits, services, favours), recompense, reward*

The Apostle Paul appreciated God's grace perhaps more than any other man of his day, and he tells us that's why he accomplished so much (1 Corinthians 15:10). Since it's essential for us to understand the concept of grace and to teach it clearly, we choose Paul for a balanced understanding of grace.

Ephesians 2:1–10

- We are dead to God in our sins. When we live the way the world wants us to, or follow our own desires, we become objects of wrath.
- Because of grace (God's love for us), we can be saved. We don't deserve it, but it's free for us as a gift if we accept it.
- It's through our faith in Christ that we're saved.
- God's love motivates us to do good works.

Romans 5:6–11

- Definition of grace: God loving us enough to allow Christ to die for our sins when we were his enemies. Acronym: **God's Riches at Christ's Expense.**
- We were lost sinners deserving only punishment, but he sent Christ to suffer in our place.
- Through Jesus' blood we are saved from God's wrath (blood must be shed for forgiveness [Hebrews 9:22, 28]).

Titus 2:11–14

- Grace means salvation for us.
- God's love leads us to purify ourselves from sin; we won't take advantage of God's grace.
- Since grace overcomes passion, it isn't a license for sin (Jude 4). Grace isn't cheap—it cost Jesus his life.

1 Corinthians 1:18–25

- The cross is God's powerful solution for sin.
- Without an understanding of God's love, the message of the cross will be foolishness to us.

2 Corinthians 5:14–21

- Christ's love demands a response! (See 1 Corinthians 15:9–10.)
- Jesus bore our sins to the extent that he became sin, or a sin offering.
- God's love motivates us to live for him, and to speak for him.

1 Corinthians 15:9–10

- Though it is not true that we are saved by working hard, it is true that those most affected by God’s grace are God’s hardest workers!

Proverbs 3:34

- This verse talks about humility associated with Grace
- Quoted by Peter and James (1 Peter 5:5, James 4:6)

Grace Is Not a License for Sin or Laziness

Some misunderstand grace as permission to continue in sin (or laziness), thinking “God will forgive anyway.” But Scripture strongly refutes this:

- “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:1-2).
- Grace teaches us “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” and to live “soberly, righteously, and godly” (Titus 2:11-12).
- Those who twist grace into license for immorality are condemned (Jude 4). God's grace is costly—it cost Christ His life—and it empowers us to overcome sin, not excuse it. As Paul said, “By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). True grace fuels zealous obedience and hard work for God's kingdom, never laziness.

Famous examples of Faith, Obedience and Grace

1. **Abraham:**

- **Faith:** Abraham is known as the “father of faith” for his belief in God's promises. He left his homeland based on God's instruction, not knowing where he was going (Genesis 12:1-4).
- **Obedience:** His obedience is most famously shown when he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, trusting in God's plan (Genesis 22:1-18).
- **Grace:** Despite his faults, like doubting God's promise when he laughed about having a child at an old age (Genesis 17:17), God extended grace to him, fulfilling His covenant despite Abraham's human weaknesses (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3).

2. **Noah:**

- **Faith:** Noah believed God's warning about the flood when there was no sign of it coming (Hebrews 11:7).
- **Obedience:** He meticulously followed God's instructions to build the ark, a task that took many years amidst potential ridicule (Genesis 6:22).
- **Grace:** God showed grace by saving Noah and his family from the flood, establishing a covenant with him afterward (Genesis 6:8).

3. **Moses:**

- **Faith:** Moses had faith in God's power to deliver Israel from Egypt, even confronting Pharaoh with confidence in God's promise (Exodus 3:10-12).
- **Obedience:** He followed God's detailed instructions for leading the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness (Exodus 3-40).

- **Grace:** Despite his initial reluctance and later moments of disobedience (like striking the rock), God's grace was evident as Moses was chosen to lead despite his stuttering and was allowed to see the Promised Land before his death (Numbers 12:3, Deuteronomy 34:1-4).

4. **Mary, the mother of Jesus:**

- **Faith:** She believed the angel Gabriel's announcement that she would bear the Son of God, despite the social implications (Luke 1:38).
- **Obedience:** Her response to the angel was one of submission, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
- **Grace:** God's grace was upon her, as she was chosen to be the mother of Jesus, a role that required immense faith and obedience (Luke 1:28-30).

5. **David:**

- **Faith:** David's faith was demonstrated in his confrontation with Goliath, trusting in God's deliverance (1 Samuel 17:45-47).
- **Obedience:** Despite his many failings, David sought to obey God by following His commands, notably when he refused to harm Saul, God's anointed (1 Samuel 24:6).
- **Grace:** David experienced God's grace repeatedly, especially in his repentance after his sin with Bathsheba, where he was forgiven and described as a man after God's own heart (Psalm 51, Acts 13:22).

Addendum

Why Old Testament Prophets in Ephesians 2:20?

Ephesians 2:20 states that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone." The term "prophets" most likely refers to Old Testament prophets for the following reasons:

1. **Biblical Context:** In Ephesians, Paul emphasizes the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church, built on a shared foundation (Ephesians 2:14-18). The Old Testament prophets, who foretold the Messiah and God's plan for all nations (e.g., Isaiah 42:6, 49:6), provide a scriptural foundation that complements the apostles' New Testament teachings. This aligns with the historical Jewish scriptures revered by early Christians.
2. **Scriptural Precedence:** The Old Testament is frequently cited as the foundation for Christian faith in the New Testament (e.g., Romans 1:2; Hebrews 1:1-2). Jesus Himself affirmed that the Law and the Prophets (Old Testament) pointed to Him (Matthew 5:17; Luke 24:44). Including Old Testament prophets in Ephesians 2:20 reinforces this continuity.
3. **Role of Prophets:** Old Testament prophets primarily delivered God's inspired scriptures (2 Peter 1:21), which served as the authoritative foundation for the early church alongside apostolic writings. New Testament prophets, while gifted in revelation and encouragement (1 Corinthians 14:3), are not typically associated with laying a foundational scripture for the church.
4. **Grammatical Structure:** In Ephesians 2:20, "apostles and prophets" are grouped as a single foundation, suggesting a historical sequence where Old Testament prophets preceded and complemented the apostles' work. If New Testament prophets were intended, Paul might have distinguished them separately or used terms like "prophets in the church" (as in Ephesians 4:11).
5. **Theological Consistency:** The cornerstone (Christ) and foundation (apostles and Old Testament prophets) represent the unified revelation of God's plan across both covenants. Including New Testament prophets risks redundancy, as their role overlaps with apostles in the early church (e.g., Acts 11:27-28).

Alternative View: Old and New Testament Prophets

Some scholars argue that "prophets" in Ephesians 2:20 includes both Old and New Testament prophets, citing:

- **New Testament Prophecy:** Ephesians 4:11 mentions prophets as a gift to the church, suggesting a role in its foundation (e.g., Agabus in Acts 11:28).
- **Early Church Context:** New Testament prophets provided revelation before the canon was complete, potentially contributing to the church's foundation.

However, this view is less likely because:

- New Testament prophets primarily offered situational guidance (e.g., Acts 21:10-11), not authoritative scriptures like Old Testament prophets.
- The foundational role in Ephesians 2:20 emphasizes enduring scripture (Old Testament and apostolic writings), not temporary prophetic utterances.
- Paul's focus in Ephesians is on the unity of God's plan across history, best served by linking Old Testament prophets with apostles.

Thus, interpreting "prophets" as Old Testament prophets provides a clearer, more consistent foundation for the church's faith, rooted in the enduring scriptures that point to Christ.

Practical Application: Building Your House

To construct a strong spiritual house, integrate faith, obedience, and grace:

- **Strengthen Faith:** Study scripture daily (e.g., Psalm 119) to deepen trust in Christ's teachings as the cornerstone.
- **Obey the Foundation:** Follow the inspired teachings of apostles and Old Testament prophets (e.g., apply Matthew 7:24-27 by acting on Jesus' words). Align with Christ to avoid stumbling (1 Peter 2:8).
- **Rely on Grace:** Trust God's unmerited favor to sustain you as part of His household (Ephesians 2:8-9, 19-22). Share grace by encouraging others in faith.
- **Weekly Challenge:** Set one faith goal (e.g., read Psalm 119 to understand God's word), one obedient action (e.g., forgive someone as per Matthew 6:14-15), and one act of grace (e.g., serve a neighbor). Study 1 Peter 2:5-8 to align with Christ, the cornerstone.