

# Christ Our Foundation (1 Cor 3:1-17)

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Chapter 3, so please turn to verse 1 and we'll read through to 17. Chapter 3, so please turn to verse 1 and we'll read through to 17.
- I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready, you are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly?
- Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, I follow Paul, and another, I follow Apollos, are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos?
- And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe, as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.
- So neither the one who plants nor 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, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour.
- [ 1 : 32 ] For we are co-workers in God's service. You are God's field, God's building. 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.
- If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for waters, because the day will bring it to light.
- It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.
- If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss, but yet will be saved, even though only as one escaping through the flames. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple, and that God's spirit dwells in your midst?
- [ 2 : 35 ] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. Thank you, Eden.
- Shall we pray? Let's ask God to help us understand this passage together. Father, your word is living and active, and yet sometimes it can cut.
- But Lord, we know that you are a loving surgeon, wanting to do heart surgery in us. You are faithful, as we've heard, and you are good.
- And so do whatever it takes through this sermon to reveal your true self to us. We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.
- Amen. As some of you know, we are having another baby later this year. Well, chat with my wife, my lovely wife, more about it if you like.
- [ 3 : 46 ] And it is a bit counter-cultural in our day and age, isn't it, right? It seems like our generation and younger, we kind of tend to have more pets than children at the moment. My role as a dad is fairly simple.

In the birthing room, it's been limited to praying, cheering Cheryl on, announcing the gender, and then cutting the cord.

And so if the Lord wills, in a few months, we'll be looking forward to that. And then, you know, midnight feeds and nappy changes. And then those fleeting moments where you have a child that fits between your hand and elbow.

But I'm also grateful that each of our children don't stay children forever, right? Don't stay infants. As you just saw, our eldest is 11, and then we have 9, 6, and 3 in a month's time, I think.

And I'm grateful because you don't want babies forever, right? And now, as far as we know, the Apostle Paul's never been a dad.

[ 4 : 54 ] Seems like when he writes this letter, 1 Corinthians, he's not married. We'll talk more about this in chapter 7. But in his missionary journeys, right, as Paul lived and served among the church in Corinth, I thought, for almost two years, Paul had the delight, the joy, of parenting, watching his spiritual babies grow.

And so this is language that is not far from his mind, actually, to another church in Thessalonica. He actually says to them, just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you.

But when he's reaching for a way to describe how the Corinthians have been behaving in chapter 3, what does he say?

Look at verse 1 again. I couldn't address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still infants in Christ.

Ouch. Not spiritual adults, but worldly babies. We want to be careful here. These are strong words, but Paul is loving the Corinthian church as he writes this.

[ 6 : 12 ] As he says this, he is like a devoted parent that wants to see his children grow. How could he not? He preached the gospel to them.

He was in the delivery room. As they were born again. And so he wants them to grow up. Because he doesn't want babies forever, either.

So here's the question. What made the church in Corinth infants in Christ? Was it their lack of deeper knowledge? Was it that they lacked a certain spiritual gift?

Is there some kind of milk part to Christianity? And then there's going to be a meat part? Well, if you've been following our series, you already know from context, don't you?

They're babies because they're battling one another in church. Go back with me to verse 10 of chapter 1. Well, that's a reminder to us, isn't it, of the issue.

[ 7 : 18 ] Two weeks ago we heard that word had reached Paul, that there were divisions among them. There was quarreling about which preacher to follow. There was boasting about who was more wise and spiritual, even though we heard last week that it's the Holy Spirit who opens everyone's eyes to Jesus, not our high IQs.

And then here in chapter 3, verse 2 onwards, Paul revisits this issue that Chloe's household had brought up. The reason Paul must address them like baby Christians is because they are still being worldly.

And Paul will unpack this in lots of different ways, but at the very least, when the Corinthians pick sides within the church, they have caved in to their sinful human nature.

By anchoring their identity, their true self, into, ah, who I am is someone who follows a palace. Who I am is someone who follows Paul, or someone else.

This is them living as if the Holy Spirit had never touched their lives. And to be honest here, Paul is also rebuking PCBC.

[ 8 : 39 ] Isn't he? Don't forget who this letter is for. 1 Corinthians 1.1, right? This letter is to the church of God in Corinth, and all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's us. And so Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is calling us out too. He is saying, when you take sides over an issue here at church and fight each other, you're a baby.

When I start to think, who's my favorite preacher, or who's my go-to MC, or my buddy-buddy cell group leader that really understands me and no one else, I'm being childish.

It's not for me today to name our different groups here, but PCBC, division, is also a live issue in our church, is it not? How could it not be?

We're fallen. We're messy. But let's also remember God's heart to us. Through this letter, the Holy Spirit wants to build us up as a spiritual house.

[ 9 : 57 ] Because of Jesus, we are God's gathered people because of the gift of Christ. And so let's tackle the log of division that's in our eyes too as we go through this passage.

A few weeks ago, I shared that in the book of 1 Corinthians. I think every single issue that comes up stems from a wrong view of ourselves, or themselves, and a wrong view of God.

And so we're going to see both in this passage. So Paul addresses both. So I want us to see, as we walk through the passage, how Paul corrects wrong thinking about ourselves, and about God, and why it should matter.

So we're just going to walk section by section. So we've just revisited the issue in verses 1 to 3. Division that is childish. Conflict among Christians that shouldn't happen.

And so from verse 5, Paul shares an interesting insight about himself. And the insight is here in verse 5. What after all is Apollos?

[ 11 : 06 ] And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord has assigned to each his task. Our world loves to elevate gifted speakers or rock stars or artists.

They could get plastered on the front page of the Herald or they get main stage at Eden Park. But the Bible says that in church, everyone is a servant.

And in the original language, the word here that Paul says for servant, it literally reads in other parts of the Bible as deacons. Deacons. Right? Acts 6, same word there.

1 Timothy 3, verse 8, same word there. Everyone is a deacon or servant. Someone who collects cups and washes them or cleans toilets.

Guys and girls who are like waiters at a restaurant. People who carry bags, pack up chairs. That is the posture that we should all take as a Christian.

[ 12 : 23 ] You know, one of the most formative moments in my training to be a pastor was in our previous church where I was a student minister. And I didn't hear a killer sermon.

It wasn't a powerful moment of worship. It was this. Here's the formative moment. I walked into the kitchen where everyone was having morning tea.

And our senior pastor at the time, his name was Tim, had his sleeves up and was washing the dishes with another older sister. pastor. And as a visitor said to me that day, you don't see that at every church.

You don't. Sadly, in some churches, the lead pastor is untouchable. Literally, behind a glass panel, perhaps. Surrounded by minders, security, followed by fans online, offline, who reserve front row seats to hear them speak.

their real lives are hidden behind PR and social media. Can I suggest that is the wrong way to treat leaders in our church?

[ 13 : 37 ] And it can lead to division and have not dealt with devastation. At PCBC, it may look different.

And yet, whether you are Pastor Albert or Pastor Andrew, whether you are Song or Sharon, Julianne or Isaac, Peter or Cindy, we are servants of the Lord first.

No more and no less. That's what verse 5 tells us. Paul then goes on, right, doesn't he, in verse 6 to point out every servant has a different role.

What does it say there? Verse 6, I planted the seed, I Paul, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. We all have different parts, but who gives the growth?

God. So who should get the glory? God, not us. And that's important to remember. Because whatever your role in God's kingdom work here, you and I, we're the same in Christ.

[ 14 : 51 ] We're one. We are God's workers. This church, this community is God's field and God's world. And because of that oneness, we don't need to say it's us and them.

We don't need to go, oh, they're different to us. We don't have to avoid people who don't look like us, talk like us. We don't have to send messages behind people's backs, do we?

Saying, oh, listen to him, or did you hear what she said? Because this church, these people, these leaders belong to God. God gets the glory, not us.

In Christ, we are all servants. friends. This is a hard way to think in our culture. We have to recognize this. We live in a world where the good news is shaped by secular, screen-shaped, Oscar-winners-a-grinners kind of worlds.

Right? In our world, you gather enough likes, you get enough karma, you grow your box score and sports. That's how you earn the love and respect and adoration of people around you.

[ 16 : 12 ] But it's a hopeless way to live. And yet, too often, we let this gospel, this good news, infect our church, don't we?

Who hasn't felt the temptation to measure success in your group, or in your church, or in your congregation? Tempted to measure it, by how many raised hands you got, how many times you filled the auditorium, how many likes and subscribes you get with your profile.

I know I am. But the gospel of Jesus Christ tells us the opposite, doesn't it? Our Lord Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

That's the gospel. His perfect result did not depend on our performance, the quality of our serving. It was sheer grace as Jesus hung on a cross for our sins.

And so there's nothing in my hands or your hands that we can bring in order to bribe God and get his love. love. It doesn't work that way.

[ 17 : 33 ] The way to be a Christian is this. Stop clinging to yourself for worth. Cling to Jesus instead. He died for you. And when you're in doubt, repeat daily.

Only this gospel, this good news, can make you humble and hopeful. gospel. And in verse 10, you can see actually Paul demonstrates this gospel, right?

Because I love this little aside. He says, by grace, God has given me the grace. I laid a foundation as a wise builder. And now someone else is building on it.

He's honest about his gifting, right? The Lord really gave him a gift of evangelism. He's a wise master builder. But he acknowledges that it's God's gift of grace.

And notice that even though he's technically, he was the founding pastor of the Corinthian church, he is so secure in his identity in Jesus. He is so glad to see, verse 10b, others building upon that foundation.

[ 18 : 43 ] He's okay to let it go. And let others take the lead. And if you and I are like Paul, if we have contentment because of Jesus with however God calls us to serve, then it won't matter whether you get the credit, I get the credit, someone else gets the credit.

It won't matter whether you're still part of that brother or sister's journey today or not. Servants don't need to talk like that. They rejoice that it's God who's growing the church.

It's God who's growing these young lives. That his name is remembered, not ours. A missionary, Christine Dillon, puts it this way, Christian ministry is like being a link in God's chain.

You see, when you share the gospel faithfully with someone, you might be here in someone's journey to becoming a Christian. Let's say they accept and repent and believe in Jesus here.

When you share the gospel with someone, your link in the chain might be here. God may use your efforts as this initial stone in their shoe, but you may never see them repent and believe.

[ 20 : 05 ] You may never be there when they pray that sinner's prayer or whatever else. So don't get jealous though of the other people or the other church or the other ministry.

that is chalking up baptisms and results here because maybe you're here and that's the place God has put you. Maybe they are just reaping the harvest that you sow faithfully.

Maybe you could be on this side. You have the privilege of building on the life of someone who has just become a Christian. Right? Don't get proud.

Oh, I get to see all this growth. Someone slaved away here without seeing the fruit so that you could rejoice and reap the harvest. We all have our roles to play and all the glory should go to Jesus, not a human teacher or a human leader.

Because, again, in Christ, we all become servants. No more, no less. That's the insight that Paul offers to the church in Corinth and I believe to us as well as PCBC.

[ 21 : 18 ] And because of this insight, Paul then next challenges the Corinthians to be careful how they build on Christ their foundation.

That's the next section, right? Be careful how you build. Paul has just used that metaphor calling himself God's architect. He's also talked about himself as a servant. he also uses farming language.

He planted the gospel, someone else has watered it. Now he's going to use another metaphor. He's going to talk about building itself, being a builder. Some of you have been over to our street in Pakaranga.

There's lots of building happening around us. And so we got the privilege around July last year of seeing the house across the road from us get carried away in a truck and then left as rubble, whatever's left over.

It was slowly dug up and flattened and smoothed out. Pipes were laid and then soon they started laying a foundation. Walls started coming up and now across the road from us there are 11 units almost ready to sell.

[ 22 : 30 ] No car parks. But the bit that actually is most important in this whole process, some of it looks more impressive than others.

But the bit that's the most important is the foundation. That was the part that took the most effort and care to lay properly.

And that is what Paul draws attention to here in verse 10 in a spiritual sense. By the grace, verse 10, God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder.

And so from this foundation, each one should build with care. He's saying to the building team in Corinth, now that he, the architect, has moved on, he's in another city now, keep building carefully.

If you're going to build this church and keep it going, make sure every brick, every material, every furnishing is firmly fixed to the foundation that I've laid for you.

[ 23 : 35 ] And for the purpose of Paul's illustration, you need to know what the foundation is. It's not Paul's good works. It's not his charisma, his intellect, it's not his celebrity teaching.

What is it? We've heard it already. It's the gospel. That's the foundation. God's good news, his amazing announcement that Christ died and rose again for sinners.

That is the message that Paul was compelled to preach. He resolved to know nothing except Christ and him crucified. That was on his lips day in, day out.

And when quality building materials rise from a solid foundation, you're going to get a secure building, right? And so in the church, we want to make sure whatever we build rises from the foundation of the gospel.

gospel. And look, the wrong way to read this illustration, this list of building materials, gold, silver, precious stone, so on, is to try and get really detailed and identify something, some teaching for each type of material, okay?

[ 24 : 48 ] And some have tried to do that. But what we do know is this. Some of these, gold, silver, silver, they seem pretty costly, right?

They seem pretty valuable and maybe stable. And some of these, they don't seem to survive a fire or a storm.

So perhaps Paul has a mind here in this analogy that some of the materials that the Israelites were using when they built their physical temples, you know, and they were told to use quality, right?

But what we shouldn't speculate on and what we don't know is whether gold corresponds to a certain teaching or silver is a certain spiritual gift and so on. We don't need to do that.

Again, I think if we want to understand this analogy, remember the context. This was a divided church. These were babies in Christ who assumed worldly ideas of how to build power and influence.

[ 25 : 52 ] Right? Imagine the situation in Corinth. Hey, Apollos, we love you so much. I think we need to expand your teaching a bit more. Can we start Apollos Ministries, TM, and let's see where that takes us?

No. Don't do that, church. That's like piling hay on concrete and saying that will stick around forever. Oh, you're such an amazing leader.

You know what? Can we just support you instead of all the others? We don't really like the others anyway, so let me just support you instead. Sadly, that's a true story in our church.

And I want to say that kind of heart is like piling up wood on a base and saying, yep, that's fire safe. No, it's not.

And so, church, can I confess that sometimes I do get concerned how carelessly some of us are tempted to build. And it will be subtle, won't it?

[ 26 : 55 ] It's like a crack in the wall and you're like, oh yeah, we can leave for another day. Or a leak in the baptistry. But we should be concerned as we serve in this church if conversations in our committees, our meetings, our groups are more about clauses and guidelines and less about Christ.

We should be careful if we're always thinking about the trellis work rather than the vine that's growing on it, the brothers and sisters in our church. It's concerning when there's more on the gossip and less about the gospel.

And we should be careful that we don't slip into just thinking about the opinions of certain saints rather than reflecting deeply on the gospel delivered for all saints.

You see, just like a real building, it can be very easy to hide shoddy workmanship until a day of testing comes, like a members meeting meltdown, like a falling out between good friends.

But if not then, then you better believe when Jesus comes back, as Paul says here, there will be a day of testing, a day of disclosure.

[ 28 : 18 ] Verse 13 is so clear. That's what Paul warns about. No matter what you hide in this life, one day all our building work as God's people will be tested by fire.

What exactly is Paul referring to here? Rewards being burned. Again, lots of speculation, lots of different answers. And again, let's use what we already have as brothers and sisters.

We know always, there's always two great answers to any question. It's either Jesus or context. And from context, these verses here cannot mean there's this middle ground after you die where your sins are purged away.

Because if you notice, what is tested with fire? It's actually not the person, it's their work. So that's why we differ from the Roman Catholic teaching of purgatory, for example, or a post-death chance at becoming redeemed.

That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches clearly it's appointed for a man to die once and then to face judgment. No more, no less.

[ 29 : 38 ] And I think from context, if we read this passage, these verses also cannot mean there's this kind of third category of a Christian who just tips over into heaven.

And the technical term, some of you might have heard it before, is a carnal Christian or a fleshly one, using the phrase, a word from earlier in the passage.

And I want to suggest that this is not possible either. because if Jesus is not your Lord and Savior, he's not your Savior. You cannot fool yourself and say, I said a sinner's prayer, I'm tipped in now, and now I can sit and be on the throne of my life and do whatever I want.

And that's just me being a carnal Christian or a worldly one. You're either in Christ or you're not in him. you're either born again or you need to be.

Christ is Lord of all or not at all. I think Paul's point in this analogy, this explanation is far simpler.

[ 30 : 49 ] If we are truly a church in Christ, then it matters deeply to God that our spiritual growth happens. Your spiritual growth matters to God.

And so I think that's the point. If you and I are in Christ, let's be careful builders. Let's build upon the gospel with quality materials to shape our lives, to fill our hearts, and let's do it in a way that builds up God's church.

Let's let the word in Christ, the gospel, dwell richly in us through quality songs, through honest prayers that are biblical, through a community that is motivated and shaped by the gospel.

We are careful builders. We are also kind of like art restorers. I don't know if you've ever seen a masterpiece hanging in the Auckland art gallery or somewhere else. They had to work hard at restoring that.

It was probably buried, some of them, and in bad shape. We are art restorers, God has rescued us. We are now his masterpiece.

[ 32 : 01 ] And through the gospel, he wants our broken bodies to be repaired and restored. He wants our distorted minds to be cleaned up so that it reflects the beauty and the brilliance of God himself.

And so we craft with care. We are art restorers. Let us shape our hearts and minds with the gospel so much that even your parents or your workmates, your kids, will be dazzled by the grace and mercy of Jesus that they can see in you.

We are art restorers. And perhaps we are diligent athletes as well, to use another metaphor. We are people who are sober minded, prepared for action.

And so we don't waste our life chasing achievements, that will be forgotten after your funeral. Because we only have one life to live for Jesus.

Let go of arguments and hurts, friends, that will not even make a footnote in history when Jesus comes back. In Jesus, make your spiritual growth more important than your bank balance or your bucket list.

[ 33 : 19 ] So let's be careful how you build on Christ our foundation. I think that's what Paul is trying to remind us of and warn us of. But maybe now you're hearing all this and going, I feel a little bit overwhelmed.

That's a lot of things I need to do today. How can I do this without feeling guilty or ashamed that I don't stack up? Or how can I do this without feeling proud and saying, I keep all the rules?

I'm cleaned up in my life here and therefore this part of my life doesn't matter. We've heard the instruction. Finally, Paul gives us the inspiration from verse 16 and 17.

Lots of 316s in the Bible, right? Some of you know a few of them, right? John 316 is, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, whoever so believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

There's another good one, 1 John 316. Anyone know that one? This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And I want to submit that actually 1 Corinthians 316 is really, really important for us too, right?

[ 34 : 32 ] What does it say? Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst? You see, the wisdom of the early ancient people of Corinth was this.

There were lots of gods, gods of wealth, fertility, joy, and all kinds of other things. And they lived in temples or shrines that you could go and worship at.

You could pay tribute to. Hundreds of shrines to hundreds of different gods. I mean, it's not so different to a lot of Asian religions even today.

there are different shrines of different gods. And that building or that place is where God is. So that's why you light your incense or you bow your bodies or you face towards Mecca.

And actually even in the Roman Catholic Church, some of you may know this, you go to Mass. Why? Because at one point in Mass, the priest declares that this bread, Jesus is now present there.

[ 35 : 42 ] And this cup, he's now present there. And so that's where God is, right? And so you say the words, you literally eat and drink the essence of Jesus.

But Paul says no. That's not how it works. The Bible says in Christ, because of what Jesus has done, God sends his Holy Spirit, God himself, who lives in each of us.

Your body is now a temple of the living God, right? It has to be because Jesus, he's resurrected, he's at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

And before he comes to rule and judge, though, he has sent the Spirit to dwell in every believer. And so that's why you are God's holy temple. Not a building, not a place, not a particular person.



And I love that he says here, that is what you are, right? You collectively. This is a truth we need to hear again and again in this letter. If a dwelling place for God is what you are, what's the question behind that, right?

[ 36 : 58 ] The question behind this answer is, who am I, isn't it? Again, Paul is giving us an identity question. We've been doing lots of identity questioning this past week, haven't we?

Who legally had to fill out a census form? Yep, most of us. And actually, our census form is an important tool to help us to understand ourselves, our country.

But they had a good go, right, at asking us, who are you? Now, truly, who are you? Right? You can either be New Zealand European or Maori or Chinese or Indian or you could choose something else.

We had big debates in our house. What exactly do we write there? And if you're an adult, you were asked three times, right, what your sex or gender was.

It was so important that they needed to do it three times. But the Bible says, if you're a child of God, if you're saved by grace, God himself dwells in you by spirit.

[ 38 : 02 ] So who are you? You are in Christ first and foremost. Your body, my body, male or female, beautiful or broken, becomes a temple of the living God through the Holy Spirit.

Isn't that good news? God once would live in a portable tent to be near his people or dwell in a stone temple, now he lives in you and you and you.

And you know what? I think this is a truth we need more and more today. 2023 is a tough time to be a Christian because everyone wants to tell you who you are.

Every action and advocacy group wants to tell you who you should be. But because of the gospel, here and in every church of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is pleased to dwell in Jewish bodies, in Gentile bodies, in Pākehā and Māori bodies, in little bodies and big bodies, strong bodies and weak bodies.

Isn't that inspiration to counter all the jealousy and division that we might face among us? Isn't that motivation to build our lives carefully in Christ?

[ 39 : 29 ] Who am I? I'm not my own. I belong to the Lord because the Holy Spirit dwells in me. And so we thank God, right?

It's not our family that defines us, or our failures, or our Facebook feeds. Only God gets the right to define who I am, who you are. And if you're in Christ, you're a temple of the living God.

No one can shake that identity, ever. And so let's not ruin God's temple by battling each other to death. Let's not be babies forever, because there's so much more to build here at PCBC.

We build carefully, but with joy, knowing who we truly are. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you so much that you have given us a name in Jesus.

Lord, no matter how anonymous we feel, even this moment, how broken, how conflicted, and Lord, no matter how depressed or distraught we feel, Lord, remind us today that in Jesus we have a name above every name.

[ 40 : 55 ] And in this church we are brothers and sisters first and foremost in Christ. So Lord, I pray that you would help just destroy division in our church.

Help us to repent and ask forgiveness, seek reconciliation. Lord, there are people who would not even walk in today because of hurts. Lord, work in our hearts.

Remind them and us who we truly are and help us to build carefully on Christ. We thank you for the gospel. We thank you that it is the power to save and is the power to transform us day in, day out.

So Father, remind us again and again, we are not our own. We are bought with a price. In Jesus' name, amen.