

# 1 Corinthians Chapter 3 v 1 - 17

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[ 0 : 00 ] moment by way of coming to the Lord in worship. Matthew chapter 7, page 972. I want us just to focus for a moment on the final words of our Lord Jesus at the end of what we call the Sermon on the Mount, that very wonderful opening ministry of God's Word that He brought to the people.

At the end of Matthew chapter 7, beginning at verse 24, we have Jesus giving a parable to sum up His teaching and the response, the right response and attitude to His teaching as particularly. And so Jesus, at the end of all that He said, says this, verse 24 of Matthew 6, sorry 7, Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a man, a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who has the ground. The wind came down, the wind came down, the wind came down, the house fell with a great crash. What are the foundations of your life? What have you built?

Your life upon. Our first hymn is a reflection on the thoughts of the Apostle Paul. It says, All I once held dear built my life upon. All this world reveres and wars to own. Once we were those whose lives were built on sand. There is only destruction awaiting us. But by God's grace, we have come to know His Word and have come to build and put our faith in Him. So let's stand and sing 637 in our hymn books, All I once held dear.

All I once held dear built my life upon. God is still, great peace and wars to own. All I once held dear, all I once held dear, I am clear, I am heard to teach us. Scent and earth was rat, compared to this.

[ 2 : 38 ] All I once held dear, I am fear to condemn. God is still, great peace and wars to own. All I once held dear, I am shortages in our worries, as of his psychiatry, for Him knowing that Production have a heart through their heart through their ois, beginning Outage Project started Mayland Let us now compare to this.

Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing. Know my all, your best.

Know my joy, my righteousness. And I love you, Lord. I trust that as we've come this evening, our heart's desire is just that, that we might know more of Christ, that we might know more of his truth, his word, more of his influence, more of his spirit.

So let's express that in prayer. And we're going to have a time of open prayer. I'll lead briefly, and then one or two or three. Everybody feel able, lead us in prayer as well, in that spirit of desiring and seeking the very face of God.

Let us pray together. O Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, we know by our experience the joy of what it is to know you through Christ, your Son.

[ 4 : 05 ] We know, Lord, the blessing of having you speak to us in your word. We know the excitement that we felt in our lives when we have been very close with you and walking with you.

And, Lord, you have been, had your hand upon us for good. And yet, Lord, we know that we have come a long way and we have yet a long way to go. We are far from being the men and women of God that we long to be, that we desire to be.

We are far from being the men and women of God, Lord, that your word teaches that you long for us to be. But we ask that as we draw near to you this evening, that you would do a work in our hearts, that you would create in us a hunger and a thirst, that indeed we might echo with the Apostle Paul, I want to know Christ.

And so we pray that even now as we come to you in prayer, by your Holy Spirit, you would lead us and help us as we bring our petitions, our praises and our requests to you.

For we ask them all in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen. The Bible now, and from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians.

[ 5 : 29 ] If you've got one of the church Bibles, that is found on page 1145.

Okay, so that's page 1145. And 1145, and that is 1 Corinthians. It's Paul, the Apostle Paul, his first letter, it's 1 Corinthians, chapter 3.

And in the church Bible, it's got the subheading there, the church and its leaders. And we're going to read the whole of that chapter as we continue in this letter of Paul to the Christians in Corinth. Corinth was a city near the west of modern-day Turkey, a very metropolitan type of community, all sorts of people, all sorts of things going on, a very bustling city, a city with all sorts of temples to foreign gods, all sorts of immorality and all sorts of wicked things happening.

And in the midst of that place, in the midst of that, God had saved people and made a church, a local church through Paul, who had preached there many years before. You can read about it another time in Acts, chapter 18.

[ 6 : 46 ] And Paul is writing to them now because they're in a bit of a fix. They've started off really well, but they've got themselves into all sorts of problems and troubles and difficulties because, like all of us, they are not perfect yet.

And so Paul writes the letter to deal with some of those problems. So we're going to pick up from chapter 3 in the very beginning where he addresses them, brothers and sisters.

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, that's God's Holy Spirit, but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ.

I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you're still not ready. You're still worldly.

Indeed, 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?

[ 7 : 52 ] 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. 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.

[ 9 : 00 ] 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. Do not deceive yourselves.

If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become fools, so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.

As it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness. And again, the Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile. So then, no more boasting about human leaders.

[ 10 : 04 ] All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future. All are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

We'll be thinking about those words of God, the words of Paul to us in a little while. If you'd like to turn back into your Bibles, where you read just a little while ago, from page 1145, that's 1 Corinthians and chapter 3.

We're going to just unpick and look at this chapter together and see what it is that God wants to say to us, or at least some of what he wants to say to us here, in this part of his word, his truth.

Now, I'm sure all of you, without doubt, without exception, will know the story of the three little pigs. It's a story you were told, perhaps as a child. Perhaps you tell your own children, or even your grandchildren, about those three pigs who were pursued and oppressed by the great, big, bad wolf. The first little pig, as you know, built himself a house using straw, a sort of a thatched house. But the wolf had an incredible set of lungs upon him, and when he came to the house, he simply blew it down.

[ 11 : 21 ] Now, the second pig built his house from wood, a sort of a log cabin, we might say, and wood is a very good material. Many houses built with it, but no, the wolf's powerful breath was stronger than the wood, and he blew that down as well.

And so they both ran to the pig, the third little pig, and the third little pig had built his house of bricks, of stone and mortar, sort of a detached townhouse sort of thing.

And then, when the wolf came to blow his hardest and hardest, he couldn't move or cause any damage to that building. And so the story ends, the pigs lived happily ever after.

I don't believe in any way that that story was influenced by 1 Corinthians chapter 3, but there are some similarities as we read through, wasn't there? There was talk about a building.

There was talk about building with wood, hay, straw, and other materials. And, of course, there was also talk about the buildings collapsing. Verse 14, if what has been built survives.

[ 12 : 26 ] So there's some similarities, some parallels there. Paul is continuing to write to these Christians in Corinth, and he's seeking to address those underlying problems that were present in the local church at Corinth.

We've seen how he identified the major problem was one of division. Right back in chapter 1 and verse 10, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you.

And, in fact, from then on, he's been dealing with this whole matter of disunity and division within the church. And it's centered around, particularly, people siding with certain teachers, certain Christian teachers or leaders.

And we're told that they were Paul, who we know, of course, Apollos, who was another Christian teacher we read about in Acts, and somebody called Cephas. You think, well, I don't know anybody called Cephas.

It's another name for Peter, the Apostle Peter. And at some time or another, these people had come and preached and taught in the church at Corinth, it seems.

[ 13 : 38 ] And some people had liked one more than the other, and so on. And it had created this sort of division, this sort of setting up one against another, contrary to one another.

Now, as we saw in the rest of chapter 1 and chapter 2, Paul has been showing that looking to human beings, looking to people, looking to human wisdom particularly, is foolishness, no matter who that person is, because the wisdom of the world, the wisdom around about us, is really at odds with the wisdom of God.

It's contrary to the way that God thinks. When God looks at the world, he sees a world which is upside down in its thinking. And that the only wisdom, the only thing that we really need to be knowing about is the wisdom of God's wonderful truth concerning Jesus Christ.

That God the Son came into this world, and in what appears to many people to be stupid or foolish, he went and died in our place upon a cross. Now, Paul says the only way that we can really understand this and grasp this as being wonderful and true is when God the Holy Spirit gives us eyes to see.

We saw that in chapter 2 and verse 10. These things are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. In fact, he goes on to say, verse 13 of chapter 2, this is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit.

[ 15 : 04 ] And he explains why people don't understand Jesus or Christianity and why they poo-poo it or shun it. He says the person without the Spirit, that's God's Holy Spirit, the person without the Spirit, cannot or does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness.

So he's been explaining to them, showing them that they have been getting the wrong game to the stick. They've been looking at these Christian leaders, and they've been fighting with one another about who's the best, who's got the best way of speaking, who's got the best wisdom, and so on, instead of recognizing that all wisdom comes from God, and that the wisdom that they are most to

be concerned about is the wisdom concerning the gospel.

And so when we enter into chapter 3, Paul begins to change his tone a bit, doesn't he? And he begins to sort of chastise them, tell them off. He says, I can't speak to you, I couldn't address you as spiritual people.

Yes, you're people who've received the Holy Spirit, and you've put your faith in Jesus, but somehow you're still thinking like everybody else in the world. You're not thinking as God thinks. You're not thinking in the right way.

In fact, so much so that you are immature. He says, mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk. What does he mean that, and not solid food? He means when he first came to them, when he came to Corinth, he gave them the milk, just as you would somebody who, a baby needs to be weaned, and they need to have the milk.

[16:38] That's the good nourishment. They can only take that on board because they're young. And he gave them the milk of God's truth. He didn't talk about the great big things, the big issues. He talked about the simple things, the ABCs, we might say, of the good news of Jesus.

But now he says, that's years later. This is years later. You should be on the solid food now. You should have got over having the milk. You should now be off the bottle, as it were. You should be on to the solid food, the important things, the serious things, the tough things, we might say, of the Christian life.

Sadly, he says, you're still not ready for these meaty things, these solid things. He says the proof that you're not ready is seen.

You're still acting like people without God, people without the Lord Jesus, people without the Spirit. You're fighting and quarreling, he says. Doesn't that prove that you're worldly? Actually, the word he uses that we have, worldly, actually means fleshly.

You're following the lusts of the flesh. You're following your feelings all the time. You're doing what you want and thinking how can I satisfy my desires rather than asking what is it that God wants.

[17:53] So he calls them mere humans. You're not being Christians. You're just being ordinary people, not the super ordinary people that you are, by God's grace. And so we notice as well, don't we, really, that as Christians and as a church, we are to be people who do not imitate the world, but rather we are to be people who stand in contrast to the world.

The church is meant to be different, not in the way we dress, not in the way we talk necessarily, though obviously our language affects and shows the reality of who we are, but we are to be people whose priorities and goals are different to the world.

We're not to sort of try to blend in, but rather we are to be those who stand out, stand out because God has done something marvelous in our lives, and we are to be those who show that by our living, God's Spirit lives in our hearts and lives, and that we're following Christ, putting God first. But they weren't doing this. They were being, as we shall see as we go through this letter, in the coming weeks, again and again, they keep on falling back into the bad old habits, the bad old ways, the ways that everybody else lives.

So how's Paul going to help them? How's he going to help them to realize not just that they're infants, but they need to start growing, they need to start maturing, they need to start becoming the people that they should be by now?

[19:15] Well, he's going to use three illustrations, that's what we have here in chapter three, three illustrations to describe the church, but which Paul corrects their thinking, in their thinking about the importance of spiritual growth, encouraging them how they can grow, and what they should do to grow, and giving them a real desire to grow, a reason to grow.

And the first illustration that he uses concerns the church, God's people, and he speaks to them and likens them to a field, or God's field, as he calls it there in verse nine.

For we are fellow workers in God's service, you are God's field. And that means if they are workers in God's field, that those who work in God's field, like Apollos and Paul and Cephas, are really farm laborers, because that's what he says.

What after all, verse five, is Apollos? What is Paul? Only servants. It's the word diakonos, diakonos, from which we get the word deacon, which is an office in the church, a serving opportunity.

These were just servants. They only did what their, the farm manager, I can put it the way, their master commanded them to do. They aren't anything special. They aren't great scientists or so on.

[20:32] They're simply those who are doing the work God has given them to do. And so Paul says, I planted the seed, verse six, and Apollos watered it. But God has been making it grow.

So what's the point of arguing about Paul and Apollos and saying who's the best? None of them cause you to grow spiritually within. None of them cause you to mature. That's God's work in your heart and life.

They're simply sowing seed and watering seed. They're giving you God's word and they're watering God's word in one sense, helping you to understand it and apply it to your lives.

But it's God is the one who makes things grow. Only God. The teachers have a job to do and it's foolish to think that they can do that by their own wisdom or strength or understanding.

So we need to think of ourselves as Christians. We are part of God's field. We are crops in the field, as it were. The church is a field that God wants to grow. He wants it to develop.

[ 21 : 36 ] He wants it to become fruitful like any farmer does. He doesn't want to sow the seed and water it and nothing to happen. But he wants it to grow spiritually and bear fruit.

How is that going to happen? It's not going to happen by us, as it were, being taken on a tangent to one particular teacher or one particular person.

It's going to happen when we look to the Lord Jesus Christ to give the increase. Remember that wonderful lesson that the Lord Jesus taught in John chapter 15 where he spoke about himself as a vine and about believers as branches.

This is what he says, John 15 verse 5. I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. You can do nothing. So it's imperative that as Christians that we realize that we need to grow and it's the natural thing that should be happening in our lives.

[ 22 : 42 ] It's natural for plants to grow, isn't it? It's not unnatural, it's natural. And so it's natural for Christians to grow spiritually and to mature.

So the question is, is that what's happening in your life and mine? Since you became a Christian or even over the past few months or even last year, is there growth that's taking place in your spiritual maturity?

Are you bearing fruit? Or are you just a bit stunted? Are you a bonsai sort of tree? Or are you actually a fruit tree? Now, it may well be that there's reasons perhaps why we've become stunted.

Perhaps it is because we've taken our eyes off the Lord Jesus and we're more taken up with people. We may not be as listening and attentive as we should be because perhaps somebody gets in the way, a person gets in the way, or a concern or situation hinders us from growing.

But you are God's field. And as a church, there must be growth because growth is a sign of life and of spiritual life. These dear Christians were not growing.

[ 23 : 50 ] They were stunted. They were dwarfed. They were bonsai type of Christians. What about you and me? Am I growing and increasing? Are we God's field?

So then Paul goes on and he uses a slightly different illustration to encourage us to grow. He's shown us that we should be growing and that it's God's work that we should be growing.

That's the proof that God, by his Spirit, is at work in our lives. And he uses people to do that, but we're not to be too concerned about who they are in one sense. But he says the next thing is he encourages them to grow by showing that they are God's building.

In fact, he goes straight from God's field to God's building in verse 9. And then from verse 9, he talks about this whole matter of construction. Like any building, we have to be built from the foundation up.

Foundation is so important, isn't it, to any building. Without foundations, a building can become insecure. It can become, of course, very dangerous as well for the people in it if it falls down upon them.

[ 24 : 56 ] Paul says that God used him to lay a good foundation. I laid a foundation as a wise builder. 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.

He's saying this, there is only one foundation upon which we can build our church, only one foundation upon which we can build our lives, and that foundation has to be Jesus Christ.

Try and build a church on anything else. Try and build a church on being a social group or meeting, or build a church upon a choir, or build a church upon a building, if I can put it that way.

All of those things are poor foundations. A church has to be built upon that one foundation, Jesus Christ. That's why I read at the very start of our service the words of the Lord Jesus at the end of his teaching in Matthew 7, that parable of the wise builder and the foolish builder.

Remember, there was the wise builder, he was the one who built his house on the rock. He had a good, solid, firm foundation. So when the storm came, and the winds blew, the rain fell, that house, that building remained solid.

[ 26 : 10 ] But then there was somebody else who came along, and he didn't care much for digging foundations or building on rock. He just built his house on the sand, and as soon as the water came, as soon as the storm came, the whole place fell down.

And Jesus used those two people to illustrate two reactions to him. Notice that. And two reactions to him and to his word. He says this, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock.

But then he goes on and says, everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. That's the conclusion. That's the explanation.

You've got to build your life on the words of the Lord Jesus Christ by doing, practicing what he says. Not just knowing them. It's not just head knowledge. It's actual activity. Building activity in our lives. So we begin upon Christ. The foundation stone. That was the foundation stone of the church in Corinth. It's the foundation stone of the church here. We must have real faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

[ 27 : 21 ] We must have real trust in what he's done for us in his life, his death, and his resurrection. We have to be underpinned. Everything that we believe and everything we are must be underpinned with the foundation of Christ.

A very pertinent, as it were, illustration, personal illustration, is that we bought a house a little while ago. And when the survey came for that house, we noticed that the porch that had been built was moving away from the main building.

And when that was investigated, it was found that an unsuitable foundation had been put down for the porch. It wasn't strong enough, it wasn't deep enough, it wasn't good enough. And so we had to have the whole thing rebuilt and a new foundation put in.

Having an inadequate foundation is very dangerous, all the more so in our lives personally. What's the foundation of your life at the moment?

What are you building upon? You might be building upon your intellect, or building upon your degree that you got at university, or building upon your family, or building your life upon your relationships, or your job, or whatever.

[ 28 : 30 ] All of those things are, Jesus says, inadequate foundations for building your life. And all the more so if you're a Christian. The foundation must be Christ.

But notice when Paul is writing here, he's concerned not only with the foundation of this building, God's building, but he's particularly concerned about the materials that are used in the building process upon the foundation.

He says we've got to be very selective about the sort of materials that we use. I'm sure you've seen it from time to time. They have these documentaries or news on the television about great tower blocks being demolished.

And it's not just because tower blocks aren't particularly nice things to live in, but several of the tower blocks they found that were built in the 50s and 60s were built with very poor materials. They weren't properly constructed. They were shortcuts made. Contracts were given and people built them up hastily. And so they had wafer-thin walls and very loose windows and so on.

[ 29 : 33 ] They've got to be pulled down. Something that was meant to last for generations lasted no more than a decade or two. The problem was the materials that were used.

And Paul says there's only two types of building material for your life and for the church. He says this in verse 12, if anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw.

So you've got the expensive materials, the good materials, gold, silver, and costly stones. And then you've got the wood, hay, and the straw.

What does it matter? What does it matter if you use cheap materials, if I can put it that way? What does it matter if you use wood, hay, and straw and not these costly things?

What does he mean? Well, he says that it's important because there's coming a day when all these things will be shaken, will be tested. What we've built our life with will be put to the test on the day.

[ 30 : 37 ] Notice if you've got it in your Bible there, verse 13, it says, because of the day, capital D. So he's not just talking about any day, he's talking about a particular day. And in the New Testament, particularly in the Bible, often the phrase the day is shorthand for the day when Jesus Christ will return or the day of judgment.

It's shorthand for us to look forward to that time when all of us, every single person who's lived, will stand before Jesus Christ as our judge and how we've lived and what we've built our lives with will be tested, judged by Jesus himself.

And those lives that have been built with shoddy materials, that have not been built with that which is good and solid and certain, we're told, will be burned up.

So therefore, we do see the difference, don't we? Wood, hay and straw will all be burnt up. Gold, silver and costly stones won't. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss, but yet will be saved. If the Christian, your life and mine will be judged, not judged as to whether we go to heaven or hell because once we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are certain and sure that we shall be with him.

[ 31 : 53 ] But there is this judging of how we've lived, of what we've done with the good things God has given us, whether we've lived for Christ, whether we've built our lives strongly with the good things or whether we've lived for the things of this world, whether we've been lukewarm, half-hearted as it were, in our Christian life.

And we shall be judged and we shall be tested and those who've built with lives that are half-hearted, lives that are just wood, hay and straw, they will be saved in heaven, but everything else that they've worked for will just be, will disappear.

There's no eternal reward, we can put in that sense. There's no great blessing to be had. What they've had and what they've used is of no consequence.

But those who've built with gold and silver and precious stones, those who've built with the good materials that God has given them, will have something that endures, that passes the test, that endures eternally forever.

But what are these materials we are to use? What does he mean by gold, silver and costly stones? Well, there are times in the Bible where God's Word itself is described in that sort of a way.

[ 33 : 09 ] Here's Psalm 12, verse 6. The words of the Lord are perfect, flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.

God's Word speaks about his wisdom. The wisdom of God is more precious than rubies. So, we're told that we are to build with, and this is where the Corinthians were getting it wrong, they were building their lives and their church upon personality, building their lives and their church upon the necessary sort of attitudes of their day around about them.

They weren't building their church and their lives upon God's faithful Word. That's what we must do. We need to, remember what Jesus said?

The one who builds on the rock is the one who hears my Word and puts it into practice. The materials we use are Christ's Word and we build with them, we use them, we apply them to our lives, we apply them to our church, we apply them to the things that we do, and that's what makes the difference between what we do lasting and what we do perishing.

It makes a real difference between spiritual maturity and spiritual infancy, spiritual stability and spiritual ruin. And one of the things that saddens many of us as we've gone along in the life as Christians is to see here and there where groups of Christians or churches or denominations have stopped building with the good, solid Word of God.

[ 34 : 44 ] They've stopped building with gold and silver. They've begun building their church upon the music that they sing or begun building their church upon the activities that they do. And before long that church shrinks and shrinks and ultimately perhaps at times it's closed.

So, here's the encouragement. We are to build because the days coming when our lives will be tested. We are to grow and to mature because one day we'll stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and how we've lived and how we've built will be tested and judged by Him.

So the question is this, do I hear God's Word and do I live it? Do I hear God's Word or as James puts it, go away and forget it? Or am I one who wants to put into practice in my life what God says to me?

Now, we don't, none of us do it perfectly. We don't, none of us do it as we should. We all fail, we all get it wrong. But is that my goal? Even though it's costly at times to follow God and His Word, I want

to do it.

I'm not willing to settle for shoddy workmanship. I'm not willing to be a cowboy builder in my life. I want nothing less than a life which is built worthy of Christ.

[ 36 : 02 ] Is that how we feel? Is that how we live? So we're a field which should be growing. We're a building which needs the right material to be growing and being built up.

And thirdly, and finally here, Paul speaks about the fact that as a church, it's important that we do grow because we are God's temple. Verse 16, don't you know you yourselves are God's temple? It's something they'd forgotten. Don't you know, he says. Don't you realize that the church is not some insignificant club? It's not just the bowls club or the rifle club. It's not the ramblers association. The church is God's temple. That's amazing, isn't it? It's something extraordinary. It's something marvelous because God by his spirit dwells in his temple.

He dwells in the hearts and lives of his people and he dwells where his people are meet together. Remember what Jesus said, where two or three meet together in my name, I'm there. But when we meet together as Christians, there's something extraordinary that's happening.

[ 37 : 09 ] God is here. Not because we're in a building particularly, but because we as his children, his church, are gathered together. It's something sacred, he says. Holy, special, set apart.

That of all the people in all the world, the church of Jesus Christ and those local churches are oaseses in the world. They are special places, unique places, where nothing is the same in the world around about us.

You together are the temple. Yes, we're individuals, but we're not individuals, sorry. We're not individuals. The church is a body. It's a family. Paul's going to be emphasizing that again and again. We live in a society today which emphasizes the individual, the I, the me. But the truth is that, dear friends, as Christians, as believers, I like the way that the New NLV has done it, where it speaks about brothers and sisters.

We are one family. And as we shall see, Paul labors this strongly. If one hurts, the others should hurt. If one rejoices, the others should rejoice. If one is built and grows in maturity, all of us should be building up and growing in maturity.

[ 38 : 23 ] In fact, Paul gives a very sober warning, doesn't he, about destroying or harming the spiritual life of the church. Verse 17, if anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person.

God doesn't think it's insignificant when people persecute Christians. God doesn't think it doesn't really matter if churches are being undermined by false teaching or heresy or lies or by greed or worldliness.

As we shall see as we go on into this book, there's one man particularly who's undermining the church by his immorality. Paul takes a very strong line against that.

Why? Because it's God's temple that's being harmed. God will not hold anybody unaccountable who harms his church. That's why those who are called to teach have a huge responsibility before God.

Because those who teach falsely will be held accountable by God. So dear friends, you're God's temple. Just like the church that's set on the hill where one sense a beacon for the world around about us.

[ 39 : 30 ] We're saying, look, God is alive. God is real. God is someone you have to give an account to. God is someone you should come to know and to be in fellowship with. We're growing as a temple and we're to grow and to become more and more that temple which more and more honours God, more and more displays his glory.

What was the reason that you joined this church? What is the reason for anybody joining the church? Isn't it so that we can come to grow together?

Isn't the reason we come together on a Sunday that we might grow? That we might learn? That we might be built up? That we might be strengthened? Isn't the very purpose of the church not a school for saints, is it?

But rather it's a refuge for sinners. It's not a museum for saints. That's probably better. It's not a display of just all the really, really good people in the town. They're all in the church. No, it's all the really, really bad people in the town.

Isn't it? Aren't you the worst of sinners? Don't you feel that way? Don't you know yourself to be someone who's broken God's laws more than anybody else? We're a school. We're to be trained. We're to be growing.

[ 40 : 42 ] We're to be developing. That's why we come together. We long to be a temple that glorifies God. We long to be a people that together, together, display his mercy, his grace, his faithfulness, his loving kindness to a world which is without him.

So Paul says, as a field, it's only natural that we're growing. There must be growth. It's God's work, not anybody else's. As a building, be careful about what you're building with.

Corinthians were not building with good, good, solid stuff. We have to build with love, aren't we?

With grace, with patience, the fruit of the Spirit. They're the building blocks of the church.

And we're to build because we have a goal in view, a beautiful temple which is God's temple which he counts as sacred, holy and special that the world may see that he is alive and active in this world.

Dear friends, let us pursue and persevere to grow. Let us be like Paul. Remember, as he writes about himself personally, let's apply that to ourselves as a church. Not that we've already obtained all this maturity, all this growth, or have already arrived at the goal.

[ 41 : 53 ] We haven't, have we? But I press on, says Paul, to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I don't consider yet to have taken hold of it.

I'm not there yet. I've not reached it yet. One thing I do, forgetting what's behind. That's an important principle, isn't it? Forgetting what's behind and pressing on, straining towards what is ahead.

I press on towards the goal to win the prize which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

We're on a mission, dear friends, and we are to grow together.

Well, let's sing our final hymn as we bring our time to a close. A hymn which, of course, I hope, reminds us that Christ is all the churches.

He's the foundation. He's the builder. And he's, to his glory, we are to live. 1, 5, 2, How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear, soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds, and drives away his tears.

[ 42 : 58 ] And one of the verses speaks about what I've been saying. Dear name, the rock on which I build. So let's stand and sing again. We're going to sing it as we did the other one, two verses together.

If you know the new tune, you'll know how that goes. Two verses together. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. gratitude, To the weary rest In the rock on which I build A shield and light in place I get a pain in tears Revealed with boundless doors of grace

Jesus, my shepherd, brother, friend My prophet, priest, and king My Lord, my life, my way, my end

Ascent, the praise I bring Ascent, the praise I bring He is the effort of my heart And Lord, my

always, Lord But may I see thee past the walls And praise thee as I own

Till there I would thy love proclaim With every pleading prayer And may the music of thy name

Refresh my soul in them Refresh my soul in them And so now may the God of peace Who through

the blood of the eternal covenant Brought back from the dead Our Lord Jesus That great shepherd

of the sheep May he equip you with everything good For doing his will And may he work in us what

is pleasing to him Through Jesus Christ To whom belongs the glory

[ 46 : 54 ] Now and forever And forever Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

Amen Amen Amen Amen