

# 'Building God's Church'

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 02 August 2026

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] Well, as Harry mentioned, we're continuing our series through Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. And as Christians, we should want to see our church grow, to see more people saved, and to see us who are already saved to grow in Christ, because that's what God wants for our church.

But the question is how? How do we build our church? What growth, what's church growth strategies would you pin your hopes on to grow our church here at Holy Trinity?

I went online and found one church growth expert who had a suggestion, and you know he's wise because of his name. So take a look. Hello, Solomon Moses, church growth expert here, and it's my job to bring you tactics and strategies that are going to explode your church with new growth. Hey, if you're serious about your church's growth, you need to try Christian choreographed breakdance singing in suits.

The renewed mind is the key to the power that we need.

The world is gonna see that it's Christ in me. The renewed mind is the key to the Christ in me. The renewed mind is the key to the Christ in me.

[1:35] Okay, that'll do. Now, is that what we need? A singing breakdancing pastor complete with backup singers and background synthesizers?

Should I ask Fiona? Where's Fiona? And Helen? Of course not. For starters, I can't do the moonwalk. That guy wasn't serious anyway, was he? I mean, Solomon Moses is not his real name, right?

But some churches try this sort of thing to attract people and grow their church because they follow the world's wisdom that says if you want to grow something and get people through the door, then you have to have impressive looking and fun sort of things to attract people.

And back then, breakdancing and synthesizers were cool amongst young people. And so this church in the States decided to do that, to try and get the young people in. Or in the 1990s, there was a whole church seeker-sensitive movement that you might have heard of before, where the idea was to get rid of anything, any church jargon, any difficult Bible bits out of the church, rather than explaining them for those new to the church.

Even today, some churches focus on concert-style music. I was talking to Bible study groups last week, and some of them saying that they've been to churches where it was more like a rock concert, complete with smoke machine even.

[2:59] Now, should we put that on our church budget? I remember watching a current affair episode back in 2021, where a South African girl called Yulandi joined Hillsong.

And she said that to sing on stage, she was told that she had to dye her hair blonde and wear trendy clothes like that and make herself more attractive. Because the world's wisdom said that you need to look attractive and impressive and to draw people in.

I mean, it's why advertisers and fashion designers use attractive models, isn't it? But that's to operate by the world's wisdom. And it was around since Paul's day, actually.

Paul was in the city of Corinth, and Corinth was a wealthy city. Well, that's who he's writing to here. A wealthy city obsessed with appearance and social status, not to mention religious idols and sexual immorality.

And just down the road from Corinth were the Isthmian Games held every two years. And these included not just athletic events like our Commonwealth Games, but also musical and oratory competitions, where speakers were judged not just on how impressively they spoke, but also how impressively they looked.

[4:12] And it seems that this culture in Corinth had crept into the church, such that some judged Paul by the world's wisdom. In fact, in 2 Corinthians, some of the Corinthians say his, that his Paul's letters are weighty and strong, but his body presence is weak.

In other words, he's not attractive, and his speech is of no account. He doesn't speak good. Apollos, on the other hand, we're told in Acts, was an eloquent man.

And so as you saw a few weeks ago, the church was divided about which leader to follow, whether Paul because of his weighty and strong letters, or Apollos because of his eloquent speech and preaching.

And they'd all follow these leaders in an effort to make them look more spiritually impressive. Well, I follow Paul, so I'm really the spiritually impressive Christian and so on.

Or they'd pin their hope on a certain church leader to grow their church to look impressive. And so having spent the last couple of chapters explaining God's wisdom is actually found in Jesus.

[5:16] Paul now returns to correct their worldly wisdom and give them a right view, firstly, of church leaders. So point one, verse one. Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the spirit, but as people who are still worldly.

Me infants in Christ. And literally, Paul says, I could not address you as spiritual, which would have been a slap in the face for the Corinthians because they thought they were. In fact, they thought they were impressively spiritual.

Actually, it's an even bigger slap in the face because to be spiritual just means you have the spirit.

And every Christian, everyone who believes in Jesus has the spirit, is spiritual.

And so he's effectively saying, I could not address you as Christians. But then he softens a little bit and says, okay, well, mere infant Christians at the end of verse one. And in fact, infants who think the gospel is just milk.

And so he goes on to say in verse two, I gave you milk, which I think is their word, not solid food for you is not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. Paul could mean that, you know, they're not mature enough to get solid doctrinal teaching.

[6:27] And so he had to stick with the milk, just the gospel thing. But he's just spent the last couple of chapters saying that the gospel is actually God's wisdom, both for the young Christian and the mature Christian.

In fact, last week in chapter two, he says, we do speak a message of wisdom, the gospel among the mature. And so the gospel is not just the milk, it's also the solid food.

It's not just for the young Christian, it's for the mature Christian. It's just they could not accept it as solid food. They were hoping for something more. But as I've said before, we never actually graduate from the gospel onto some other so-called solid teaching.

Why? Rather, we grow deeper in appreciating the gospel. No, appreciating how deeply God must love us, that he would give his only son to die for us.

That's extraordinary. And we grow deeper in living out the gospel, you know, living like Christ more and more. And we grow deeper in understanding the implications of the gospel, what it says about God and about us, and how we're not to fight over which church leader we think is impressive when we're meant to follow God and Christ.

[7:43] For he goes on to say, I could not give you solid food, for you are still worldly, verse three. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?

Are you not acting like mere human beings with human wisdom? For one says, I follow Paul, and another says, I follow Apollos. Are you not mere human beings? You see, human or worldly wisdom seeks to follow one leader over another in an effort to look more impressive.

I remember when the minister who married my wife and I, Michelle and I, became a bishop. I said to a Christian friend, well, we were married by a bishop. The only thing is, my Christian friend, the minister who married him and his wife, just became the archbishop.

And so he said, well, we were married by the archbishop. You know, this spiritual one-upmanship kind of thing. I mean, we were just being silly, but the Corinthians were not. They were fighting over which leader was better and in turn made them look more impressive and might grow their church to be more impressive.

And as we saw a couple of weeks ago, this fighting caused divisions, didn't it? And this week, Paul also says that this fighting forgets that every church leader is just simply a servant.

[8:59] Verse 5. What, after all, is Apollos? What is Paul? Well, only servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, started the church, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.

So neither the one who plants or the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose or a job to do, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor, how they do the job.

But you see, verse 5, church leaders are simply servants. We'll hear more about this next week and what it means for us all as church members. But the fighting forgets that they're simply servants. Yes, they're assigned a different job to do to help grow the church. But again, verse 7, the one who plants and starts the church and the one who waters and continues the church, they're nothing compared to God who makes it grow.

It's like the kids' talk, right? I remember learning this lesson some years ago at another church, actually, where the preacher was having a bad day. I've preached bad sermons before, so I'm not having a go at this person in particular.

[10:08] You might think that this sermon is one of them. But this minister preached a doozy, and he started off with a random Bible verse, just kind of plucked it out. It wasn't what we were looking at, or it didn't seem to make sense.

He got to Jesus, which was great, but no one could follow him and see how he got there or what it meant. I was looking at people in the pew next to me, and we're all scratching our heads. But then at the end, he prayed, and before we sung the next song, a visitor in the congregation stood up and said in front of everyone, what you've said today has really touched my heart, and from now on, I want to follow Jesus.

It was the husband of a wife who was a member. And you know what my first thought was? How did that happen from this sermon? Seriously? The answer?

Verse 7. Because it's only God who makes things grow. And so both of you have a witch church leader you follow to make you look more spiritually impressive or to grow your church to be more impressive.

It's foolish. Yes, leaders are supposed to do their best and do their job, but in the end, they're simply servants. It's God who makes things grow. As Paul emphasizes in verse 9, for we are fellow workers in God's service, and you are God's field, God's building.

[11:24] You get the point? It's God who counts. And so rather than pin our hopes on a breakdancing pastor, we're to pray. That God would grow our church.

This is one way we can all help build our church here at HTD, by praying. In fact, this verse from verse 7 is what always is on the notice for our prayer night.

Coming up this Wednesday night, come along if you can. For it's only God who makes things grow, and so we must pray that God will make our church grow. Do we pray as part of our prayers, even during the week, not just for our health or our jobs or our family, but for our church, that God would make it grow?

Having said that, God does graciously choose to work through people, as we've heard, to grow his church, provided, though, we build with the right stuff. I point to verse 10.

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care, for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

[12:39] In verse 10, Paul says God's graciously given him a job to do, which is to lay the foundation, start the church in Corinth. And in verse 11, the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ.

For God's Spirit works through the good news about Jesus, how he died for our sins and rose to prove he's our Lord, works through the good news about Jesus to convict people's hearts and cause them to believe in Jesus, be saved from judgment for life eternal, and become part of the church.

This is God's wisdom that saves and starts God's church. It's why in verse 10, Paul calls himself a wise builder, not because he thinks he's smart, but because he's using God's wisdom, that is the gospel, to build.

For there is no other name that saves, no other foundation for the church. But in verse 10, we're also told that each one, each church leader and even each church member should build with care.

To build on this foundation using the right stuff. Verse at 12, 13. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is because the day will bring it to light.

[14:01] It will be revealed with fire and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. Now notice in verse 12, there are two groups of building materials. And I take it it's the first group that's the good stuff.

I mean, they're valuable to start with, right? Gold, silver, costly stones. But more than that, they're the things that survive fire. Because Paul talks about the day of judgment being like a day of fire. It won't literally be fire. It's picture language. But on that day, it says the quality of each person's work will be tested. And so if they built with wood, hay and straw, so to speak, well, fire burns wood, hay and straw, doesn't it?

In other words, what they've built will not survive judgment day. And so Paul says, build with the good stuff that will survive. But what exactly is this gold, silver and costly stones?

Well, the question to ask really is, what or rather who enables us to survive, to stand on the day of judgment? It's Jesus, isn't it? And so to build with gold, silver and costly stones is to build with the gospel, the good news about Jesus.

[15:17] In the end, the gospel message about Jesus is God's wisdom for both the foundation of the church and the building of the church. Just like it's both milk and solid food.

Because as I said, we never graduate from the gospel. We rather share it with people that they might become Christians and start at church. And then we unpack the gospel with its implications for life and so on to help us grow the church.

But it's still the gospel. And so take our youth group as an example. I've known churches who have pinned their hopes to grow their youth group on fun games and junk food and outings and cool leaders with trendy clothes.

And there's nothing wrong with those things. In fact, fun is part of enjoying life together as part of God's family. And I mean, let's be honest, who doesn't like pizza? I mean, you know, there's good junk food out there.

But the world's wisdom says to build a youth group, you focus on just those things. But those things don't save, do they? Whereas God's wisdom is to build with the message about Jesus who does save.

[16:30] And so while growing youth group can include the fun games and junk food and all those sorts of things, it must also include teaching about Jesus, whether that's talks or Bible studies, to help kids understand more about Jesus and to grow more like Jesus, to have leaders who model Jesus and to pray to God through Jesus.

That's to build with gold, silver and costly stones. And so for us, we're to do what we can here to either teach others about Jesus or support the teaching about Jesus.

Whether that's supporting by praying for our church ministries, as well as the leaders at Kids Church and JTs, as Harry did before, that they would faithfully teach the good news of Jesus and grow the kids.

Or whether it's having good music and songs that encourage us to praise God for Jesus. Or whether it's financially supporting the teaching about Jesus.

Or if we're able to serve a church like welcoming, then to do so. And not simply to be nice to others, although it's good to be nice to others, just for the record, but so that people might keep coming to hear the teaching about Jesus.

[17:52] I mean, how many people have you heard that I went to a church, but it wasn't welcoming, so I never went back. And so we're to serve in these ways to encourage others to keep hearing the teaching of Jesus.

Or simply attending church to encourage one another to stick with Jesus. All this building is building with gold, silver, and costly stones.

And if we build like this, then what we build will survive. And verse 14, the builder will receive a reward. A reward, whether it's praise from Christ, like well done, good and faithful servant.

Or the responsibility given by Christ, like come and take charge of five cities, as Jesus says in a different parable. Or being welcomed into glory by the very people you've helped grow.

But if we pin our hopes on the world's wisdom to build a church, you know, and using only attractive teaching, skip the difficult bits of the Bible, focus on entertaining music, have a breakdancing pass,

or whatever it is, then that's to build with wood, hay, and straw.

[18 : 57] And it won't last. It'll be burnt up. And then verse 15, the builder will suffer loss, but yet will be saved, even though only as one escaping through the flames.

The builder still believes in Jesus, so they still escape judgment, just, but they'll lose their reward of well done, good and faithful servant. There'll be no welcome by those they've helped grow in Christ because they haven't actually helped them to grow in Christ.

And the church they tried to build won't survive. Now for those at that particular church, God will still save his people. He'll just use other means to do it.

Whether by reading the Bible on their own or prompting them to change from a wood, hay, and straw church to a gold, silver, and costly stone one, one of our staff members has that story. They started off in a church like that and moved across over the course of their journey to other churches. The point is though, we're to build God's church with the right stuff. And so will you play a part in building our church? Whether it's by taking part in teaching others about Jesus as the kids and JT's leaders are doing now or Bible study leaders do during the week, or by supporting the teaching about Jesus through praying or serving or giving or simply attending to encourage one another to stick with Jesus?

[20 : 19] Will you play a part in building our church? And will we all have a right view of ourselves as church members? Point three, verse 16.

Paul goes on to say, don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit lives among you? You see, this gathering here this morning is not any old gathering. It's not just another club or a sports team.

No, we are actually God's temple. For God's spirit dwells amongst us, prompting us to love one another despite our differences or prompting us to believe his word despite our world.

And so as God's temple, we matter to God. And so much so, verse 17, if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is sacred and you, we here this morning, gathered together, are that temple.

There is a difference here between the person back in verse 15, by the way, who tries to build with the wrong materials. They still escape judgment through the flames because at least they were trying to build up the church.

[21 : 28] But here in verse 17, a person who destroys the church will not escape judgment because they're not trying to build up a possible church, but they're tearing down a real one.

And this was a real warning to the Corinthians because do you remember what their boasting and fighting over leaders led to? It led to division. And doesn't division destroy churches?

I bet a lot of people here know of churches that have been decimated because of division. I grew up in one. Some here today have come from one. And if you have, I'm sorry, you've gone through that. Or if you got sucked into a side which caused division, there is always forgiveness in Christ before that day of judgment. But Paul's point here is that we as God's church really matter to him.

We are his sacred temple. And so does church matter to you this much? Does it matter that we might seek to come every week we're able?

[22 : 33] And does it matter so much we'll seek to avoid any unnecessary division? Things that don't matter like how we baptize people, splashing or dunking, or where to sit in church or what color the chairs are or what we're going to have for the fellowship break, morning tea?

I mean, who cares? The church really matters to God and so does it matter to us? And will we see church leaders and church growth with God's wisdom rather than worldly wisdom?

Verse 18, do not deceive yourselves. If anyone you think are wise by the centers of this age or this world, then really you should become fools in the eyes of the world so that you may become wise in God's eyes.

For the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness. And again, the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise are futile. So then no more boasting about human leaders.

In other words, view church leaders and church growth with God's wisdom rather than the world's. And in fact, remember all we have in Christ includes the church leaders anyway.

[23 : 43] He goes on to say, all things are yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, that's Peter, or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours and you're of Christ and Christ is of God.

Paul says, it's pointless boasting over which church leader is better because in Christ you've got them all. They're all your brothers in Christ. In fact, all things are ours in Christ whether the world, life, death, the present or the future.

For we belong to Christ, Christ belongs to God and God owns everything. Sure, it may not feel like it at the moment. We may have to wait to enjoy all things kind of like waiting to enjoy an inheritance that's ours but it's still ours.

And so the world may persecute us but as Jesus said, the meek will inherit the earth. The world is ours, you see. Or death may still take our lives but in Christ it's ours because we have life eternal. We'll have life again, won't we? The future might be unknown but in Christ it's ours. We may not know exactly what's going to happen in the years ahead but our eternal future is secure.

[24 : 58] It's ours. Do you see how much we have in Christ and how silly it was for the Corinthians to argue over which leader to follow when they're all their brothers in Christ or how foolish it is to build the church with anything other than the good news about Christ.

And so will we pray for God to grow our church? Will we play our part to build this church with the gold, silver and costly stones? and will we see how much it matters our church to God that it might matter to us too?

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus who unites us together as your family, your church. Help us to build your church your way in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.