

Take Care How You Build on Christ the Foundation

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Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Let us pray. Blessed Lord, who has caused Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may hear, read, learn, and inwardly digest them.

! That through the comfort of your Holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of your Holy Word, and the hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We are continuing this morning in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. It's on page 1132 in your pew Bible. I encourage you to open and follow along.

We move from where we left off last week, where Paul gave us these two metaphors to describe the church, the local church.

He says it is God's field, remember that, and God's building. And these are metaphors that Paul uses to describe the church, specifically the local church.

[1:15] In the first metaphor, Paul also said that the field needs nurture and care. And those who have been assigned as servants to tend it, those who have been assigned to tend the field are just servants.

That's all they are. But he showed us that it is ultimately God's field, isn't it? And it is God that initiates the growth and the fruitfulness in that field.

And we now move this morning to the second metaphor, God's building. You know, both metaphors exclude the notion of self-sufficiency, of independence on our part as the church.

I hope you see that. Paul painstakingly wants to show us that the church's dependency is not on human effort, or human wisdom, or human resources.

The dependency of the church is squarely on Christ, who grows it. He owns it. And he owns the work itself that goes on in it.

[2:36] He owns the church. He owns the work. He owns the servants who work in the church. And all of it flows out of his greater working in our midst.

And Paul wants us to understand that as a fundamental fact of how the church works and how the church operates, if it is, in fact, Christ's church.

And I hope you see that these metaphors are not speaking, again, of us as individuals. That's not part. So when we're reading here, when Carol read it, and we read you, the you there is you all. It's plural. It is talking about the church, the corporate body of Christ. The emphasis is on the church as a whole. Specifically, the local church of Corinth.

And if we were going to apply it to ourselves, we should think of it as Paul writing to the local congregation here at Holy Trinity. And so now he goes on in the second metaphor in verse 10 to 15 to show us what God's building is like and who are the people called to build, the builders within that building, what they look like and how they are to operate.

[3:57] The church is God's building. And Paul expands on that as the church's function and the nature of its work.

Look there in verse 10. He says, According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I lay the foundation. And someone else is building upon it.

Let each one take care how he builds on it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

God has especially graced Paul, the apostle, and called him to lay the foundation of the church in Corinth. He is especially being called as the apostle to the Gentiles.

And here Paul says to them, I did the job God called me to do by his grace. I was a skilled master builder.

[5:02] The actual word in Greek is *sophos architecton*. It's better understood as I was a wise architect or builder.

And the word wise is actually really instructive for us. I think Paul wants to say to the Corinthians, They who consider themselves full of wisdom, super Christians.

He wants to show them that I lay the foundation among you as a wise, expert, builder, and architect. And here Paul isn't tooting his own horn.

Rather, what he wants to do is he wants to apply, he applies the wisdom, the wisdom they so celebrate. He applies true wisdom to himself in order to contrast, to be a contrast to the Corinthians. Who think they're wise in their own eyes. But in fact, they're proving that they are still foolish infants. So Paul applies wisdom to himself as a wise builder.

[6:08] And why is he a wise builder? Because the foundation he laid was Christ. His determination among the Corinthians is to know nothing among them except Christ and him crucified.

And this is what makes him a wise master builder. And he now warns them. Let each one take care how he builds on the foundation that has been laid.

Who are the others who are called to take care here? They're the leaders of the church. The leaders of the local congregation. In Corinth.

Take care. Take care. Take care how you build on the foundation that has already been laid by the apostles. This is true of all churches.

Every local church. That claims to be the church of Christ. Remember when we went through the book of Ephesians. We talked about how the foundation has been laid. There's no reason to lay a new foundation.

[7:15] Who laid the foundation? The apostles. And so for us to be the church of Christ. We saw this also when we went through 1 John. Together. The foundation has been laid already by the apostles.

And all of us as we come into Christ's church. As we come into that building. That metaphor of building. Paul uses that metaphor as well in Ephesians.

As we come into that building. From all backgrounds and nations and tribes and tongues. And we've been built up. We should take care. How we build upon the foundation that has already been laid.

And that's what Paul is saying here to the Corinthians. But here's the first crucial point. This building has only one foundation. It has already been laid by Paul.

And the foundation is Jesus Christ. That's there in verse 11. Paul here isn't concerned with the size of the building. That's not what he's instructing them about.

[8:21] Make sure the building is large and impressive. And giant. That's not what Paul is concerned about. He's not concerned about the risk of the building.

In terms of how it's supposed to look. What he's concerned about is the quality. What he cares for. And what he wants the leaders. Those that he now tries to take care of their build upon it.

What he wants them to be concerned about as well. Is the quality of the building. Now if the structure being built is the local church. In our case, only Trinity.

Then we are to see it as a living structure. And in fact, it isn't just any kind of building.

I hope you see that in verse 16. As this passage was read. That this building isn't any kind of building. It is in fact a holy temple. After all, it is God's field.

[9:30] And it's God's building. So wherever God inhabits. That place is made holy by his very presence. We believe that God inhabits us here.

He's present with us. And so, in fact. This gathering. Is a holy temple. And according to Paul. If the foundation.

Is not Jesus Christ. Then it is not a holy temple. Where God dwells. That's an absolute requirement. For any church. To be the church of Christ. For it to be the church of Christ. It has to be laid on the foundation. That is Jesus Christ himself. And what does it mean.

To have Jesus Christ as foundation. What it means. To have Jesus Christ as foundation. Is not a set of doctrines really. We think of it as.

[10:25] Okay. We believe these things. These are the set of. Our statement of belief. This is our creeds. Not that those things are not important. We have them. If you go to our website. We have. We have.

Creeds that we subscribe to. We have a statement of belief. Those things are very important. We have a church polity. By which our church is structured. Healthy churches ought to have. All of those things. But those things are not.

The foundation of the church. The foundation is to have. The person. The person. Of Jesus Christ. And his saving work. What is his saving work?

His finished and accomplished work. Upon the cross. That is the ground. Of our confidence. That is the ground. Of our faith. And then. Therefore.

That is the foundation. Upon which the church. Stands on. And rests on. And any church. That is not built. On Jesus Christ. Is not of Christ. It is not a true.

[11 : 22] Christian assembly. Whatever it claims to be. Paul is here. Saying to us. It is not of Christ. So that's of first importance.

There is only one. Foundation. Now. The Corinthians. The Corinthians. Will insist. As Paul writes this. To them. They will probably insist. That indeed. They are the church of Christ. And they are building.

On the foundation. That has already been laid. By Paul. And they will be right. In fact. To say that. That they are building. On the foundation. Which Paul himself says. I have come among you. I have laid the foundation.

Same thing in our day. No church. No matter. Their worldly tendencies. No church will outright. Deny Jesus Christ. As the foundation. But many churches.

Like the Corinthian church. Are moving away. From the foundation. That has been laid. That's the whole point. Of Paul's warning to them. The foundation has been laid. But you are moving away from it.

[12 : 25] Many churches in our day. Are tinkering. With the foundation. Adding to it. Or subtracting from it. And Paul wants to warn us.

Any church that does this. Is under threat. Under threat of ceasing to be. A holy temple. Where God dwells. So the second thing.

Paul wants us to be mindful of. Is that. Is the material we use. In constructing. This building. That is God's building. And just a reminder again. Remember that the building.

Is a metaphor. For the church of Christ. The body of Christ. Which is the local church. Paul is of course. Not talking. Is not talking about.

The physical structure. Of the church building. But he's talking rather. Of the mystical body. That is comprised.

[13 : 23] Of every member. Of this church. Every member. From the littlest child. To the oldest. To the newest. From the newest member. To the oldest.

Member. Of the among us. That. All of us. Gathered together. Are the body of Christ. And we are God's building. We are God's holy temple. And that's what Paul has in mind. When he speaks. When he's writing here. And so. The one who builds. Upon this foundation. Will be. Accountable. As they build.

For their work. On the day of judgment. Look there. In verse 12. To 15. Now. If anyone builds. On the foundation. With gold.

Silver. Precious stones. Wood. Hay. Straw. Each one's work. Will become manifest. That means. Each one's work. Will be shown.

[14 : 17] For what it is. It will be shown. On that day. But that day. Will disclose it. Because it will be revealed. By fire.

And the fire. Will test. What sort of work. Each one has done. If the work. That anyone has built. On the foundation.

Survives. He will receive. A reward. If anyone's work. Is burned up. He will suffer loss. Though. He himself.

Will be saved. But only. As through fire. Now. The point here. Is this. What is built. On the foundation. Must conform.

To the foundation. Let. Each one. Take care. How he builds. On it. Now. How do we. Distinguish. Here. Between the superior.

[15 : 10] And an inferior. Building material. It's very easy. Here. To misapply. What Paul. Is saying. So. We ought to be careful.

Very careful. To look at Paul's. Argument. Closely. Paul. Is not concerned. With the costliness. Of the material. That's not what those.

Those lists. Are meant to. Convey. To us. It's not about the costliness. Of the material. Those who are wealthy.

I can give a lot. To the church. Or those who are educated. And skilled. And are able to bring. Their expertise. To serve the church. Or those who have been.

At it longest. And therefore. Have seniority. That is not. None of that. Is what Paul had in mind.

When he's speaking. Of the materials. In building the church. None of those things.

[16:05] Factor. Into the quality. Of the building material. For the building. I want it. That's important. To note. Do you know.

That there are six materials. Listed in verse 12. What are they? Gold. Silver. And precious stones. Those are the first. The first materials. And then. Wood. Hay. Straw.

Those are the. A lot of materials. That were listed. But again. It's not the worst. Of the material. We're meant to focus on. But their durability. Or their endurance.

And that's what makes them. The first three categories. Or the last three categories. Because. As Paul goes on. To say in verse 13.

Each one's work. Will be shown. For what it is. On the day of judgment. By means of fire.

[17:00] What will happen. In this fiery test. What would happen. The gold. The silver. And the precious stones.

Along with the wood. Hay. Straw. Will all go through. The fire. Fire. But the gold. Silver. And the precious stones. Will endure. Coming out of the fire.

Refined. The wood. The hay. And the straw. Will be burnt up. The fire. Will test. Each person's work.

On that day of judgment. Now. We must be clear. We must be clear. What this fire is. And what it is not. Because. There's many wrong teachings.

That have stemmed. From these verses. The fire reveals. That's what the fire is done. Is done. On that day. It will be made manifest. All our work. Will be shown.

[17:59] For what it is. All of us. Without exception. All our work will be shown for what it is on that day of judgment. And the fire will reveal and test each person's work of service in the church.

This is a testing fire. And it's only the work that is being tested.

Note in verse 15 what Paul is saying. He wants to convey that to us. That even those whose works are burned up. What would happen to them? They will be saved.

Even if they're being saved as if by the skin of their teeth. They will be saved. Why?

Because salvation is not dependent on our work. But on Christ's finished work on the cross. So for all of us. All of us.

[18:59] This is a comforting thing to hear. It isn't that we will be judged and given acceptance into God's kingdom on the basis of our work. What is the basis of our acceptance into God's kingdom?

It is faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. That is the only work that gives you entrance into God's kingdom. Not your work or mine or anyone's work.

It is only Jesus Christ's faith and trust in his finished work that gives you entrance into his kingdom. So he's not talking here about acceptance into God's kingdom.

He's not talking here about acceptance of sons and daughters. He's specifically only talking about the reward that we will get for our work in God's field and in God's building.

That's the judgment that is being tested. That's the fiery judgment here that is being tested. This fire will test it. The quality of our work.

[19:57] And this is why, by the way, this is why the foundation is essential. Jesus Christ, his crucifixion, his death, his burial and resurrection is the foundation by which you and I are forgiven and given entrance into God's kingdom.

This is why the foundation is essential. So that if we were to build on a different foundation, then we're departing from the truth of God's word.

And our soul is in peril. But as long as we're on the foundation of God's word, our work will be tested. But we will all, because we put our faith in Christ's work, not in our work, we will gain entrance into God's kingdom.

But notice also that this will take place when? When will this testifiery trial take place? Is it tomorrow? Next week?

It says here that it is on that day. The day is a day of judgment. It's future. The testing is not now. [21 : 13] The testing is future. And these verses I want us to see are especially applicable to leaders in the church.

So the question then is, what are we building on? And what are we building with? What will stand the test of time?

Or rather, what will withstand the test of fire on that day? You know, the world's wisdom and all walks that are based on the world's wisdom, no matter how it seemed to impress, now, Paul is saying, all of that work will be burned up on that day of judgment.

The work that is self-centered. The work that is self-centered. The work that is self-centered. That is self-seeking. That boasts in human powers. The work that seeks the world's adulation.

The work that makes us seem impressive in man's eyes. None of those will impress God on that day.

[22 : 32] Works that are based on the gospel. That stems from faith in Christ crucified. That is offered up to him in gratitude from a heart of love for him.

Those kind of works will come through the fire, refined, as gold, silver, and precious stones. Those are the works that will get us reward in heaven.

And who's the one judging? God is. Christ himself is the one who will judge the works that are being done in his building, in his field.

God is. That's why I want us to see that we cannot judge anyone's work. That's really important.

Because as we read this, the temptation might be to say, well, okay.

Let me look around and see what work people are doing. We are not capable or qualified to be the judge of anyone's work.

[23 : 37] In fact, we're not qualified to be the judge of our own work. The day, Paul says, we'll disclose it. Verse 13. God alone is qualified to judge.

He alone sees and knows the hearts and motives of everyone. So he alone is able to render judgment. And he will on that day. Here's a helpful question then for all of us.

Who are you working for? Who are you working for? Because we will judge your work on that day.

Who do you have to please when you work in God's field, in God's building?

Are you aiming to please the world which will pass away, which is doomed for failure? Are you working to please Jesus Christ, your master and king, and the judge of us all?

No, there are many ways in which we build that seems wise. Seems very wise by worldly standards. But in fact, they will end up being shown to be just hay and straw.

[24 : 50] Straw material. And as a church, we need to examine ourselves. Collectively, corporately, examine ourselves.

So when the cross is not at the center of our life together, we are in danger of building with the wrong materials. When we prize knowledge more than Christ-like obedience, a condition which results in arrogance and pride, rather than humility before the cross of Christ, then we are in danger.

When we don't acknowledge our complete dependency on Christ, and instead we depend on our own charisma, human charisma, or we depend on human expertise, we are in danger of building with the wrong materials.

When we are governed by our feelings and experiences, and those feelings and experiences override the truth of God's word among us, then we are in danger of building with the wrong materials.

When pride, arrogance, and saving face is more important than humility, repentance, and reconciliation, we are in danger of building with the wrong materials.

[26 : 06] And here's the sobering truth. This applies for all of us. It applies to all of us. If we're honest with ourselves before God.

Some of our works, even though they're built on the foundation of Christ, some of our works will be burned up on that day. Why?

Because they're tainted by pride, by self-glory, by self. That's why none of us are exempt from Paul's warning here.

To take care how we build. And so, if you're hearing Paul's warning, and you're thinking, where do I go for help?

If you're convinced that this is indeed, this church, this local assembly, is indeed God's field, and only God gives growth in it, that it is His building, and all our works is laid upon Him as the foundation, then if we believe that, we must go to Him in prayer.

[27 : 21] It is to Him we go when we ask Him to help us with our works, knowing that it is God Himself working in us who enables us to will and to act for His good purpose.

and He will help us build wisely. Because for the sake of our time, we're going to only get to verse 17 this morning, but quickly, let's just look at verse 16 and 17.

Because when we insist to go it alone, Paul wants to show us the danger of careless, the careless wrecker, or the careless builder, in God's temple.

So when we insist to go it alone, instead of the call to build wisely upon the foundation that is wisely laid by the apostles, when we insist to go it in our own human effort, in our own human strength, what would happen?

We would start to dismantle and ruin the building itself. Instead of taking care to build wisely, we will be careless.

[28 : 36] And we, we ourselves, are going to be in danger of being the cause of division and fracture in the building. Look there in verse 16.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? And if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.

But God's temple is holy. And you are that temple. Paul's rhetorical question in verse 16 can best be put this way.

You ought to know that you are God's temple. It seems like that's what Paul is saying to the Corinthians. You ought to know that you are God's temple and that God, the Holy Spirit, dwells in you.

That is, not just in you individually, but in you as the church. It's clear that the Corinthians have not contemplated the implication of their infantile squabbles, the division among them.

[29 : 43] They have not fully contemplated the implications of that. And they have not contemplated that the judgment for such foolishness will be severe since they will face God's judgment.

He will judge their work. And Paul here is not only speaking just to the Corinthians, he's speaking to the whole church. Those who think of themselves as super spiritual among the Corinthians are in fact, ironically, the ones working towards destroying the temple because of their careless way of building upon the foundation, whether they're conscious of it or not.

You know, in a pagan culture of false gods, Corinth was full of temples devoted to all different kind of gods, the pantheon of gods all over, from every corner of the world.

You can find it in Corinth. In such a pagan culture, Paul is saying to this Christian church, you, you, Corinthian Christians, brothers and sisters in Christ, as you gather together as the body of Christ, whenever you gather, whether on Sunday mornings like this, or in your Bible studies when you gather, or in your prayer groups, every time you gather as God's people, you are the temple of the living and true God in the midst of false gods.

You are holy. Not in a ritual way, but you are holy in a moral and ethical sense. And what that means is that you are meant to reflect in your actions and in your behaviors and in your interactions with one another, you are meant to reflect the holiness of God whose name you bear.

[31 : 55] God's judgment. But in the case of the Corinthian church, there seems to be little marked difference between them and their culture. And Paul's warning here in verse 17 is dire.

And it's a warning that causing dissension and division within Christ's church will incur God's judgment. Doing so damages Christ's church.

Doing so impedes the work of the Holy Spirit among us. And look there in verse 17. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.

For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. Whoever does this, that is, destroys God's temple, what they're in fact doing is they're cutting themselves off from the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, as the one source of life.

And if you cut yourself off from the Holy Spirit, the source of life, what happens? Destruction. This is a warning by Paul. It's one of those prophetic warnings in the Bible.

[33 : 09] And it's meant to call us to wake up from our slumber and our apathy and our infantile attitudes. To see clearly and to turn to God.

You know, a church that ceases to operate as God's temple, a church that leaves the foundation of Jesus Christ, a church that is marked by factionalism and dissension and given over to worldliness, is a church that is no different from the world and the culture around it.

It's a church that is ceasing to be reflecting the holiness that it's meant to reflect as God's holy temple. And if that's true of any church, if they cease to stand out as the temple of the living God, if that church is no different from the many pagan places of worship because God's Holy Spirit is no longer dwelling there, then that church is marked for destruction.

That's Paul's implication here in verse 17. This is why the local church must be taken seriously because it is God's temple.

We are God's temple. We cannot, brothers and sisters, minimize what we are. We cannot act as the world does.

[34 : 45] God's temple is holy. You are that temple. And so we must defend and protect that holiness of God's temple with our lives by living in a Christ-like way with one another.

Our interactions will be marked by that which lasts. Love. We will eventually get to 1 Corinthians 13, but I can't help but think of 1 Corinthians chapter 13 here, speaking of those things that will endure. Only the things done in love, love for God and love for the brothers, the brethren, those are the things that will last. The kind of love that is grounded in God's truth, that kind of love is what must govern our interactions with one another.

And so we must take great care, great care we must take, instead of being careless in our dealings in the church.

And what would that mean in actual reality as we do life together? What might that mean for us? It will mean that we would not excuse unfair behaviors in the church.

[36 : 15] We must take care to defend the honor of Christ's name and Christ's church. Because why? We are God's temple. God's temple is holy.

We must take care to defend the honor of Christ's name in Christ's church. The cross which is Christ crucified must be our standard. Not human allegiances.

The church must be a hospital for sinners and not a hospice for the dying. The former, the hospital, is the holy temple.

It's not that sinners cannot come in. The church is a hospital. Sinners are welcome to come in. Well, all sinners, after all, saved by grace.

And we enter into God's holy temple. For we recognize it as God's holy temple. We are as a hospital where we are made whole, where we are healed. And those who come in can have an encounter with the living God because He is there among us.

[37 : 30] He who gives life, He who heals, He who mends the broken, is present among us. The church must remain a hospital. Hospital. But if the church becomes a hospice, it is nothing more than a shell, a social club, playing at church, but devoid of the Holy Spirit's power, and therefore devoid of life.

God's temple, God's temple. How do we make sure we remain a hospital and not a hospice? We do so by calling one another to obedience to God's word, to repentance, to restoration, always, always remembering that God's temple, which we are, God's temple is holy, and we are that temple.

Let us pray. Almighty God, I pray that you graciously grant that your word that we've heard this morning may be inscribed inwardly in our hearts.

Lord, we confess that that we can't do that in our own power. We pray that our own flesh, our own pride, our own arrogance, and we pray that you will help us, Holy Spirit, that our work will be solely in service of you, our King, and in building up your church, we confess that we can't do that in our own power.

We need your Holy Spirit help. So come, Holy Spirit, help us continue to do the work of healing us, of restoring us, of building us up at God's holy temple.

[39 : 44] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.