

Building God's Church

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[0 : 00] Well, today is the first Sunday with me as your new vicar. I tried to start the next sentence before that happened, but thank you for pushing on, Jess. That was very nice.

And as your new leader, I'm keen that we continue to grow as a church. But what does a church leader need to be in order to grow the church? What makes the perfect pastor?

Some years ago, a survey was conducted asking Christians that very question. Here are some of the results. The perfect pastor teaches the whole Bible, but preaches for exactly 12 minutes.

He is 28 years of age, but has 35 years experience. He speaks about sin and judgment, but is politically correct. It's a bit close to home, isn't it?

He spends all his time out of his office visiting the sick and doing evangelism, but is always in his office praying and preparing. He is loud and charismatic, but humble and quiet.

[1 : 08] He helps Christians grow, but never challenges them from the Bible. And he will build the church to twice its size in one year. Needless to say that this church leader does not exist.

Now, of course, the people in the survey did not say all of those things together. They only said some of those things which they saw were important. But as you can see, there were conflicting views about what made a good leader.

That will grow the church. And as we come to 1 Corinthians 3 tonight, it seems that there are also some conflicting views over which leaders to follow in the church at Corinth.

That's the context. Let me show you. If you've got your Bibles there, just turn back a page to chapter 1, verse 11. Chapter 1, verse 11. So second column on the left-hand side there towards the top, verse 11.

He says, Verse 12. You see, they are arguing with each other about which leader was the best to follow in an effort to build themselves up and show that they were superior because they followed a better leader.

[2 : 32] They were saying, We're better because we follow Paul, the great church planter. And others were saying, No, no, we're better because we follow Apollos, the powerful preacher.

And so on. For those who remember Paul Barker, who's now a bishop, it would be like us saying, Well, we're a greater church because one of our leaders is now a bishop or something like that. And this fighting is such a problem in the Corinthian church that Paul is still having to deal with it in our passage tonight in chapter 3.

So that brings us to chapter 3 in your Bibles and point 1 in your outlines. Have a look at verse 1. He says, Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit or spiritual people, but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ.

I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. Why? Well, you are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling 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? You see what's happening?

[3 : 44] He's still having to deal with this issue about boasting in which leader they will follow. And by boasting in different leaders, they were judging them by worldly standards, by how many churches they've planted or how powerful their sermons felt and so on.

That's why Paul in verse 1 says he could not address them as spiritual people, because they were acting so worldly. Now, this is a pretty big slap in the face for the Corinthians, because we haven't been working our way through the letter, of course, but if we had, we'd realize that these people thought they were very spiritual.

And so for Paul to turn around and say, I can't address you as spiritual people, big slap in the face. Paul is saying, you're actually acting more Corinthian than Christian, more worldly than godly, more like infants and less like mature Christians.

But before we are too harsh with them, we need to remember that it's very easy for us to do the same, to judge leaders by worldly standards. On the next slide, meet Dave.

Dave is a guy I know from Bible College. He's a minister in Perth and has been working hard to help people come to know Jesus. He looks like an ordinary bloke, but let me tell you, he's also a qualified brain surgeon.

[5 : 09] Now, what did you just do in your head when you heard that he's also a brain surgeon? Did you think, wow? Or did you think, maybe we should have got him as our vicar instead?

What impressed you more about Dave? Was it that he gave up his time to help people hear of Jesus, or that he's a brain surgeon as well? You see, was our opinion of him shaped by the world's standards, or by Christ's standards?

It's very easy to do by the world's, isn't it? Well, the Corinthians were judging their leaders by the world's standards, and trying to build themselves up, based on who they followed. And so Paul now moves on to remind them just who leaders are, and who actually builds the church.

So at point two in your outlines, verse five in your Bibles. He says, Well, look, 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 of the gospel, and Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. See what he says? Leaders are God's servants, whom God appoints, whom God gives tasks to, and whom God works through.

[6 : 30] And by the way, this means that leaders will answer to God, and not their congregations or ministries. But it does mean, if you lead some sort of ministry here at 5pm Church, then this is who you are, God's servant.

But the point is, it's all about God, and not so much the leader. In other words, church growth is not about having the most impressive pastor, by the world's standards, it's about God.

God is the one who ultimately grows the church, because it is his church. Do you see verse seven? 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 labor. For we are co-workers in God's service. You are God's field and God's building.

Do you notice which word kept being repeated there? God. It's about God. Leaders are God's co-workers, but God is the main worker, who ultimately gives the growth.

- [7 : 45] That's what we saw in our first reading, where God spoke to Abraham and said, I will do this. I will do this. God, the word I kept being repeated. God does it all. Why?
- Well, because it's his church. Do you see verse nine? Verse nine starts with the word for, or because, which gives us the reason. The church grows, verse nine, because God is the main worker.
- We are God's field, God's building. God has bought us his church at the cost of his only son's blood. And so we, his church, are precious to him, but we belong to him.
- We are his, and he is the one who will make us grow. This was brought home to me some years ago when I was at a different church. One of the preachers gave a particularly bad sermon.
- It happens to us all, but this one was particularly bad. He took one verse from the passage and sprang bored from that to talk about Jesus, which was good, but he didn't refer to the passage at all, and he was really hard to follow, which was bad.
- [8 : 55] In fact, at the end of the sermon, I must confess, I thought to myself, I now understand this passage even less than I did before. I wasn't alone.
- But at the end of the sermon, a man stood up in the middle of the congregation and said, what you've said this morning really touched my heart, and from now on, I want to follow Jesus.
- True story. And do you know what my first thought was then? How did this happen from that sermon? The answer?
- Verse 7. Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. It is God who makes things grow.
- And I found out a little bit later on that his wife had been praying for him for years, and God decided to answer that prayer that day. And so there's a few implications for us at this point, I think.
- [10 : 01] First, as I said before, if we are involved in any kind of leadership at 5pm church, then we are to remember that we are God's servants.
- Coworkers with God. He is the one that grows the church. And therefore, we are not to boast about our leaders. That's pretty much the big application from the whole chapter.
- I don't think we've got a problem of that here at Holy Trinity. I've never heard someone say Mark is way better than Pricey or the other way around. I've heard anyone boast in us, actually.
- I think the only people that boast in Mark and me are our mothers. So I'm not sure we've got that problem here at Holy Trinity. But that's where the passage goes. If you look at verse 21, he kind of ends up by saying, concluding, so then, no more boasting about human leaders.
- All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death, the present or the future, all are yours and you are of Christ and Christ is of God.
- [11 : 03] That's the big implication. Don't boast about your leaders because, this is extraordinary actually, all things are ours in Christ anyway. I don't know if you realize that.
- whether life or death, the present or the future or the world. In fact, later on in chapter 6, I think it is, Paul writes, don't you know that you will judge the world?
- When I first read that, I thought, no, didn't know that. But we will. All things are ours in Christ. So it's ridiculous to boast about which leader is better or not. That's the big application. But I think for us here who don't have the Corinthian problem, we're still to remember that we are God's servants.

That's the first implication. The second implication is if it's God who grows or builds the church, then we must all pray for God to do that. We must pray that God will build our church here at HTD.

We must pray as individuals and as a church like we did before when we kind of commissioned the ministries and so on. Now, I know regular prayer is not easy for most of us and I feel like our corporate church prayer life has dropped off a bit, at least among the morning English congregations.

[12 : 20] So one of the things I'd like to do, in fact, I've started talking with Mark about this already, is kind of think about how we can reinvigorate corporate prayer. Perhaps have some prayer Sundays throughout the year and I'll be saying more about this in the coming weeks.

But for now, will you commit to praying regularly for your church, God's church here at HGD? Will you commit yourself to praying for this church this year?

Thank you to those who already do this but for the rest, please do commit to this. Put it on your prayer mate app or whatever else you use. For it is God who ultimately grows his church.

Now, of course, just because God is the one who gives the growth, it doesn't mean that we pray and do nothing. We must still do the task that God has assigned to each of us in building his church, whether the task is serving supper or dinner or teaching Sunday school or youth group or welcoming people on Sundays.

Whatever the task is, we must still be faithful in it. I mean, if you just look across to the next column in chapter 4 verse 2, that's what Paul will go on to say. Do you see chapter 4 verse 2?

[13 : 33] He says, Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court.

Indeed, I do not even judge myself and on he goes. We are God's servants who will answer to God and so we must prove faithful in whatever task we're given. Of course, Paul primarily has in mind the task of speaking about Jesus in God's word because this is how God builds his church, which brings us to point 3 and verse 10.

Have a look there at chapter 3 verse 10. 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. Here in verse 10, Paul begins by saying that he's like a wise builder, not in the sense of being clever, but in the sense of preaching Christ.

See, again, if we'd been reading through the letter of 1 Corinthians, we would have read back in chapter 1, if you just turn back a page, it's our last Bible flick, just turn back a page to chapter 1 verse 22, page 1143, and look at what he calls true wisdom here.

[14 : 58] Verse 22, Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, he says.

Christ is true wisdom. This is what makes Paul a wise builder, because he builds with Christ, the gospel. And in case you're not convinced, then Paul makes it just as clear, I think, in chapter 3 verse 11, back in our passage, where he says, no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

See, Paul preaches about Christ to build the church. In fact, he says, here in verse 11, that no one can lay any other foundation. You can't do it. It won't work than Jesus Christ.

The gospel message of Christ found in God's word, the Bible, is the only foundation on which God will build his church. Because it's only the message of Christ that saves people and creates the church in the first place.

God's word. And so, if any church moves away from Christ and God's word, if they focus less on Christ and his word and more on inspirational stories or emotional music or social activities, if they speak only half the gospel, you know, the nice bit, the salvation bit, and skip the judgment bit because worldly wisdom says, just tell people nice stuff.

[16 : 42] If churches do that, then what happens is the church loses its foundation and will collapse on the last day. It will be like the house on the next slide which lost its foundation.

Collapse. You see, the gospel of Jesus in God's word is our foundation. And in order to keep the gospel of Christ as our foundation, it must remain central to all we do at HCD this year and beyond.

So in verse 10, when Paul talks about building on the foundation of Christ in God's word, he does not mean we start with Jesus and then move on to something else outside the Bible.

No, no, we never graduate from the gospel onto something else. Rather, we build on the gospel in God's word and grow up in Christ and God's word, not by moving away from it.

We build on the foundation of Christ by continuing to teach about Christ in God's word and by seeing the background of the gospel in the Old Testament and seeing the implications of the gospel in the New Testament.

[17 : 49] We build on the foundation of Christ in God's word by growing up in Christ and God's word, not by moving away from it. And so if you think about a foundation of a house, the foundation not only supports the house but also shapes the house on which it is built.

So on the next slide is a concrete slab which is the foundation for a house. It's rectangular, right? So what shape do you think the house will grow up to be? Rectangular, right?

And if on the next slide if the foundation of a house is this shape which is a bit more trendy and exotic, then what shape would the house grow up to be? That shape.

Odd shape. I don't know what you call that shape. You see, the foundation not only supports the house but it also shapes the house on which it is built. So also the teaching of Jesus Christ in God's word not only supports our church but is to shape our church on which it is built.

This is what it means to build with the right materials. Do you see verse 12 to 15? Verse 12, he says, if anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver or costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is because the day will bring it to light.

[19 : 09] 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 burnt up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Do you notice in verse 12 we've got two types of building materials? One group are precious and survive fire like gold, silver and costly stones.

The other group are common things that are burnt up like wood, hay and straw. Wood, hay and straw are the usual worldly things that houses were built out of in Paul's day.

They represent the usual worldly wisdom for building the church like avoiding talk of sin and judgment because people don't like that or not spending too much time in the Bible and just telling lots of stories because it's easier for people to listen to.

In fact, one minister recently told me that he thinks it is better to preach an interesting sermon than a faithful one. But you see, that's worldly wisdom.

[20 : 17] That's building with wood, hay and straw. And what will happen to the leader who builds the church like this? Well, verse 13, all his work will be for nothing.

All his effort to grow the church will amount to nothing because it will be burnt up on judgment day. It will collapse like the house we saw on the slide. In verse 15, he himself will escape but only just and with a few singed hairs.

Now, just in case that's not enough of a warning to build with care, Paul adds in verse 16, 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. You see, God loves his church which is you together us.

We are his temple because his spirit lives in us. And that makes us very precious to God. And so, he will destroy the leader who destroys his precious church.

[21 : 27] It's a pretty severe warning, isn't it? Now, it does seem to contradict, however, verse 15 where the leader will escape albeit through the flames. But I take it there are two slightly different scenarios being imagined here.

The first in verse 15 might be a youth group leader that seeks to grow the youth only through games and no Bible. And so, there was no real Christian growth.

Then on the last day, all that effort, all that work will amount to nothing because it did not grow the youth in maturity or in number. But the leader was a believer and had good intentions so we'll be saved.

And then take another leader, different scenario who speaks a different gospel. One where there is no sin or judgment. And for the record, I've heard a person who used to be a bishop of Melbourne tell a person at Ridley College that at Easter don't preach about sin and judgment, just preach about God's love.

So I'm not just making this stuff up. But if there's a leader who speaks a different gospel which says God loves everyone so God will save everyone even if they don't believe in Jesus or something like that, you can believe whatever you want, that's okay.

[22 : 44] then I take it that kind of leader is the one in verse 16 and 17 that will destroy the church because they preach a different gospel and will also be destroyed because of what they've done to God's precious church.

Either way, do you see that all church leaders must, verse 10, build with care. How? By teaching about Christ in God's word to one another and to those who don't yet know Jesus.

In fact, we are all to build with care because we are all to speak God's word to one another as we have opportunity. It's not just the staff. On the next slide we read this from Colossians 3.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you, congregation, teach and admonish one another. And so we must all be careful how we build.

I sent out an email earlier this week about my Bible study group starting up and one of the responses I got back was very encouraging. It said, thanks Andrew, looking forward to getting together in God's word.

[23 : 51] I thought that was really encouraging because here is a person that knows how to build the church. God builds the church through us as we speak to one another and hear about Christ in God's word.

And if we build like this, then verse 8, verse 14, each will be rewarded according to the task God has given us. By which I think Paul means we'll get to see the fruit of our labor in heaven as we see that youth group kid or whoever that God has used us to help persevere to heaven.

And so if the first implication is that we are God's servants, no boasting servants but remember we are God's servants. If the second implication is that we must pray because God gives the growth, then the third implication as we kick off this year is that all of our activities must either speak the gospel of Christ in God's word or support Christ in God's word being spoken.

Do you get that? Either speak it or support it being spoken. So for those who lead Bible studies here, we must study God's word and not just a book about God's word because the Bible is how God grows his church.

Your pastors and others who preach and disciple you are to do so by speaking about Jesus in God's word. We will work hard to help you understand it for yourselves even use some stories and pictures ourselves but you will also have to work hard to listen because listening is actually hard work especially on humid nights like tonight and yet this is how God grows us.

[25 : 31] The songs we sing are to be about Christ and God's word and not just about what I will do or I, I, I. You can very easily tell God's songs versus me songs.

Or those who lead outreach activities we must speak about Jesus in God's word. Do it in a way that the kids can understand but we must speak it nonetheless for that is how God grows his church.

Those who do J Kids or Youth Group or Sebs must speak about Christ in God's word and not just play games because that's how God grows his church. Having said that games are still really important because they help form relationships and have fun and that in turn helps kids to hear about Jesus in God's word and those who serve in the kitchen are still really important because food or food's great full stop but food provides an opportunity for conversation where we can ask after each other and pray for each other and speak God's word to one another.

Remind each other of promises that we know. Those who serve on sound or slides are still really important because it helps us up the front to speak God's word and helps you to understand it and receive it.

Those who serve with maintenance in the gardens are still really important because it helps us to hear God's word without worrying about the physical building collapsing on us or the car park getting flooded when it rains.

[26 : 54] You see we need both speaking ministries and supporting ministries so that people can keep hearing about Jesus in God's word because whether we're Christian or not that's how God builds his church in both maturity and number.

So can I thank you for those of you who do serve in some of those ways. What does this all mean for me as your new leader? Because this wasn't a 12 minute sermon it's now under 26 minutes sorry.

And I'm not 28 years of age with 35 years of experience. What's more people have said that they are looking forward to seeing what new things I will do. So what does it mean for me then?

Well it means much of what I will do and what Mark will do will actually remain the same. I'm sure there will be some new things but we are to continue to prayerfully love and faithfully teach you and others about Christ from God's word.

And we have to keep training and encouraging you to do the same. For this is how God will grow his church. So as I finish can I encourage you to keep praying regularly for your church?

[28 : 13] Can I encourage you to speak about Christ in God's word to each other when you have the opportunity? community and can I encourage you to serve in ways that will support the speaking of Christ in God's word so that together God would use us all to grow his church this year for his glory.

Let's pray. Our gracious Father we do thank you for reminding us that we're not to look at leaders or ourselves in worldly terms but as your servants to faithfully do the tasks that we've been given to do.

Thank you for reminding us that it's ultimately you who grows the church by working through us as we both support and speak the word of Christ in the Bible.

And so Heavenly Father we pray that you would help us to so build your church with your word this year. Grow us in both maturity and number we pray for your glory.

In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Very well thank you.

[29 : 25] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.