

Wise Foundations

February 12, 2023

Deut. 30:15-20; 1 Corinthians 3:1-15

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I loved Mrs. Long, my fourth-grade teacher. She taught me so much about loving everyone and celebrating our gifts. She is the one that allowed me to do the weather report every morning for the class, because I said I wanted to be a meteorologist one day. She is the one who taught us to only do put ups instead of put-downs. Because of that rule, our class had very little bullying and I learned to see the good in people first.

One of my most memorable experiences in her class was our month-long learning about African American inventors. Each child was required to learn about one invention that an African American created. Things like the stop light with the three colors, the potato chip, Gas Masks, the pressure cooker and so forth. I personally was fascinated by the work of George Washington Carver. Mr. Carver was born into slavery sometime in 1864. When he was an infant his mother, sister and he were kidnaped from a farm in Missouri and taken by slave raiders and sold back into slavery in Kentucky. He would eventually be found, but not his mother or sister. George was returned to Missouri and Moses Carver and his wife raised George, teaching him to read and write. After the Civil War George received his freedom and was sent by Mr. Moses Carver, his former owner, to attend an all-black school at age eleven to continue his education.

George was especially gifted in horticulture and studied agricultural practices. He attended several schools seeking a degree. He became the first African American to earn a bachelor's degree in horticulture at Iowa State Agricultural School (now Iowa State University). After graduation the school president

invited him to stay on and earn his master's degree, In 1896, upon earning his master's degree, George Carver received several offers, the most attractive of which came from Booker T. Washington (whose last name George would later add to his own) of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University) in Alabama. Booker T. Washington was the first leader of Tuskegee Institute and a prominent leader in helping newly freed slaves receive a higher education, especially around the agricultural sciences.

At Tuskegee George pioneered crop rotation to improve soil quality using crops like soybeans, sweet potatoes, and his famous peanuts. George was known as the Peanut man and developed over 300 products using the peanut plant. He also invented harvesting equipment that made it more efficient to harvest and clean peanuts. All these new products and methods in farming helped improve harvests and diversify crops, helping black farmers move west and establish successful farms and communities west of the Mississippi.

The powerful testimony of George Washington Carver's life is the way that Moses Carver, Booker T. Washington, and others built upon the good foundation that God had given to George Carver. People saw his natural talent and hunger for learning and instead of stifling it, they supported and encouraged it. George was a gifted engineer, natural scientist, and inventor. George was also a very spiritual person, so it is easy to assume that George was inspired by Paul's first metaphor in today's reading that "God causes all to grow". George Washington Carver spoke and wrote often about his dependence on God's insights. For example, he said,

"God is going to reveal to us things He never revealed before if we put our hands in His. No books ever go into my laboratory. The thing I am to do and the way of doing it are revealed to me. I never have to grope for methods. The method is revealed to me the moment I am inspired to

create something new. Without God to draw aside the curtain I would be helpless.”

This self-humility and acknowledgement of God being the inspiration, the master Gardner, and the master architect to one’s success is echoed in Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian church we read today.

The Corinthian church tried to boast about the gifts and talents of Apollos, Paul or Cephas which led to the internal divisions they were experiencing. Paul tries to correct this by stating that any success that comes happens because of God and God alone. This foundation of humility and dependence upon God alone is the good and wise foundation that Paul goes on to share as his master builder metaphor.

Paul understands the leaders of the church are builders of God’s kingdom here on earth. They are the builders, but God is the master architect. As we hear in other bible passages, Jesus is the stone that the builders have rejected and has become the corner stone. Paul expounds upon this concept in Ephesians 4:19-20:

“So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

This concept of the corner stone is a vital aspect of architecture. I may not understand it as well as trained architects, like Ed Bolt, but the first corner stone establishes the measure upon which all other construction is oriented around. If you, as a builder, deviate from the standard of the cornerstone the building will not endure.

We hear that same guidance in our reading from Deuteronomy as the People of Israel are given the commands of God and are reminded that they need to first and foremost Love God. Loving God, according to Deuteronomy means one walks in God's ways and observes God's commands. This same foundation of life can be found in the teachings of Jesus. Jesus affirmed that the greatest commandment is, "Love the lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is like it Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus went on to say that upon these two commands hangs all the law and the prophets. That means that the law and the prophets are measured against or rest upon how they measure up against this standard of Love.

If the teachings and instruction of someone is not resting squarely upon this foundation of Loving God and Loving our neighbor, then it is not a wise foundation to build upon. Paul reminds the church to measure all teachings against this standard of Love and to not allow it to remain or our faith will not withstand the tests of God's judgment.

We all have foundations we build upon and seeds of faith that grow in our hearts. I am grateful that Mrs. Long planted a seed of love and appreciation for others at a time in my life when kids seem to master the skill of put downs, teasing and judging others. It is a perennial seed that God continues to grow in my life. It is a seed that George Washington Carver also cultivated in his life. He said this about success in life.

"How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because someday in your life you will have been all of these."

What a wonderful way of remembering that we will always find ourselves in others. Let us be kind to others.