

Building God's Temple Together

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[0 : 00] So what we've seen the past couple weeks is that this church in the city of Corinth was a messed up church. They had lots of issues, which is a big part of the reason that this book of 1 Corinthians in the Bible exists, because Paul was writing to them to address all of the issues that had come up in their church, and to tell them, here's how we should be approaching these things from a godly perspective.

In chapter 1, we saw that there was divisions in the church, that people were fighting and arguing about the different teachers there. Last week in chapter 2, we looked at how they had this desire for worldly wisdom, and in their desire for worldly wisdom and their pursuit of it, they were threatening to give up the gospel that set them apart and that made them unique as God's people.

And today, Paul is going to continue addressing these two issues, and he's going to use two images. He's going to mix his metaphors a little bit. He's going to talk about the church as a field and the church as a building, and show how because the church is a field, is God's field, and because the church is God's building, there shouldn't be divisions in the church, and we shouldn't be pursuing worldly wisdom instead of godly wisdom.

So, the first thing, let's look at the first couple verses, and then we'll jump into what we want to see in this passage today. He says, What then is Apollos? What is Paul?

Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, like I said, the church in Corinth was divided.

[1 : 38] They were arguing. They had fights about who was the best teacher, who was the best preacher. In a watermark perspective, maybe we could put it this way. There was the Tobin group.

They sat front and center because they were excited to hear him preach every Sunday. Whenever he got up on stage, they were excited, and when it wasn't him, they were upset. They would discuss his sermons.

They would come sit as close to the front as possible so that when Tobin got up, they would be right there, ready for it. Over here, you have Chris's group. They don't get to hear him preach as much, but when he does preach, they love it.

And because they don't get to hear him preach as much, they just continually listen to his sermons on podcast and have discussion groups that get together throughout the week to discuss what Chris said in his latest message.

Over here, we have Graham and Alfie's group. They love the African teaching. And like Chris's group, they don't get to hear Graham and Alfie as often as you get to hear Tobin.

[2 : 46] And so what they do is they have discussion groups that meet up throughout the week. They podcast it. They maybe pull Graham and Alfie over to their houses for dinner. And then right up here, a little off center, you have Justine, who's in my group because she's married to me and she has to be.

But to make up for the fact that she's all alone, she sits there and when I'm preaching, she live tweets the sermon so that people around the world can follow and join in on her group.

And this is comical because that's not the way that it is at Watermark, but it was the way that it worked at Corinth. And it spilled over and it affected their relationships because Tobin's group and Graham's group would not talk to each other and interact with each other like they were supposed to.

And I know that different people at Watermark may have our favorite preachers, but I think that generally we see that we are a unified body rather than a group of rivals.

You know, one Sunday after church, one of my youth came up to me and he said, Hey Eric, you know you're not my favorite preacher at Watermark. Chris is. I think he expected a reaction from me or something, but I was just like, I'm excited that there's someone preaching God's word out here that you're excited to listen to.

[3 : 57] Right? But what happened here in Corinth is that the people were fighting. The people didn't see themselves as a unified body. They would go around and rather than saying, I'm part of the church at Corinth, they would say, I follow Paul.

I follow Apollos. Or in our context, I follow Tobin. I follow Chris. And Paul is addressing this issue and he says, this cannot be the case.

You know, there was actually a funny story. One of the groups just went around and said, you follow Paul. You follow Apollos. We follow Christ. Because who would follow a mere man? And they didn't say it in this way of trying to bring everyone together.

They showed it. They did it as a way of showing how superior they were to everyone else. Bringing the fighting even further. So when Paul starts off the passage today, he wants them to see these divisions shouldn't be because of the nature of what the church is.

He says, what is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed just as the Lord assigned to each. He says, Apollos, me, we're nothing.

[5 : 02] We're servants. You go around trying to build the church on servants, really? It can't be built on us. We can't sustain it. Then he says, I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.

So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He says, look, Apollos and I, we came here.

We told you guys about Jesus. But the fact that you're Christians is not because of our work. The fact that you're Christians is because God came in and he blessed what we did and made something happen from that.

But if you're trying to build the church around me and Apollos, you're building it on people who have no real power to change you. Then he says, he who plants and he who waters are one.

Remember, Paul planted Apollos waters. We are one. And each will receive his wages according to his labor. He says, look, you guys are fighting over Paul versus Apollos.

[6 : 07] But Paul and Apollos are actually on the same team. We support each other. We're encouraging one another's works. We have one another's backs. For you guys to go and fight over who's the better teacher and over whose side you support is fighting against the work that we're actually trying to do among you.

The church can't be divided because we're all on the same team. The nature of what the church is, is a unified body.

And then he says, for we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. Now, I love the ESV translation of the Bible, but I feel like this verse, they got it wrong.

Because it sounds like we are God's fellow workers. We're working with God here. But if you, and in a sense, that's true. But if you look at what Paul is actually trying to say, he's saying, we are working together, serving God.

A better translation might be, we are co-workers in God's service. Paul, Apollos, we're not divided. We are united.

[7 : 14] Under a common head, God. And you as a church need to be united under that same common head. And then he says, you are God's field and God's building.

What you see is that the you here is referring to the whole church. It's a plural you. So he's saying, you, all of you together, are one field. All of you together are one building.

All of you together can't remain separate because the nature of what the church is, is one unified structure, united under Christ.

So for us as the church to go around fighting and arguing and discussing about, my teacher is better than yours, so I'm a better Christian, is counter to what the purpose of the church is.

And then he transitions from talking about the field to talking about the building. And that's where I want to spend the most of our time today, if we can go to the next set of verses. He says, 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.

[8 : 26] 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. He says the foundation of the church must be Christ.

And he actually also here attacks the desire of the Corinthians for wisdom. When he says that he's a skilled master builder, the word that he uses there for skilled is wise. He says, look, you in your worldly wisdom want to build the church around dynamic teachers, around big personalities that can draw out crowds.

But the true wisdom of God, the true skill in building the church doesn't come in building it around personalities. It comes in building it around Christ. And this is counterintuitive to the world, because like we talked about last week, Christ crucified makes no sense to a lost world.

But if we are God's people, that is the one thing that unites us and brings us together, and that needs to be the foundation for who we are as a church.

He says anything else that you build the church on is not going to be strong enough to hold it up when the times of testing come. You know, my dad is an engineer. And if you ask him about foundations and why they're so important, he could give you a talk for hours and hours and hours.

[9 : 48] About different types of foundations and what foundations do, and why it's important to have a good foundation under your building. But really, the whole talk would boil down to the sentence that if you don't have a good foundation, your building is going to collapse.

Now, if we think of this tower like the church, or like a normal tower, would you ever build a tower with a music stand as the base, as the foundation? People are laughing because that's foolish.

Because all it takes is some kid walking by and going, and your tower is destroyed. And Paul is saying, look, if you try and build your church with me as the foundation, if you try and build your church with Apollos as your foundation, if we as Watermark try and build the church with Tobin or Chris or Graham or Eric or Alfie as the foundation, it's like building a tower with a music stand for the foundation.

It's not going to be able to hold up the structure of the church. We need Christ to be our solid foundation, because any other foundation will crumble when the day of testing comes.

And as we keep reading, we see that not only do we need the right foundation, we also need to build on that foundation with the right materials. It says, Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

[11 : 44] 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, although he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

He says, We have this foundation of Christ, and then we build on that foundation. You can build with gold, silver, precious stones. You can build with wood, and hay, and straw.

But remember as you build that one day, fire is coming. So be careful what you build with, because you want your building to last after the fire has come.

And so, you know, we want to build on this foundation. We don't want to build on a different foundation, because then that's not the church anymore. But he wants us to build up God's building together.

And what does it mean for us to build on this foundation? Growing up, I learned it this way. Now, Eric, you are a Christian now. You have believed in Jesus. Now you need to go build on that foundation in your life by reading your Bible, and praying and obeying God and telling others about Jesus.

[12 : 58] And I think all of these things are important for us as Christians if we want to live a healthy Christian life. The problem is I don't think they're what Paul is talking about here. Because if you remember, he's talking about the building not being our individual lives, but the church.

And so what it means to build into this building is something bigger. It's something about our community. Each of us is responsible for building into that community individually.

Each of us will be judged individually by how we built into that community. But what we're building into is not just our own lives. It's the community of the church as a whole.

So what does it mean to build with gold or silver or precious stones? Maybe it means going out and volunteering for the kids or youth ministry and investing in the lives of our next generation.

Maybe it means joining a community group for the first time and actually getting involved in the life of other people around you in the church. Maybe it means offering to host a community group because there's a group that needs a place to meet and you have a place available that they could use.

[14 : 09] Maybe there's a Christian brother or sister who's sick or in the hospital and just needs someone to visit them. And maybe building with gold and silver and precious stones means that you go and you visit them and spend time with them and encourage them.

It can mean a lot of things. But it's about building up the community. Investing in one another's lives. Pointing one another towards Christ.

And conversely, building with wood and hay and straw means doing things that appear to be investing and building into the community but that when the day of testing comes will be revealed to not be.

Maybe that means you show up on Sunday morning so you can hear this teaching but then you go out on your own throughout the week and don't get involved in community. Maybe it means that you constantly point out the problems in the church but you never are willing to get involved and do anything to help out to fix them.

This next one I'm a little hesitant to say because it needs lots of qualifiers but I'm going to say it and then I'll say the qualifiers. Maybe it means that when you see someone else who has a need in the church you volunteer to help them but then you have your helper do all the work instead of you.

[15 : 29] And now I'm not saying that it's universally wrong to have your helper do the work for people but what I am saying is if you're constantly doing that as a pattern rather than actually investing in them yourself that may be something to examine and see is that something where I should be getting more involved myself.

Paul wants us to build with the right materials on this foundation of Christ and he says someday whatever you're building with will be manifest it'll be obvious and apparent and you notice he says your work will be tested.

He doesn't say your works he's not talking about this checklist like oh Sunday May 3rd at 11 19 a.m. you fell asleep in church we're going to cross that one off your list no he's talking about one body of work as a whole he's talking about the church what are we doing building into the church putting this structure together there's going to be a fire that comes to test the entire body of work which means if you're pouring and investing into this body that's great news for you because even if no one notices it today someday God's going to notice it.

It means that if you're pouring and investing into this body today and you make a mistake here or there it's just going to get burned up and everything else is going to remain. But it means if you're not pouring into the body and investing there's reason to be terrified because one day the fire is going to come and it's going to burn everything up.

And you know our salvation is not based on how we build but there are rewards that are dependent on how we do building into God's building.

[17 : 28] And there have been plenty of people throughout history who have built these ginormous palaces for God's kingdom but they built them out of wood and hay and straw and just put a nice fancy gold paint layer over the top so it looks shiny and nice.

But on the day of testing it's going to burn up and all they're going to be left with is a pile of embers and a couple drops of gold that were used in making the paint. I wonder how we would feel if we get before God and 80 years of our work is just reduced to a pile of cinders.

It's essential Paul is saying to build properly upon the foundation of Jesus Christ in the church.

And it's essential because even if we have the best foundation if we don't build on it properly it's not going to stand. In September 21st, 1999 there was an earthquake in Taiwan.

7.6 magnitude. We've got a picture here of a 12-story building that just collapsed. It fell on a commercial building next door to it. Lots of people died in this earthquake but lots of the damage actually could have been preventable.

[18 : 50] In this earthquake there were a number of buildings that were advertised as earthquake-proof that fell over in the earthquake. In Taipei a lot of the buildings that were supposed to be earthquake-proof that fell over collapsed because the construction workers had used cheap cement to cut costs.

But when the day of testing came their buildings crumbled. In another city there were five apartment buildings that collapsed that were supposed to be earthquake-proof.

But when they did investigations what they found later on is that the walls that were supposed to be full of bricks were full of buckets and plastic bottles that had been put in there to cut costs.

They looked really nice and fancy on the outside. But the day of testing came and they were shown to be what they were hollow and empty and unable to stand up to the test that was coming.

And Paul is saying don't let our lives be like these buildings. Build with lasting materials. Invest in the community. Invest in this building of God.

[20 : 04] So I want us to ask ourselves how are we building on this foundation of Christ in the Watermark community? What does this look like for us on a practical week-to-week basis?

I think it's something different probably for each of us. but that doesn't remove this call for us to build into this community. Do some of us maybe need to change course now to get more involved to invest more in the life of this community?

Because God is saying there are literally eternity will be different based on whether or not we build properly on this foundation. And the even crazier thing if we pull up the next set of verses is that it's not just any building that we're building.

He says do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple God will destroy him for God's temple is holy and you are that temple.

The reason that it's so important that we build properly into this building isn't just because we're going to be tested someday but also because this building is where God himself lives.

[21 : 26] As Paul wrote this to the Corinthians they lived in a city of temples. There was a big temple to Apollo downtown. If you go to the city of Corinth now you can still see the pillars standing from this temple.

They had a temple for Athena and possibly the most famous temple in the city on top of the mountain next door was the temple for Aphrodite filled with a thousand priestess prostitutes.

The Corinthian church knew what a temple was. They knew that a temple told you something about the God that it was built for. And as they this small group of people gathered inside someone's house to worship God reading these words would have been puzzling because they say look, look at our God.

He is so big. He is so powerful. How are we supposed to show the world around us who he is? Because that's what temples do. Temples show the world who their God is.

That's why the temple of Aphrodite the goddess of beauty and love and pleasure and procreation was filled with prostitutes because they wanted to show the world what worship of Aphrodite involved.

[22 : 43] God. And Paul says to the church at Corinth you are a temple. You are supposed to live a certain way of life that shows the world around you who the God that lives inside you is.

Now like I said before in Greek there's a separate word for you if you're talking about an individual than for you if you're talking about a group. So he could say you like Eric Scott are God's temple and God's spirit lives in you like Eric Scott.

That's not what he says here. He says all of you are God's temple and God's spirit lives in all of you. I think the NIV maybe gets this translation better.

It says don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple God will destroy that person for God's temple is sacred and you together are that temple.

What he's saying is it's not just me or him or her or an individual. He's saying God's spirit lives in us when we are together as a body.

[23 : 56] And while it's true that God's spirit lives in each of us individually which we'll see later in chapter six when Paul says that's why Christians shouldn't go around sleeping with prostitutes he's saying here that God's spirit lives in all of us collectively as a body as a unit which means that the way that we apply these verses is slightly different because if God's spirit just lives in me what does that mean?

I should take care of my body I should read my Bible I should pray I should be positive because I'm God's temple and I think all of these things are things that we should be doing but I don't think that's what Paul is pointing us to here because we collectively are God's temple so what that means is that we should love one another what that means is we should serve one another what that means is we should remind each other of the gospel and point each other towards Christ we should take care of each other because God's spirit dwells in our midst and as we do these things for each other it shows the world around us who our God is what God is worshipped in this temple the God who loves us sacrificially that's why we love each other sacrificially the God who laid down his life for us that's why we are now willing to lay down our lives for one another

I think throughout history a lot of people have read this verse and seen it as a call to this isolationist introspective Christianity where I am God's temple and so I can stay home by myself I can worship God alone I don't need other people around me because God is here with me and yes he is here with you but what these verses are saying is that can't be our response our response has to be to go out to get involved in community to plug into the lives of others to love them to serve them that means sometimes hanging out with a bunch of annoying and bratty teens can be more spiritual than staying home and reading your Bible have you ever thought about that sometimes cooking a meal for a family that just had a new baby can be more spiritual than staying home reading your Bible because God wants us to show the world around us who he is reading your

Bible is awesome reading your Bible is necessary if you want to have a strong Christian life but it needs to lead to action that impacts the community and shows the world who God is and God cares so deeply and immensely about how we relate to one another as the church that he actually includes threats he includes threats he says if anyone destroys God's temple God will destroy him whatever harm you do to God's temple whatever harm you do to the church God will do to you uh oh and again the communal application of this verse means that it's different if I alone am God's temple then destroying God's temple would be like cutting myself and I absolutely think we again shouldn't do that but if we together are God's temple then destroying God's temple means gossiping about one another it means lying to one another it means starting fights with one another maybe destroying

God's temple means going into your office telling all your co-workers and clients about how you go to this church called watermark and it's so amazing and then cheating them in your business deals so that they assume bad things about everyone else in the church and giving the church a bad name through your actions destroying God's temple is destroying the community destroying the unity and purity of the church and I know this looks scary but actually God's telling it to us for our own good because what he says is you together are one unit you together are one building if you think about a physical building you can't hurt one part of the building without leaving other parts of the building more susceptible to damage if you break a window in a house the walls and floors are much more susceptible to flooding if you cut a live wire and just leave it dangling the whole structure is more liable to catch fire if you break the latch on the front door the whole house is more susceptible to having robbers or vandals break in and destroy everything and what

[28 : 49] God's saying is when you lie to or about one another when you gossip and slander about one another when you start fights with one another that's breaking in the window on God's house that's cutting the live wires and leaving them dangling there in God's house that's breaking down the latch on the front door of God's house and you are leaving yourselves susceptible to attack by doing that because you are part of that unit we are one unit we are God's house God lives in us together and God cares immensely about how we interact as a community God the good news is we don't have to destroy God's house we don't have to build badly we can build well that's why Paul writes this because he wants the Corinthians to build well into God's house we can build with these lasting materials and so in closing today

I want to throw out a couple ideas of what this might look like in some of our lives this week these ideas may not relate to you maybe as you hear them something else will pop up in your mind but my challenge for you is if you see a clear way that you feel like God wants you to get involved in investing in the community investing in his house in his church don't leave here today before you've taken the first steps to doing that because this literally is something that has eternal consequences so here's the list maybe it means talking to that person in your community group who's been going through a tough time and can be a little bit difficult to talk to and letting them know that you're there for them and actually meaning it maybe it means joining a community group so you can get plugged in to the life of the church maybe it means stepping up and volunteering in the kids or youth ministry so you can invest in the lives of others within the church or the university ministry maybe if you're married it means finding a special way to serve your husband or wife today to remind them that you love them and that you have their backs maybe it means apologizing to someone that you've hurt and taking whatever steps are within your power to make things right in that relationship maybe one of these sticks out to you maybe none of them do but something else came to mind as I said that but again my challenge for you don't leave here today without dealing with it because the way that we interact as a community as a body is hugely vitally important in God's eyes and eternity will be different because of the way that we treat one another let's pray father we thank you for your love we thank you for your gospel and for the fact that you care about us we thank you that your wisdom is not the wisdom of the world but it's a greater wisdom we thank you that you desire our good that you want us to be protected from attacks from inside and outside and

God I pray that we as a body would support one another that we would love one another and encourage one another and build on that foundation of Christ in each other's lives that we wouldn't tear one another apart or pursue things that the world says should be important at the expense of what you say is important God help us to love you more and to love one another more in Jesus name amen