

# 1 Corinthians 3:7-19 // The Building That Jesus Builds

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Date: 04 January 2026

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our next reading comes from Ephesians chapter 2, verses 19 to 21, and you can find that on page 1174 at the bottom of the page. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord, and in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Finally, our last reading comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verses 9 to 17, and that is on page 1146. In this chapter, Paul has been using agricultural language to talk about how God builds his people, and he's been using language like planting and watering, and now he's going to move on to language around building.

So from verse 9, For we are fellow 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 what it is, because the day will bring it to light.

[ 1 : 28 ] 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 lives among you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person.

For God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple. Amen. Thanks so much, Nicola, and let me wish you a happy new year, too.

It's great to see you all. And so, usual practice at St. Silas to walk through books of the Bible chapter by chapter. But this evening, though, we're starting a new topical mini-series as we think together about the church.

And the reason for that is simple. The Bible doesn't give us just one picture of what the church is. It gives us multiple pictures. The building, the body, the bride.

[ 2 : 39 ] And each one helps us to see something different and significant about what the church is. And it's my big prayer that as we begin this series, that God would give us a bigger, clearer vision of what Christ's church is.

And that as that vision sharpens, we'd also begin to think about how our own gifts and time might be used by him in his work here at St. Silas and beyond.

And so, normally I'd ask you to keep your Bible open at one particular passage, but tonight we'll be dipping into a few. And we'll put them up on the screen as we go along, but we'll spend most of the time in the two passages that Nicola just read earlier.

So you might want to keep a finger or take your service sheet and make a makeshift bookmark and put it in your Bibles in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and page 1146 and Ephesians 2 and 1174.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would open our hearts and minds to what you are showing us this evening about your church.

[ 4 : 05 ] Help us to listen freshly and to take seriously what the scriptures say to us. Would you shape our vision and deepen our love for what you are building in Christ at St. Silas?

For those of us, Lord, who belong to your church, help us to treasure what it means to be part of a local congregation and to see that belonging to the church of Jesus Christ isn't a burden but a great privilege.

And for those of us here this evening who are looking in from the outside, we pray that you would open the eyes of faith, draw them to yourself, build your church, we pray for the glory of your Son. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's that time of year, I suppose, a time when questions like these emerge. What are you going to invest your life in this year?

What are you going to build your life around? Now, some of us, it depends on what season we're in, I suppose some of us are just taking it one week at a time, one day at a time.

[ 5 : 17 ] Perhaps others are already thinking deliberately about direction, priorities, and what you're aiming at this year. Let me ask you, what are you building towards?

Let me tell you a story that's helped me to reflect on that question recently. Over Christmas, I realized that it's been 10 years since I left the profession of architecture.

And between 2012 and 2015, I worked on a big project as part of a big team, the redesign of Aberdeen Art Gallery.

And it was a big team. It involved all sorts of people, contractors, subcontractors, engineers, all kinds of engineers, conservationists, lighting diviners, you name it, dozens of people working together on the same building.

My role? Well, among other things, one of the fun things I got to do was build models, model after model, testing variations of the rooftop galleries that now sit on top of the Victorian gallery that was first built in 1884.

[ 6 : 29 ] I wasn't the lead architect. I wasn't there when the office won the project back in 2009. I wasn't even there when the project finished in 2019. But when I took my family to visit it, knowing that I'd had a small hand in it, that some of my work contributed towards the final finished building, that gave me real joy.

Now, I know I don't look particularly happy in the photograph, but that's as good as it gets, I'm afraid. Because it's deeply satisfying, isn't it, to be part of something bigger than yourself, to know that your effort, no matter how small it may seem, actually matters.

And that raises a question for all of us. What is worth building your life around? And where might we be invited to play a part in something lasting, something of real significance?

Well, that's what we're exploring tonight, what the church really is, and how ordinary people like us are caught up in something far bigger than we might have ever realized or imagined.

And if we're honest too, it might just challenge what we think about how we live our daily lives too every day. So two main headings this evening. First, the church is a building.

[ 7 : 58 ] Now, you might have heard the expression, the church is not a building, it's the people. Now, when my brothers and I were little, my grandfather used to amuse us with his twist on a classic children's tongue twister.

Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear. Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair. Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn't fuzzy, was he? And then he'd add with a grin, Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear or was he?

And it left us just a little bit confused as children. You might feel the same way about the church. Is the church a building or isn't it? Well, at least as far as the Bible is concerned, the answer is no.

If you're thinking about pillars and arches and stained glass, the answer is no. But the answer is yes, if you listen to the New Testament.

Because while the Bible is very clear that the church is made of people, not bricks and mortar, it's equally happy to describe those people as a building.

[ 9 : 06 ] When Jesus says, I will build my church, he's not talking about the architecture, he's talking about people gathered, joined and formed together by him.

And Paul says the same. So if you turn to 1 Corinthians 3, page 1146, in chapter 3, verse 9, he says, Paul says to an ordinary local church in Corinth, you are God's building.

And then just a few verses later in verse 16, and he clarifies what kind of building he means. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells among you?

Not you individually here, you together as in the whole church. In Glaswegian, you all are God's temple, a dwelling place where God's presence is meant to be known and displayed.

Ephesians 2 puts it another way. Page 1174. He pictures a spiritual construction site.

[ 10 : 25 ] In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

So here's the picture. Christ is constructing a building. The building is made of people and we are the materials, not bricks, not concrete people.

And Paul wants us to notice two things here. First, the foundation matters. And secondly, the building is still under construction. So let's start with the foundation.

Before any above-ground work can be done, you have to get the foundation right. That's exactly the point that Jesus makes in Luke chapter 6, which Catherine read for us earlier.

Two builders, two houses, one storm. And what made the difference wasn't what you could see. It was what was underground. It was what they were built upon.

[ 11 : 35 ] The wise builder digs deep down and builds on the bedrock. Paul takes up the same image in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 11.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. The church is built on the gospel, the good news of who Jesus is and what he has done.

Not on tradition, not on personality, not on numbers or reputation. Jesus Christ is the church's one foundation. And when Paul says that, he doesn't mean Jesus as some idea or as a moral example. He means the good news that Jesus lived a life that we couldn't live. He died the death that we deserve to die. He was raised after three days so that we can have a future and forgiveness and a life with God that is a reality to come.

Christian faith doesn't start with us building something for God. It starts with trusting the foundation that God has already laid in Christ. And this is crucial in 1 Corinthians 3.

[ 12 : 49 ] The foundation is already laid. You don't improve it. You don't adjust it. You don't tinker around with it. Messing with the foundation is when cracks appear.

The church doesn't need a new foundation. It needs faithful building on the foundation that already exists. And that brings us to the second thing that Paul wants us to see.

It's a building under construction. So listen again to Paul's language in Ephesians 2, verse 21. The whole building rises.

You are being built together. That's present tense. Not you have been built, but you are being built. But the church is a work in progress. And that matters. That matters, particularly if you're someone who's prone to discouragement.

[ 13 : 51 ] It sets our expectations. It gives us a realistic expectation about what church is and what church isn't. You know, sometimes we come to church and we're expecting to find a finished building.

What we find instead is scaffolding and dust, noise, half-finished walls, things out of place, things not as we expect them or hope for them to be. And we can be tempted sometimes to wonder if something's gone wrong.

Well, Paul says, no, that's exactly what you should expect. And anyone who's been on a construction site knows this. Halfway through a building project, everything can look a complete riot, a complete mess.

You can see like an utter disaster and materials are piled everywhere, not quite lining up yet anything. And you walk in at that stage, you might despair. I've walked onto construction sites and I have done just that, just completely despaired.

Buildings that I have been a builder on, I've despaired at as well. Well, the mess isn't evidence that nothing is happening. It's evidence that something is happening.

[ 15 : 06 ] And that is, same is true for the church. So if you're here exploring the Christian faith, it's worth knowing this. The local church is not a fancy, finished showroom.

It's a construction site, a building site, an active building site, a work in progress. It's here that believers are shaped and refined.

So we are redeemed, yes, but we are still being transformed. We're forgiven sinners learning to live our new lives by the power of the Spirit.

So no one here is the finished article, but Christ is present among us as the builder. And the evidence of his presence isn't that everything is complete.

It's that the work is ongoing. In fact, we should be wary of a building site or a church that looks too tidy. The process can be messy.

[16:13] It can be frustrating at times. Sometimes it can even be painful. But it's a work that's towards something absolutely glorious. And once we get that picture into our minds, once that picture settles in our minds, it reshapes how we think about church.

It reshapes our attitude towards church. It sets up the next question. If this is God's building, then how is it actually built?

And what part might I have to play in it? So there's a famous quote from the architect Louis Kahn, one of the great architects of the 20th century.

He once said, even a brick wants to be something. A brick wants to be something. It aspires. And then he imagines a conversation with a brick.

You say to a brick, what do you want brick? The brick replies, I like an arch. And you say, I like arches too, but you know, arches are expensive and I could just use a concrete lintel over an opening instead.

[17:26] What do you think about that brick? And the brick replies, I like an arch. Well, Louis Kahn isn't saying that bricks get to design the building.

He's saying that they flourish when they're used according to their nature within a design that's bigger than themselves. You know, the New Testament says something very similar about us. Peter calls us living stones. He says, as you come to him, the living stone, that is Jesus, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house.

We're not just a pile of bricks. We're not another brick in the wall. We are living stones shaped, placed, and purposed by Christ. And here's the key.

Every stone matters. none are surplus. None are merely decorative. And unlike uniform brickwork, stones are different.

[18:35] Stones are different shapes, different sizes, different colors. They're hewn out of a quarry. They're rough around the edges when they first come out. Well, Jesus, the master builder, knows exactly where to put each one.

chisels, polishes, and fits each piece perfectly into his grand design. So like Louis Kahn addressing the brick, let me ask you, living stones.

Living stone, what do you want to be? How do you see yourself being used in the upbuilding of the church?

How might you uniquely contribute to what God's building here at St Silas? Where might you roll up your sleeves at St Silas and build?

Not so much what role do you wish you had, but where is Christ placing you right now for the good of others? It's not so much about finding the perfect spot, it's about putting your hands to work where you are faithfully, joyfully, and in step with Christ.

[19:48] So that your efforts to build up others would strengthen the fabric of the church like that. So how does Christ actually build his church?

This building of living stones, how does he do that? Well, Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 4, and again notice the construction language. Chapter 4, verse 11.

Christ gives, among other people, pastor, teachers, not to do all the building work themselves, but to equip his people for works of service or ministry so that the body of Christ may be built up.

The leaders don't do all the building. Leaders equip, and we all together build. So if you belong to Christ, you're not a spectator in this project.

You're already on the construction site. Now that might feel like a new idea. In many churches it doesn't work like this.

[20:58] But the New Testament knows nothing of a church where a few build and the rest watch. As we often say here, it's not the ministry of the few, it's the ministry of the few.

Every member ministry, as Martin mentioned earlier, ordinary Christians ministering God's word in various ordinary ways to one another.

What does that look like? Paul gives concrete examples in the rest of his letter to the Ephesians. Building happens in everyday moments.

Truth spoken in love. Scripture shaped, scripture soaked encouragement, faithful presence over time. Now a lot of that is in form.

It might be sending a friend a message, a text with a Bible verse that's encouraged you that morning. It might be meeting up with somebody for a coffee and opening up God's word.

[ 21 : 57 ] It might just simply being present and alongside somebody who needs an arm around them. A lot of that is informal. But there are also structured ways that we build one another up at St. Silas too. Midweek growth groups, roots, we need to see these as construction sites. Construction sites where we're digging into God's word and opportunities to build one another up in Christ. Christ. And as Martin said, there are just loads of opportunities to serve at St. Silas. We all have a part to play. We can all pitch in and muck in like that.

As Paul puts it in Thessalonians, when you meet up, encourage one another and build each other up. It's that construction language again. Build each other up just as in fact you're doing. It's not a command for leaders only. That's for the whole church. So the question isn't so much are you building, it's what are you building and how.

[ 23 : 12 ] Because one way or another we are all contributing to the building positively or negatively with our words, our tone, our attitude, our encouragement or silence, with our prayers, prayerlessness?

Are we strengthening each other's faith or eroding it? I trust that we are all seeking to build up our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Just turn with me again to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Chapter 3 verse 10. Building well matters. Building well matters. Paul writes each one should build with care. And then in verse 12, if anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, their work will be shown for what it is.

The fire will test the quality of each person's work. Now it's an unusual list of building materials. I grant you, I never got to specify gold in my architectural career.

[ 24 : 28 ] It's precious stones, the straw, like the three little pigs. And Paul doesn't spell everything out for us. He doesn't tell us what the gold means. He lets the image do the work.

Different materials, different cost, different durability. Then you introduce fire into the mix and the difference between them becomes obvious.

How are these materials going to fare? The straw house, it's not going to do very well. Gold and precious stones, they'll do okay in the fire.

He's not talking here about whether you're saved. The foundation is Christ that's settled. He's talking about the quality of what we build on top of that foundation.

So imagine God, for example, saying let's take the kids' own work that you've done over the last few years. Imagine it as a building, the foundation is Jesus Christ. You've been building on that, serving these young people, seeing these young people built up.

[ 25 : 36 ] Let's see what survives. Well, the growth group, that you've led, or the root studies that you've done preparations for. Let's test it.

Was it careless or faithful? Was it shoddy or excellent? Was it rushed? Was it filled with energy and joy and reliance on God?

Some materials are cheap and quick. Others are costly. Time, energy, prayer, and patience. So are we building with our best or cutting corners like cowboy builders?

Now, I get it. There'll be times when we're just overrun with all sorts of other stuff and we just need must. We just need to get stuff done. But whenever we can, let's give it our all.

Because this building isn't made of bricks. it's made of people. Much of what you do will be unseen.

[ 26 : 42 ] Much will feel small or ordinary, inconsequential perhaps. Or maybe you've prayed for somebody week by week. Maybe you've welcomed people warmly at the door.

Maybe you've been serving faithfully behind the scenes for years on end. But on that last day, God will say, I saw that.

I noticed that you did that really well. And that matters. Faithful work on Christ's foundation is work that endures.

And God cares about how we build because he cares about the people being built. he notices diligent builders.

He rewards faithful workmanship. Every prayer, every encouragement, every act of service contributes to the overall masterpiece, the building that Christ is building.

[ 27 : 49 ] And it's not too late to get involved. Christ is building through ordinary people like you and me. we may never see the full shape of what Christ is building through us.

Much of it will remain hidden, but none will be wasted. Let me finish by telling you about another building. On a June evening in 1926, an elderly, poorly dressed man was struck by a tram on a

busy street in Barcelona.

A few people noticed, people passed by, eventually a small crowd gathered around him. No one recognized him. He was taken to a poor person's hospital.

And there, a few days later, he died. That unrecognized, almost forgotten man was Antoni Gaudi, the architect of the Sagrada Familiar Cathedral that's been under construction since 1883.

That's more than 140 years ago, and it's still under construction today. It's almost done now, I think. But Gaudi had given his life to that building. He lived on site, he worked among the craftsmen, he poured decades of imagination, skill, and sacrifice into its completion, into a project he knew he would never see completed.

[ 29 : 15 ] Stone by stone, arch by arch, a lifetime spent building for generations he would never meet. Something noble about that, something stirring about that, but however magnificent the Sagrada Familiar is, and it is magnificent, must be, I think, probably the second finest church in Barcelona after the Santa Maria de la Mar, but however magnificent it is, it is still only stone, inanimate stone.

Now consider this, the church, Christ's church, is far, far greater than any cathedral, spiritual building, not made of concrete or marble, but of people, living stones.

And at the heart of this building stands not an architect who died by accident, but a savior who deliberately gave up his life.

Jesus Christ didn't merely design the church. He doesn't merely oversee its construction from heaven. He laid the foundation with his blood 2,000 years ago.

And the wise builder of Luke chapter 6 is the one who digs down to the rock. That rock is Christ, crucified and risen for us.

[ 30 : 48 ] He gave his life so that this building, this church, could exist at all. So that broken people could be brought together and built together into something beautiful, a building that is a dwelling place for God's spirit.

And now, astonishingly, he invites us to build with him. not because the work depends on us, but because by his grace, he invites us and chooses to use us.

So let's return to the original question. What are you building your life towards? What do you want to be?

A spectator or a living stone? Someone who admires the building from the outside? or someone who gladly gives of themselves to something eternally significant?

One day, when the scaffolding comes down, you'll see it's all been worthwhile. Your labors have not been in vain. And as living stones, we are part of an ongoing construction, a divine building, where Christ himself is building his church.

[ 32 : 05 ] Nothing is more solid, nothing is more beautiful, nothing is more worthwhile to give your life towards than what God is building through Christ.

Amen. And let's pray. Amen. Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus, the solid rock. apart from him, we have no place to stand before you. We thank you for your Holy Spirit who dwells in us and among us.

Would you build your church here at St. Silas as a place where many living stones are added, where people find their place and purpose, and where your glory is made known in this city.

And as we build our lives on the foundation of the Lord Jesus, would you continue to chisel and shape us, polishing us and forming us more into Christ's likeness.

[ 33 : 10 ] We ask in his name. Amen.