

As most of you know our older son is a realtor. He spends a good deal of his time showing people houses. His experience tells him that there is no perfect house. People would like to take one room from this house, another room from that house and another room from another house. You get the picture. If only rooms could be moved from one house to another it would make his job easier. Even architects often would like to change some of the designs in the houses they have designed especially after they have lived or worked in them for a while. If we have such problems with our physical dwellings—what about our spiritual houses?

Last week the Barna survey concluded: “Most Christians have no idea what churches expect of them in terms of ‘spiritual’ maturity.” If that is true how can we build a spiritual house when we have no idea how it should be built? What do spiritual houses look like? Here are a few clues from I Peter.

The first is, they are never finished. Or should never be finished. Now I am not talking about building like the Winchester Mansion in California. Mrs. Winchester would not let the builders stop building (they worked 24/7 until she died) and she often did her designing on a dinner napkin. There are doors that lead nowhere and steps to the ceiling. It is a house of confusion. Peter says in verse five, *“like living stones, let yourselves be built (or give yourselves to being built) into a spiritual house...”* Peter’s image is one of continual building. We give ourselves over to the master designer who continues to build all our lives. We continue to grow and develop. We continue to refine our faith and in the process see things in new ways. We are not there yet, we continue in the process.

On Thursday we will celebrate the first year of our Wings for Reading program. The students who will celebrate with us on Thursday are reading far better now than they were when they first came to us in October. They are not there yet but they have grown in the process. If they are going to be good readers they will need to continue the process – reading daily, etc. So it is with us. If we are to progress in our faith we too need to be involved in the process daily.

We discover new things each day. There are more opportunities for ministry today than there were yesterday. Thirty years ago who among us would have imagined the World Wide Web and all that it offers. Who among us would have ever considered that the words “blogging” and “tweeting” would become a part of our every day language? Today, students are no longer bound by the classroom they are in but can interact instantly with other classrooms around the world through the internet. You can even attend worship on line! Some congregations “stream” their worship services over the internet. Sermons can be downloaded to MP3’s and iPods. (We are working on it!). We have more opportunities to spread the word today than ever before in history.

We are in process. We are still being built. God is not finished with us yet. Jennie Howard at 95 had this plaque in her room: “Please be patient with me, God is not finished with me yet!” Our spiritual house is not finished in this life.

The second clue from I Peter is that God is the builder. Now, I like this because it takes a lot of responsibility off my shoulders. The Holy Spirit is involved in the process and we only need to be open to its leading. We must read the Scriptures with the openness to the moving of the Spirit through the Word. We should read with a readiness to be molded and shaped into God's image. We are clay in the potter's hand. Wood in the hands of a master carver. Marble in the hands of the artist.

We get in trouble when we don't follow the directions of the architect. When we don't follow the directions given things get messed up – Eden, rebellion. Amazing how many want to build without the plans of the builder.

Another clue is that we need to get rid of the trash and rubble. Peter says that we are to rid ourselves of all malice, guile (deceit), envy, slander, etc. I am sure that Peter was not trying to put together an exhaustive list of the rubbish that needs to be removed. What he is saying is that in order for the builder to do the job we need to rid ourselves of those things that hinder the building process. Can you imagine what politics would be like today if the negatives were removed from politics? What if politicians worked together rather than trying to destroy the other party(ies)? What if Christians did the same?

We need to get rid of those things that hinder our growth. Our adult Sunday School lesson last week was about the wrong impressions we have of others, the prejudices that we have (rightly or wrongly) about other people. It asked how we deal with them. The process of understanding them is a process of growth. The author shared about his image of a specific people. Then he was called to go and live among them for a year and this changed his whole image.

A cartoon with a weary dad spread out exhausted on a sofa with a house in confusion around him had this caption: "I knew all about raising children until I had them!"

It is hard to build in the middle of rubble. Part of the process of building a spiritual house is to get rid of the rubble that is in the way of the builder.

Thus, what is a spiritual house? My definition is: a house that reflects the love of God in every room and where Christ is the foundation, the chief cornerstone. All other foundations will eventually fail. Communism for the most part has fallen and largely through prayer. The empires of Greece and Rome are now gone. Many of the ideologies that sought to destroy Christianity are now gone. They are a part of the past. The foundation of Christ is the one still standing.

As we look at this foundation we discover it is a foundation built on love.

- *A spiritual house is one where God is always present.
- *A spiritual house is one where God's grace is always found in abundance.
- *A spiritual house is one filled with God's forgiveness.
- *A spiritual house is one still in the process of being built.
- *A spiritual house is a peculiar, special one.

We need to examine the rich language Peter uses to describe this house – the people who dwell within – chosen, royal, priesthood, holy and God’s own people. All these speak of a special people called by God to be different. Probably these are the most wonderful words: a people called. We are the very people God has called for a purpose. We are a people who are continually under the leadership and inspiration of the God we serve. A spiritual house is a living house where love is the chief and only cornerstone.

Living in a “Spiritual” house means living in a house that is on a journey – under development. It is a house whose doors are always open and anyone is welcome to come in and join in the adventure. It is a house whose destination is God – and how we reach the destination is the adventure. We may not always know where God is leading but we are confident that God is leading. We are in the process of being built and all that really matters is our willingness to be in process. Christ is our foundation and that foundation is love.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quoted is from NRSV, NCCC/USA 1989