

I Corinthians 3 - Foundation Issues, Church Edition

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Jesus, we do cry out to you this morning and beseech you. We want to be your church like that. Would your church, not just here but around the world, be a church like that?
- Founded on Christ. Reaching the brokenhearted and binding up the wounded. Proclaiming the truth of Jesus.
- Would you make that true of us here? Father, we long to be the church that you have created us and called us to be.
- And so this morning we turn to your word and ask that you would guide us. Would you teach us? Would you show us what that looks like? Show us the beauty of where you're doing that here.
- [1 : 0 9] Show us the places where we're struggling and the places we need to turn back to you afresh. Jesus, you've promised to build your church.
- And there will be nothing, not even the gates of hell that can stand against her. And so will you do that even through our time this morning. Build us up through your word.
- We ask in your name. Amen. You can turn with me this morning to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. 1 Corinthians 3.
- We're not leaving Luke entirely this morning. If your Bible falls open there, you just hold your place. We'll be back. But we are going to build a little on what we discussed last week.
- Last week Jesus concluded his sermon in Luke chapter 6 with an incisive warning about examining ourselves. Looking at the foundations of our lives as we've been talking about this morning.
- [2 : 1 0] I showed you some of the cracks in the walls of my home. Which can be warning signs of foundation issues. We talked about the eternal significance of shaping our lives around the person and work and words of Christ.
- Having him truly be our foundation personally and individually. We're going to see this morning that individual struggles can easily become corporate struggles.
- In other words, if it can happen with individual people, it can happen in a church. Just check out these pictures from the doorway to my office. The first one is looking in there on the left.
- That's not artistic. That's a crack. The second one is the view that I have each week while I'm writing my sermons. A great reminder actually.
- Of the importance of the importance of a good foundation. There are some foundation issues in the office. You should know that they're being addressed. That we've already engaged someone.

[3 : 18] That there's work underway to make sure my office doesn't slide off the side of the building. And if some of you were praying to that end. But the cracks that I have in front of me each week are a great reminder of the importance of building a church.

Not just a home. Not just an individual life. But a church on the foundation of Christ. On something firm. It's equally vital for a church as it is for an individual. Not just for a physical building that we would call a church.

But for us spiritually as God's people to have a firm foundation. As we ordain and install officers in this church this morning.

I thought it would be good to revisit that priority that Jesus speaks of. And talk about the corporate application of that for us as a church. Paul is writing here in 1 Corinthians to a church.

A church with some health. And with some dysfunction. Like every church I have ever known. He's using the picture of a building. And he writes to a church that he planted about their corporate foundation.

[4 : 26] Listen to God's word in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Beginning at verse 9. We are God's fellow workers. You are God's field.

God's building. According to the grace of God given to me. Like a skilled master builder. I laid a foundation. And someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

For no one can lay a foundation. Other than that which is laid. Which is Jesus Christ. The grass withers. The flowers fade.

But these words of our God will stand forever. I don't want to complicate this morning. A very simple statement. That we just read.

That Paul makes as the bottom line of what's going on here for the church. Verse 11. No one can lay a foundation. Other than that which is laid.

[5 : 23] Which is Jesus Christ. The church must be built on the foundation of Christ alone. How's that for profound? I really jazzed it up there didn't I?

The church is one foundation. Is Jesus Christ her Lord. We've been singing it. We've been talking about this. It's not new information. But maybe being a Christ centered church sounds to you like something redundant.

Something to be taken for granted. Of course. Of course will. What else would be going on at a church? Of course we're going to be Christ centered. Built on that foundation.

Paul doesn't take it for granted at all. It's something that he's hammering home time and time again. As he writes to a variety of churches. This one in particular in Corinth.

Just at the beginning of the book. Chapter 1. Here's what he says. He says people talk about a lot of things. But we preach Christ crucified. Period.

[6 : 24] Chapter 2. He says it's tempting to use flowery language. To try to sound impressive as a pastor. And talk about all sorts of creative things. But I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Now chapter 3. Paul says you're being divided into allegiances to human beings. Different human leaders that are distracting you. But no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid.

Which is Christ. He's reminding this church who is at the center of their community. Just as Jesus and his followers demonstrated in Luke 6.

It's all about him. They're all there for him. Right? Jesus is the source of our salvation from beginning to end. He's the one in whom we find every spiritual blessing.

None of that comes apart from him. The church exists because of the work of Jesus. It grows through the grace of Jesus. And lives for the glory of Jesus.

[7 : 32] Right? Isn't that true? The church doesn't exist but for the work of Jesus. The church lives in everything we do for the glory of Jesus.

Only being able to do that because of the grace of Jesus at work in and through us. That's our hope. We can't be reminded of that truth often enough.

Can we? But it's also important that we not just say it and hear it and think that sounds wonderful. But that we know what that means.

What does it look like to be a Christ-centered church? I mean that sounds good. We should probably do that. But what does that mean about us? What does health look like in that regard?

When a church is built on the foundation of Jesus, what's a healthy sign? And what's perhaps a crack? What things do we see that might be cracks indicating that our corporate foundation is shifting, losing sight of the focus on Jesus?

[8 : 35] There are probably hundreds of good answers to those questions. This morning I just want us to see three areas that Jesus highlights in his sermon in Luke 6.

We've talked about this sermon already and about the personal application of it. But let's focus on the corporate application. What does it mean for Southwood or any church, any gathering of God's people to be Christ-centered, to have our foundation built on Christ alone?

First, it means that we must follow Christ's leadership. Jesus addresses the issue of leadership in his new community in verses 39 to 42 of Luke 6.

Jesus told them a parable. Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher.

Here's Jesus again is reminding them. And remember what he's saying here. The goal is not to surpass Jesus, to outperform him, to be a better person than Jesus.

[9 : 47] No, instead, to be trained to be like him. And if we're blind to our own weaknesses, we will ruin ourselves and others, misleading them.

And so he goes on in verse 41. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?

You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. If a leader is to be of help to anyone else, he must first address his own sin.

He's not the ultimate leader. Elders, deacons, God has called you to lead this body, to give us direction, even at times to help us see the specks in our eyes.

Don't overlook your own log. Don't stop repenting. Don't forget there's only one perfect leader, and you're not the one.

[11 : 05] We must follow Christ's leadership. This is not merely for church officers, small group leaders, youth leaders who volunteer with our young people, children's leaders who teach and lead them.

Ask yourself, are we submitting ourselves to God's word for ourselves before we call others to do so? Is our sin bigger than our brothers?

Are we quick to find fault in ourselves and slow to find fault in others? See, following Christ's leadership, seeing him as the true king and head of the church, the only one who's the perfect leader, it means that human leadership in God's church looks in many ways very different from the kind of leadership the world seeks.

Worldly leadership looks like always having the right answers or faking it when you don't, pretending that you do. Godly leadership looks like sometimes getting it wrong and admitting it.

In worldly leadership, you have to step up. In godly leadership, you have to kneel down. Worldly leadership says, never let them see you sweat.

[12 : 25] Godly leadership says, let them see you sweat and cry and repent. Godly leadership points to self.

Godly leadership points to another. See, what's the real issue in all of these examples of the difference in two kinds of leadership?

It's in worldly leadership, you're asked to be the man, right? It's up to you. Be the leader. In godly leadership, Jesus remains the man, the leader.

And you must know you need him to actually be led by him. He's your leader too. So I would say this to you, when you find someone who makes much of Jesus, who makes Jesus be great in your eyes, in your heart, when you find that person, follow him.

Stick with her so that you can keep being led to Jesus. It may well be that you're not impressed with him personally on a regular basis.

[13 : 42] But when you're around him, you're impressed with Jesus. Follow there. Stay there. So that you'll always be led to Jesus.

Jesus paints this unusual picture of leadership in his new community. Talks about logs and specks and leaders being blind.

What he's saying is leaders following Jesus lead in humble repentance. We should be quick to listen and slow to be defensive. Quick to serve and slow to flaunt our authority.

Take advantage of those under our leadership. Leaders following Jesus lead in dependent prayer. Quick to ask for God's help.

Slow to go anywhere in their own wisdom. So as church members, you must pray for us. I told you we're going on a retreat this weekend, your elders and deacons.

[14 : 42] Pray then, but pray all the time. We desperately need God's help. We're being called to lead in a very counter-cultural way, in a way that's not natural for any of us.

So pray, pray that we would lead that way. Pray that our hearts would fight against the temptation to lead differently. One of the things I'm most thankful for about this church is that God is creating that kind of leadership here.

The men being installed this morning are a continuation of that. I wish you all got to sit in meetings and in conversations with these guys, as some of you do get the opportunity to do with our elders and deacons, and see them examine their hearts together.

See them cry together. Repent to each other. Pray together for God's direction. You would be so encouraged. I'll show you a video next time.

We must pray God continues to make us such leaders. Leaders who point to Christ. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, that there's a danger, a real danger in the church when people look to human leadership more than to Christ.

[15 : 59] When we lose focus on the glory of God because of our obsession with human strengths and gifts and successes and results. It's what's been going on in Corinth and what's happening there, do you know?

It's dividing the church, isn't it? Into a bunch of different groups. I'm with Paul. I'm with Apollos. Splitting them up. These days we would call it a cult of personality, right?

A human leader looming too large in front of Christ. Now you may think, oh, we got that easy at Southwood because our senior pastor doesn't sound amazing enough or look cool enough to develop a cult of personality.

That's just not something we're going to struggle with. He certainly isn't funny enough. But, don't amen that. That's not nice. I heard that. But in all sincerity, beware.

Beware of cracks that look like things like only getting excited to hear God's word from one preacher. A crack could be having a church leader who in your mind can do no wrong.

[17 : 14] It might be finding yourself consistently agreeing with the same group in the church all the time. It may mean when you see those things, we're shifting off our foundation of Christ alone.

Y'all, only His leadership is flawless. Only His. No one else's. Don't be confused. We must always push each other back to Him.

Secondly, a church built on the foundation of Christ alone must follow Christ's word. We noticed in Luke chapter 6 that it's Jesus Himself who's bringing shape to this new community, right?

They must follow His words. He's the one who's going to tell them how it's going to work. He concludes His sermon by driving that home at the very end. It's the passage we read earlier when Ron was leading us in confession.

Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like. He's like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.

[18 : 23] And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it because it had been well built. But the one who hears my words and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation.

When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great. We must preach God's word.

We must teach God's word. And we often think we do that merely because it's true, because it's the only thing that can infallibly give us direction.

And that is true, but it's even more than that. You know why especially we must preach and teach the word if we are to keep Christ as our foundation? Because when you preach the word, you preach Jesus.

That's what happens. That's what Jesus tells the guys on the road to Emmaus, right? As he's walking with them, having risen from the dead, he goes back and he tells them all the things taught and all the scriptures concerning himself.

[19 : 27] Every time you open this word, that's where it's pointing you, to Jesus. The story of the Bible, cover to cover, on every page, is the story of God's grace through Jesus.

It is God redeeming and restoring his people and his world that he created for relationship with himself. And he's bringing us back into that relationship and making us what we were meant to be all through Jesus.

When we stick with the word, we stick with Jesus. If you begin regularly to hear a lot of good advice, and I mean this here as much as anywhere else.

If you're hearing what you think is pawned off as good advice, but you're not sure where in God's word it came from, you may be seeing a crack. When God's word is not read.

Or perhaps when it's read at the beginning of a sermon, but not connected in any way to the 30-minute lecture you hear afterwards. Now there's more than one way to do that.

[20 : 33] But you must always be careful. Please, never hesitate to ask me or any other teacher here at this church, were you basing that comment on God's word?

Can you show me where that's coming from? Can we look at that together? Help me understand where you're getting that. Depending on God's word has been a hallmark of Southwood since long before I got here.

All the way back to the founding of the church. But we must never let that priority waver. And it can. And it happens fast in churches and with devastating effects.

Following God's word, Jesus says, is not merely about hearing it, right? It's not just, let's make sure the pastor gets this one right. But it's actually about doing it. As well.

Jesus is really clear. He hears my words and does them. It's a danger for churches to find themselves only reading and teaching the easy parts of the Bible.

[21 : 34] The ones they like and agree with and make them feel good. But if we're to follow Christ's word, we should expect, we're not going to get it all right.

So we expect that we open God's word and find it to challenge some of our assumptions. To challenge some of our actions. To redirect us. That's what we should expect.

And we must be willing to be shaped by all of it. Even when our instincts lead us a different direction. Is the word of Christ our source of life?

Together, as a group, do we teach it? Preach it? Study it? Talk about it together in conversation? Do we get challenged and redirected by it?

Have our priorities shaped by it? Do we read it? Meditate upon it? Make our decisions based on it?

[22 : 31] Find our comfort in it? Why? All because it always keeps our focus fixed on our great Savior.

Come back here. That's why. That's what you'll find. Comfort, direction, teaching, pointing you to Jesus. All right, one more.

We could go on all day, but we wouldn't be here all day. I'd be alone. If we as a church are to be built on the foundation of Christ alone, not only are we always looking to His ultimate leadership, not only are we always turning to His word, but also we must follow Christ's heart.

What do I mean by that? There are a lot of things following Christ's heart could mean, but we're just thinking here this morning in Luke chapter 6. We've seen in Luke 6 the heart of Christ, haven't we?

Jesus spends all night in prayer with His Father, bringing His heart into alignment with the heart of God, and He comes down from the mountain after praying all night, and what's His heart got on it?

[23 : 46] It's people, isn't it? His heart is for people, particularly for those who are not yet a part of His community. It's His 12 disciples. It's people from all over the place who've come, Jews and Gentiles.

He's going to teach. He's going to heal. He's moving towards people. And as He begins to teach, who else is on His heart? He starts with the poor, doesn't He?

At the very beginning. The poor. Those outsiders who are not in His community. Who are we going to love? Who does He tell us to love?

Your enemies. Let's just read a little bit of it. Verse 27. I say to you who hear, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you.

Pray for those who abuse you. If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you?

[24 : 47] Even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. But love your enemies.

Do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. And your reward will be great. And you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful.

How? Even as your Father is merciful. It's easy to forget the fact that a church built on the foundation of Christ alone is not primarily for us in the church.

It's for Him. It's for Jesus. And therefore, it must share His heart for those outside the community.

The heart of Jesus is for the poor, the hungry, the enemies. And by those words here in Luke 6, He particularly means those who don't know Jesus as the treasure above all other treasures.

[25 : 55] That's what He's talking about. The heart of Jesus is for the unreligious. The cynical towards religion. The anti-religious.

His heart moves towards those who are different ethnically, spiritually, socially. He moves towards them so much that He would go all the way to the cross and be rejected and cast out so that people like that who weren't naturally a part of His community could be welcomed into it.

That's His heart, isn't it? That's the heart of God sent in flesh in Christ coming for those who are outside to bring them in. To bring them into His community where they're gonna do what?

Where they will meet Him. That's what His community's all about, right? It's about Him. We wanna invite people in not so they'll meet us. So they'll meet Him.

It's really easy though to fall into a consumer approach to church. To think of church like we do most of the rest of our lives.

[27 : 07] Do I get what I want or need there? Right? Thought about church that way before? When you were looking for a church you may have thought I need to find a place that can do fill in the blank for me.

How's it gonna meet my needs? I mean, be honest. Have you had more conversations wrestling over the mission of the church to help those in need or wrestling with whether or not your church is meeting your needs?

Which one do you tend to talk about more with your friends? That can be a crack. A warning for us to come back to the foundation of Christ alone and share His heart.

What really drives our lives? Is it our comfort or Christ's heart? Another dynamic that can be a crack for a church is where your new members are coming from.

What's your church growth strategy? Does your church only grow because people from the church down the street get pulled over because they like what you do better? You do church more the way they want you to do it?

[28 : 19] And so you get some people from some of the other churches and your church gets bigger? Or do we long and work and pray to help people meet Jesus for the first time even?

If we're not at least praying for and then talking to our neighbors, unbelieving school or work acquaintances, we may be losing Christ's heart.

His heart to reach out, to welcome in all sorts of people who need to experience the good news of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

This is an area I'd love to challenge us because it's so central to the heart of Christ. And I love this church. We love each other so much sometimes that we're just happy to have us here.

And we just love each other. And I'm delighted in that. But sometimes it makes us just, let's not really mess with what we got, you know? I kind of like the people here. We're friends.

[29 : 20] We love Jesus together. I'm not telling you to stop loving each other. But Jesus says there are others we must love as well.

If we're to have His heart, we're to love not only each other, but others as well. I was writing this sermon. I wrote the words, keep your friends, but make some enemies too.

That doesn't sound quite right. Keep some friends and make some enemies. But keep your friends and love some enemies too. Find others who are not already in, who don't know Christ.

Not just those who look and act like you, but the poor and the have-nots. Or some of us, we need to hear, not just the poor and the have-nots, but your wealthy next-door neighbor who on the inside is full of loneliness and emptiness and needs to know the hope and fulfillment of Christ.

Don't overlook them. This is one of my favorite images of Southwood when I'm walking around this building praying. Some of you have seen me circling.

[30 : 33] It means I'm confused and I don't know what to preach on Sunday. So I'm praying for our church and one of the images that often comes to mind is of a storm shelter. I've shared this with you before.

We need storm shelters in this part of the country. They come through here. You know, maybe there's one of those bad tornadoes coming. Imagine that we know the tornado is coming.

It's been picked up on the radar and we all run here to that storm shelter that has a firm foundation that's secure and so we know it's a safe place to come in the storm.

And imagine looking out those windows right here and you can see a long way and you see all sorts of people with the wind blowing through their hair and they're crawling on the ground.

It's the poor, your neighbors, your enemies, the rest of Huntsville desperate to find a safe place.

[31 : 35] Nowhere with a foundation that they can count on to be secure and to hold when the storm shows up. And we all know it's coming and if you're looking out there and seeing them, wouldn't your heart break?

Wouldn't you hurt for them? Wouldn't you run out to yell to them and to bring them in and to welcome them into a safe place? Of course you would.

We want to offer safety. We want to give life to those facing certain death with no protection. Y'all, God has given Southwood a firm foundation.

He's made us a storm shelter and storms are coming. Those things are certain. The question is, are we bringing others in? May we always be a community where we are built securely on the foundation of Christ alone.

Following His leadership and His Word. And may we never forget that following His heart means offering the refuge of Christ to everyone around us.

[32 : 46] Let's pray. Father, we're not individually that way naturally.

We're not corporately that way naturally. We have the same selfish instincts that each of us does. We have a Savior whose heart has never stopped just with us but has been for the nations, for the ends of the earth to know Him, to live in relationship with Him, to praise His name.

And would you never let that zeal wane in us. Don't let us lose sight of Jesus. Don't let us move from His Word.

Holy Spirit, keep our hearts aflame for more and more knowing who Jesus is. would we love well as Your people.

You have poured it into us. Would it spill over from us? We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

[34 : 05] Abon businesses