

1 Corinthians 3:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

Analysis

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble (χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, λίθους τιμίους, ξύλα, χόρτον, καλάμην, chryson, argyron, lithous timious, xyla, chorton, kalamēn)—Paul categorizes building materials into two groups: permanent (gold, silver, costly stones) versus combustible (wood, hay, stubble). These represent the quality of doctrine, methods, and lives built upon the Christ-foundation. Gold/silver/precious stones endure refining fire; wood/hay/stubble are consumed instantly.

The metaphor extends beyond formal teaching to include all ministry work—pastoral care, evangelism, discipleship, church governance. 'Gold' might represent sound doctrine taught with love; 'stubble' could be true doctrine taught with pride, or false teaching mixed with truth. The categories are not binary (heresy vs. orthodoxy) but graduated—some work is excellent, some acceptable, some worthless, despite all being built on the true foundation. This assumes genuine believers whose work will be evaluated at the bēma (judgment seat of Christ, 2 Corinthians 5:10), not unbelievers facing condemnation.

Historical Context

Ancient builders used these exact materials: gold and silver for ornamentation, stone for structure, timber for framing, thatch and stubble for roofing. Fire was the primary threat to buildings; only stone and metal survived conflagrations.

Paul's audience would immediately grasp the metaphor—some building is permanent, some temporary, all subject to testing.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. If your teaching, parenting, or ministry were tested by fire today, what would survive—gold or stubble?
2. How can you evaluate in advance whether you're building with permanent or combustible materials—what criteria distinguish the two?
3. What stubble have you been building with—shortcuts, pragmatism, popularity-seeking, or doctrinal compromise—that needs to be replaced with gold?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	δέ	τις	ἐποικοδομεῖ	ἐπὶ	τὸν	θεμέλιον	τοῦτον
G1487	Now	G5100	build	upon	G3588	foundation	this
	G1161		G2026	G1909		G2310	G5126
χρυσόν	ἄργυρον	λίθους	τιμίους	ξύλα	χόρτον	καλάμην	
gold	silver	stones	precious	wood	hay	stubble	
G5557	G696	G3037	G5093	G3586	G5528	G2562	

Additional Cross-References

2 Timothy 4:3 (Parallel theme): For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

2 Timothy 3:7 (Parallel theme): Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Timothy 2:20 (Parallel theme): But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.

Revelation 3:18 (Parallel theme): I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

Revelation 21:18 (Parallel theme): And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

Psalms 19:10 (Parallel theme): More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

Psalms 119:72 (Parallel theme): The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

1 Peter 1:7 (Parallel theme): That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

Revelation 2:14 (Parallel theme): But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

Hebrews 13:9 (Parallel theme): Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.