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Sermon Notes

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Building Each Other Up

Romans 14:19-23

Introduction

From the very beginning of history, man has been fascinated with astonishing and impressive building projects.

Of course, the first awe-inspiring human building project was the Tower of Babel, created in defiance of God for the glory of man, created with state of the art technology and a desire to reach for the heavens on a man-made stairway

But it didn't end there. Humanity has continued to build impressive buildings even after God interfered at Babel. The Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, a marvel of human cooperation (especially by slave labor) and a mystery of human precision in engineering. It still stands today.

Ancient building projects have been done as the fruit of all great human societies, the flower of a great people making a great name for themselves: the Roman Coliseum, the Great Wall of China, the great cathedral in Chartres, the Taj Mahal... all built by humans and gloried in pridefully by humans.

This has continued into the modern era: Frank Lloyd Wright, the American architect who designed Fallingwater, a home straddling a waterfall in a Pennsylvania forest, had the ambition to be the greatest architect in history.

In 1956, Frank Lloyd Wright proposed a mile-high structure known as either **Mile High Illinois**, **Illinois Sky-City**, or simply **The Illinois**. The design, intended to be built in Chicago, was to have included 528 stories, with a gross area of 18.46 million square feet. It was never built, although if it had been, it would have been by far the tallest building in the world.

But now, there are plans in Japan for something far more astonishing: there is a building project planned that they say will be the greatest human building project in history

The **Shimizu TRY 2004 Mega-City Pyramid** is a proposed project for construction of a massive pyramid over Tokyo Bay in Japan. The structure will be 12 times higher than the Great Pyramid at Giza, and would house 750,000 people. If built, it will be the largest man-made structure on Earth. The structure will be 2,004 meters(1.24 miles) high (that's almost

five times taller than the Sears Tower in Chicago) and will answer Tokyo's increasing lack of space.

Because the world's seismically active Pacific Ring of Fire cuts right through Japan, the external structure of the pyramid will be an open network of megatrusses, supporting struts made from carbon nanotubes to allow the pyramid to stand against high winds, earthquakes, and tsunamis.

BUT All of these awesome building projects have something in common: they are part of the present world that will be rolled up like a dirty garment and thrown away when God creates the New Heaven and New Earth... as impressive as they are, they are all temporary

AND All of these human building projects are as NOTHING with God's massive building project through time: the Church of Jesus Christ

It is a spiritual temple that is comprised of believers from every tribe, language, people and nations

It is a spiritual temple that is made up of living stones, individual believers from every generation of human history

- God has been working on it since before the foundation of the world
- God is the architect, who drew up the plans
- God is the builder who is executing the plans
- God is the owner who will get all the glory

God the Father gave the command, God the Son paid for it by His blood, God the Holy Spirit is overseeing the day to day construction

This human structure alone is survive through eternity

This human building project alone will last... and you, my Christian friend, will avoid wasting your lives only if you are daily involved in its construction

It is this work that Paul has in mind in Romans 14: The eternal dwelling place of the living God; the church of Jesus Christ

Romans 14:19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Romans 14:20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food.

I. God's Magnificent Building Project: The Church

A. Solomon's Glorious Temple

1. David had the idea; God had a better vision
2. Plans given to David; Executed by Solomon
3. Glorious, but small... and earthly

1 Kings 6:2 The temple that King Solomon built for the LORD was sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty high.

Smaller than our sanctuary here

And certainly too small to contain God

1 Kings 8:27 "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!

AND it was still an earthly shadow of the reality

Hebrews 8:5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.

4. Concept now obsolete

Hebrews 8:13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear

B. Christ's More Glorious Temple

1. A Spiritual temple
 - a. Solomon's temple was made of earthly stones and bricks and acacia wood and gold dug from the hills and mountains
 - b. Christ's temple is spiritual... a spiritual dwelling place in which God will live by His Spirit
2. The people of God are the temple
 - a. Ephesians 2

Ephesians 2:21-22 In [Christ Jesus] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

- b. 1 Corinthians 3

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

c. Hebrews 3

Hebrews 3:6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

d. 1 Peter 2

1 Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone-- rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

C. Ongoing Construction for Millennia

1. Jesus' promise: "I go to prepare a place for you"

John 14:2-3 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

The truth is that Christ has not so much been preparing US for the PLACE been preparing US to BE the place... we will BE the dwelling place of God

2. The dwelling place Christ has been working on for all of human history

Revelation 3:12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it.

3. Ongoing even today, as the gospel continues to go on
4. People from every tribe and language fitted for a place

D. Our Eternal Dwelling Place and God's

1. Medieval cathedrals magnificent... but temporary
2. Our eternal dwelling place is not man-made
3. Revelation: No temple in the city

Revelation 21:22-23 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

4. Our eternal dwelling place is God, and we are His... perfect unity
 - a. Amazing!! In 1 Corinthians 3, we ARE the temple of God

- b. In Revelation 21, God is the temple
- c. Perfect unity, perfect dwelling together in heaven

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

II. God's Fellow-Builders

A. God Has Ordained Us to Build with Him

- 1. "God's fellow-workers"

1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

What an incredible thought! To be laboring side by side with God on the eternal building in which we will all live!!

- 2. Romans 14: do what leads to mutual edification

^{NAU} ***Romans 14:19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.***

- a. The Greek word used here by Paul implies the construction project I have been describing
- b. He follows it up with describing the "work of God"

^{NAU} ***Romans 14:20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food.***

- 3. We are to build up the temple through evangelism and discipleship

B. "Edification" in Conversion and Sanctification

- 1. Evangelism builds the temple because it sets a new living stone in place
- 2. Discipleship builds the temple because it polishes and beautifies each stone already set in place, making it a fit habitation for our Holy God
- 3. To "build up the body of Christ" means to lead new people to Christ, and to strengthen each existing member in their personal walk with Christ

C. Every Spiritual Gift Builds the Temple

- 1. All Christians have a defined role

Romans 12:6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

2. Spiritual gifts given to build the temple

Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ

1 Corinthians 14:12 Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

3. Paul already mentioned this... this is how we are co-laborers with Christ in the building of His temple

Romans 1:11-12 I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- ¹² that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

D. Everyone Rewarded for His/Her Service in the Construction Project

1 Corinthians 3:8-14 each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹ For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

III. The Ultimate Destroyer: Sin

A. Romans 14 Introduces the Destroyer: Sin

1. Sin is what destroys the building project
2. Sin desecrates the temple
3. Sin halts construction
4. Sin defiles and makes ugly the living stones that are set in place
5. So, SIN is the enemy of the building project God has us on
6. Paul's concern in Romans 14 is to protect the church from defilement, from sin

B. Satanic Sabotage

1. The word Paul uses is “destroy” or “tear down”
2. The idea: the unrestricted exercise of your freedoms in Christ could tear down the work of God by leading people into sin
3. This is sabotage, the very work Satan is trying to do to this grand building project
4. Christ is very serious about anything that would cause us to sin

1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

Matthew 18:6-9 If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! ⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

C. New Definition of Sin

Romans 14:23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

IV. The Major Effort: Maintaining Peace While Building

A. Peace and Mutual Edification

Vs. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

1. The building is built when peacemaking brothers and sisters edify each other
2. The building makes no progress while there is strife discord and disunity
3. Therefore Paul calls on Christians to be diligent about maintaining peace so that mutual edification can go on
4. “Therefore” connects to what Paul just said about the nature of the Kingdom of God

Romans 14:17-18 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

5. Because the Kingdom of God is about these things, and because anyone who serves Christ is pleasing to God and approved by men, THEREFORE follow what leads to peace and mutual edification

B. It Takes Effort

1. “Be diligent” or “Let us follow”... there is a road of peace; follow it
2. Ephesians talks about that too

Ephesians 4:2-3 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

3. So does Philippians

Philippians 2:1-4 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

4. Here the issue is not flaunting your Christian liberty
 - a. Throughout Romans 14, Paul dealing with debatable issues and Christian freedoms
 - b. He has come down very strongly against Christian legalism, calling all Christian legalists “weak” and saying they judge someone else’s servant
 - c. But the rest of the time he spends addressing the more mature believer, to urge him not to destroy his brother with his freedoms

C. Satan the Sower of Discord

Eris: Greek goddess of discord... threw an apple among the goddesses entitled, “For the fairest”... Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena all fought over it... the harmony was ended and the strife led to the Trojan war

1. Likewise Satan loves to sow discord among the brothers
2. Discord and disunity characterize his evil empire
3. Whenever there is strife and discord, you can smell the aroma of Satan’s actions

D. Discord Ends the Flow of Spiritual Gifts... and Ends Construction

1. Once the peace ends, the mutual edification ends
2. Why? Because the flow of Spiritual Gifts stops
3. Spiritual gifts are given for the building of the body of Christ until it is finished

V. Is It Really Worth It? Choosing Not to Use Your Freedoms

A. Americans Accustomed to Rights and Privileges

1. Declaration of Independence: Thomas Jefferson's famous phrase "Unalienable rights"

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men."

2. Constitution established with a strong commitment to protecting individual rights... the Bill of Rights was the clear result of this
3. Miranda rights, established by the Supreme Court in 1966: "You have the right to remain silent..."

Americans are used to thinking in terms of their rights... what they deserve, what is truly theirs as American citizens

B. Christians Have Extensive Freedoms

1. Galatians called "The Epistle of Freedom"
 - a. Judaizers threatened the Galatian Christians' understanding of the gospel of grace

Galatians 2:4-5 This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. ⁵ We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

- b. They sought to impose a bunch of legalistic regulations stemming mostly from the Laws of Moses
 - c. Paul was moved to write passionately about the freedom the Galatian Christians have in Christ

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

- Romans 14 Paul has been arguing from the perspective of the freedom Christians have to eat meat and drink wine and not be bound to celebrate religious days in a legalistic fashion

Romans 14:14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself.

Vs. 20 All food is clean

- Paul is strong in 1 Corinthians 9 about the freedoms he has as an Apostle

1 Corinthians 9:1-12 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? ...³ This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. ⁴ Don't we have the right to food and drink? ⁵ Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? ⁶ Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?

1 Corinthians 9:7-12 But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ.

C. BUT Is It Really Worth It?

- The Kingdom of heaven is not a matter of food and drink
- Rather it is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit
- The earthly pleasures and freedoms are all gifts of God
- But none of them are essential to our lives in Christ
- Paul is advocating a joyful willingness not to exercise your freedoms if they might cause your brother to stumble into sin

D. Choosing for a Brother's Sake Not to Exercise Freedom

- This is a repeated theme in Romans 14

Romans 14:15-16 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.

Romans 14:20-21 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

2. Clearly Paul is talking about legitimate gospel freedoms here... eating meat sacrificed to idols, drinking wine in small quantities that cannot make you drunk
3. Paul says it's better not to exercise these freedoms if there's a possibility somebody might stumble into sin

E. Keep Your Freedoms Private

Romans 14:22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.

1. He goes beyond it here to talk about keeping your freedoms private
 - a. Sometimes talking openly about your right to drink wine or your right to watch any DVD you want or your right to go to any place of entertainment you want or your right to wear any kind of clothes you want can be as damaging as doing those things right in front of someone
 - b. The talk is what Paul is trying to close off here... so that people's consciences aren't damaged
2. The danger is that your freedoms might actually be a source of condemnation for others
3. AND in the end they might be a source of condemnation for you as well... since by your open flaunting of the freedoms you destroyed the work of God
4. There is also a danger your good gifts might become defiled in your own mind as well because of someone else's slander
5. So he urges silence and keeping things private... but obviously ALWAYS OPEN BEFORE THE LORD
6. Finally there is a hint of danger that you need constantly to assess your own behavior... if something that started out good then leads you into sin, give it up!!

Matthew 5:29-30 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

VI. Everything Not From Faith Is Sin

Romans 14:23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

A. Powerful Statement: Condemnation Comes from Doubting and Yet Doing

1. If your conscience is telling you “No!” and you do it anyway you have sinned
2. You can’t go faster than your conscience
3. This is a remarkable thing... almost as though sin were relative
4. Actually it isn’t... some things are clearly evil, openly spelled out in the Bible
5. BUT these “debatable issues”, these matters of Christian liberty are what is in Paul’s mind
6. And it is clear from this statement: anytime you violate your conscience and do anything that is not from faith, you have sinned
7. If you are eating some piece of meat and the whole time you think God is angry with you, against what you’re doing, then you have sinned, even if later you find out that all food are clean

B. Application to Christians: Romans 14

1. The violation of conscience is a serious matter
2. Christians should be warriors over the fragility of our consciences
3. Christians should also be passionately concerned about someone else’s conscience
4. Therefore Paul is urging us to watch carefully in the matter of the exercise of Christian freedom for conscience’ sake

C. Application to Non-Christians

1. This statement is also a strong proof to non-Christians that God doesn’t accept any of their supposed good deeds
2. So many non-Christians think they’ll be justified on judgment day because of their good deeds
3. But this verse shows that good deeds done not by faith in Christ are actually SINS

D. How Sin is a Failure of Faith

1. This amazing statement is also a good diagnosis of the root of sin for Christians
2. All sin is a failure of faith

3. Faith is the ability to see into the unseen world... to see the Holy God sitting on His powerful throne assessing everything we do
4. Whenever we sin, we are acting as though God doesn't see
5. It's like we have become temporarily blind to the presence of God
6. We wouldn't do this thing if Christ were standing right in front of us... why do it now when you think He can't see you?

E. How a Strong Faith is Essential to Holiness

1. The stronger your faith the more powerful you will be in resisting temptation
2. By faith you will stand in the day of testing
3. By faith you will understand God's constant presence and constant holiness

Job 31:1-4 "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. ² For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? ³ Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? ⁴ Does he not see my ways and count my every step?"

4. By faith you will cry out for help in the day of need

Hebrews 4:14-16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need

5. Therefore, FEED YOUR FAITH and you won't sin

VII. Application

A. Let the Eternal Building Project Be the Center of Your Life

1. Live for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ
2. Every day, pray for and act for the completion of God's Eternal temple
3. Evangelize!
4. Disciple another Christian
5. Speak words of encouragement; use your spiritual gifts
6. LIVE for this construction project; living for anything else is a waste of time

B. Take Sin Far More Seriously

1. **"Anything that does not come from faith is sin"**

2. How much of your common everyday life does that rule out?
 3. Ask, “Am I watching this movie by faith, for the glory of God?” “Am I watching this ballgame by faith, for the glory of God?”
 4. “Am I listening to this music by faith, for the glory of God?”
 5. “Am I looking at this magazine by faith, for the glory of God?”
 6. “Am I eating this food, or this quantity of food by faith, for the glory of God?”
 7. “Am I playing this computer game by faith, for the glory of God?”
 8. “Am I spending this money by faith, for the glory of God?”
 9. If the answer is ever “No!” then it is no longer a matter of Christian freedom for you... it is sin.
- C. Take Your Brother and Sister’s Walks with God More Seriously
1. Is your lifestyle helping your brothers and sisters in Christ to be more godly or more worldly?
 2. How are you sacrificing your freedoms to help the Body of Christ grow?
- D. Non-Christian
1. If everything that does not come from faith is sin, that means that salvation by works apart from Christ is impossible
 2. BUT salvation by good works is the number one religion in the world
 3. Are you trusting in good works to save your soul?
 4. COME TO CHRIST BY FAITH ALONE