

## INTRODUCE

Good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here. If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. 1 Corinthians 3. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible, so if you don't have one, grab one of the hard-backed black one under every chair. You can open your phone or tablet. 1 Corinthians 3. If you open a black one from under your chair, 1 Corinthians 3 is on **page 953**.

## INTRODUCTION

So, today, we get to talk about one of my favorite topics: the church! And you're like,

- *“well, you obviously are passionate about this topic,*
- *because you're a pastor.*
- *A pastor talking about the church is like...*
- *a Chic-Fil-A employee saying 'my pleasure'.*
- *It's expected...in fact...I'm incited when they don't!*

But, I think this is an extremely relevant topic for us. Because sociologists who study spirituality in America say that two seemingly contradictory things are true in regards to Americans' spiritual lives:

- FIRST: spiritual interest is remaining very steady in our country—people are religiously hungry,
- BUT, at the same time, there is a move away from the church. 1/3 fewer Americans attends church weekly since 2010.<sup>i</sup>

This does not bode well for my career choice, right?

- But it's not even just that I want to talk about the church...
- or that culturally we can engage on this point here...

Remember what's going on leading up to this passage in 1 Corinthians.

- Paul is addressing divisions in the Corinthian church,
- and as he does, he is emphasizing
- that divisions in the church are a very serious matter to God.

**SLIDE THE CHURCH MATTERS TO GOD!** So, that should catch our attention. Well, let's jump into this. 1 Corinthians 3 starting in verse 5:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 3:5-9a

[5] What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. [6] I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. [7] So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. [8] He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. [9] For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field,

### EXPLAIN: LEADERS ARE SERVANTS

So, Paul begins one of two metaphors today for the church. He calls the church a field. So, this is an agricultural metaphor. And rhetorically, he begins with the church leaders calling them **servants**.

Paul's first point is that **SLIDE LEADERS ARE SERVANTS**. Listen to me, **you are not here to serve me...I am here to serve you!**

And this isn't to diminish the way we should respect and honor our leaders. But things had gotten out of hand in Corinth.

- They were treating their favorite leaders
- more like the Greeks treated their favorite philosophers!
- They were ascribing unhealthy celebrity status to them.
- This would never happen today, right?

But Paul shoots that down. He says,

- *“Hey, we’re servants.*
- *God assigned us tasks.*
- *I’m the guy who planted the seed of the Gospel.*
  - *I told you about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.*
- *Then Apollos watered the seed.*
  - *He preached and taught you with great ability.*
- *But that’s it!*
- *We are just faithful servants.*
- *Doing what God assigned us each to do.”*

Paul makes the case that church leaders

- are nothing more than servants of God,
- and when they work faithfully,
- they will receive wages.
- We aren't indispensable.
- We aren't the ones who receive glory.
- And we aren't the ones who grow the church.
- Paul says, **I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.**

## ILLUSTRATION: GARDEN

So, you might have a green thumb.

- You might have a killer garden.
- You might know the best methods for your
  - urbo-agro,
  - raised beds,
  - suburban farmer-wanna-be thing...
  - and just kill it.

But truthfully, you are completely reliant on things out of your control.

- You didn't create the seed.
- You didn't create the dirt.
- You didn't create the water.
- You can't control the seed once it's in the dirt.
- Not to mention the weather.

## EXPLAIN: GROWTH IS A RESULT OF GOD

You see, leaders have their place in the field...in the church.

- But they are farm-hands.
- They are hired help.
- And if they do good work, they get paid.
- But they aren't the field owner.
- They are servants.
- God gives the growth.
- God grows his church.

And then Paul says: **you are God's field.**

## EXPLAIN: THE CHURCH BELONGS TO GOD

- This is God's field.
- This is God's church.
- This isn't Paul's church,
- or Apollos' church.
- This isn't Chris Martin's church!

If you introduce me to one of your friends and say, *"Hey, I go to Chris' church."* I'll stop you mid-sentence, and say, *"No. You mean, we go to church together!"*

And that's Paul's point: **SLIDE** THE CHURCH BELONGS TO GOD.

- And this is why divisions are such a big deal!
- And why causing divisions is so heinous to God.
- Because this is his field.
- This is his church.

## TRANSITION

So, that's the first metaphor Paul gives us:

- the church is God's field.
- Leaders are servants in the field.
- And God gives the growth.

But then Paul moves on to the second metaphor for the church, and he now calls the entire church to account for how they are a part of this. Let's look at the rest of verse 9.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 3:9b-11

You are God's field, God's building.

[10] 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. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. [11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

### EXPLAIN: MASTER BUILDER

So, Paul shifts metaphors to a building. The church is no longer a field...it's a building.

And Paul calls himself, as a church leader, a skilled master builder. Now, that title in Greek is *sophos architektōn*.

- So, *sophos* where we get the word *wise*,
  - which links all this to the first two chapters
  - where Paul argues for the *sophia* of God
  - over the *sophia* of the world.
- *Sophos architektōn*.
  - Where we obviously get *architect*.

So, Paul is a *wise architect*. This very likely means that Paul was like a general contractor for a building project.

### EXPLAIN: THE FOUNDATION

So, in this new metaphor, the church is a building. Leaders are contractors. And his first main point is **SLIDE** THE FOUNDATION IS CHRIST.

The message to the church is that there is a temptation to build the church on something other than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Back to the wisdom issue. There is worldly wisdom that would encourage churches to be built on many other foundations.

And I just shared this last week in our membership class, but you can build a church on many different things.

- You can build a church on highly experiential and passionate WORSHIP experiences. These churches tend to live or die based upon the Sunday morning gathering and its effects.
  - And worship services aren't a bad thing...in fact, they are a very big deal. They just aren't the foundation.
- You can build a church on a SOCIAL JUSTICE cause. These are missions focused churches where the main thing for the church is to care for the least and lost. To take up the cause of the oppressed, the widow, the orphan.
  - And, again, so good! No one is arguing that missions are bad! But again, they aren't the foundation for the church.
- You can even build the church on COMMUNITY. Where your main focus is connecting people in tight groups where they can love and be loved. Where they can "do life together". Where belonging is the highest value.
  - And yes, and amen to this! But it is not the foundation of the church.

The foundation of the church is Jesus Christ. And the foundation affects everything else in the building.

## ILLUSTRATION: BUYING A HOME

Maryse and I bought our home about 18 months ago, and we looked for almost 4 months before we bought the place.

And as we were walking through homes, it was crazy how important the foundation was. Jon Holm, one of our elder candidates, was our realtor, and as we would walk through homes:

- He would point out cracks in the drywall as a result of foundation issues.
- Sometimes he would open and close doors to see if the frame lined up with the door, because a shifty foundation could affect that.
- Once we were walking through a home and he was like, *“Something’s not right with the foundation in here.”*  
And so, he has me pull out my Chapstick from my pocket and set it on the floor. Where it proceeded to roll all the way down the room.
  - It’s like, “yeah...we’ll pass...”

But if you know anything about homes, you know there are some easy fixes...but when there’s an issue with a foundation. It messes with everything.



## APPLICATION

Listen,

- If you build a church on passionate worship experiences as the foundation...
  - it can quickly become a production or a concert rather than a church.
- If you build a church on social justice causes as the foundation...
  - it can quickly become a non-profit or NGO rather than a church.
- And if you build a church on community as the foundation...
  - it can quickly become a social club rather than a church.
  
- So, if you are looking for a church right now,
- or when you leave Fathom at some point,
- always try to figure out what the foundation is.

The foundation of the church is supposed to be Christ.

## MAIN POINT

Now, this is the point where Paul moves from simply talking to church leaders, and extends the metaphor to the entire church. And he does so by making his main point in verse 10: **Let each one take care how he builds upon it.**

This is the main thrust of Paul's passage today. **SLIDE** BE CAREFUL HOW YOU BUILD.

- Let each one...
- leaders,
- but also each one who is a part of God's church,
- take care how he builds upon
- the good foundation of Christ.

We are ALL called to build on this foundation...to build up the church.

Later in 1 Corinthians Paul will expound upon the gifts God gives every person in the church.

- All of us have been called to engage.
- All of us have been called to invest.
- All have us have been called to build...
- and how each one builds matters.

Look at verse 12 & 13:

### **1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-13**

[12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— [13] 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.

### **EXPLAIN: WHAT YOU BUILD WITH MATTERS**

So, what is Paul talking about? What exactly are we to build?

- Well, he's talking about how we invest our lives.
- How we invest all that God's given us...
- into building up his church.

- God has given you certain GIFTS and ABILITIES...
- certain AVAILABILITIES based on your life stage...
- and certain RESOURCES.

We alliterate these in church: **time, and talents, and treasures.** God has given each one of us those things. And he's asking us to take care how we build with those.

### **EXPLAIN: ETERNAL OR TEMPORAL**

And then he really gives two categories of building materials. He says **gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw.** And remember, this is a metaphor, so these building materials represent two categories. Some materials will endure, and others will not.

- The church needs to be built on the foundation of Christ,
- by wise builders,
- with materials that will last.

So, there are three elements: gold, silver, and precious stones...and these are lasting, enduring, one might say, eternal.

And then there are three elements that are more temporal. Now, it's not to say that they are bad or wrong in-and-of-themselves. But only that they are temporal and will not last.

And the question is this: **what are you building with?**

- You have time, talents, and treasure...
- and what are you putting them into:
- temporal things,
- or eternal things?

Because the Day is coming when fire will reveal the type of work each one has done. Now, you might notice that the Day is capitalized in your bibles.

- This is because Paul is referring to a specific day,
- and that is the Day of the Lord.
- Judgment Day.
- There will come a day where every single one of us
- will, before God, give an account for our lives.
- And one that day every good work you did will be tested by fire,
- and some will be shown as temporal and it will burn up,
- while other work will survive the fire,
- and be shown as eternal.

### **APPLICATION: FIRST AND BEST**

And this is why we talk every single week here about first fruits giving. And yeah, we talk about it in terms of finances, but it really extends to all of your time, all of your talents, and all of your treasure. And the point here is:

- What you do with your first and best
  - when it comes to the church...
  - will one day be judged.
- Do you give God's church your first and your best?
- Do you build with your time?
- Do you build with your abilities?
- Do you build with your resources?
- Do you give to God your first and your best?
- Or do you give him whatever leftovers you have?

Why would you do that? And hear me: **God won't take your leftovers. He wants your first and your best, because he is first and best!**

Do you invest your time into God's people...into the church?

- Or is the best of your time given to temporal things?
- This is why, historically,
- Christians have always gathered
- on the first day of the week.
- Sundays.
- Our first, and what should be our best.

Do you invest your abilities and talents in God's body?

- Are you serving?
- Are you building with us?
- Or are all your abilities going toward things
- that may be good,
- but that aren't eternal?

And honestly, when it comes to your finances, are you giving into the church?

- I do think that generosity outside the church is great!
- Maryse and I give to a number of things outside this church.
- But we give our first and our best to Fathom...
- to his field...
- to his building.

## TRANSITION

The question asked is this: **on the Day, will your house pass inspection?** Have you built into anything with eternal value?

And then Paul ends this passage with three categories of workers. Look at verse 14:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 3:14

**[14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.**

### EXPLAIN: THE FAITHFUL WORKER

The first category of worker that Paul mentions is **SLIDE** THE FAITHFUL WORKER.

Now, remember the metaphorical language.

- God is building his church,
- on the foundation of Jesus Christ,
- and we get to build on that foundation
- with eternal materials.
- And as we build and invest into God's church,
- those things will survive the fires on the Day.

These eternal things are like

- investing into people's lives,
- sharing the gospel,
- caring about the poor and the orphan and the widow.
- These are eternal investments that last and that matter to God.

So, you have to ask yourself, am I investing in things that will eternally matter? Or am I merely investing in my temporal, earthly happiness?

The faithful worker will find that his investments, his part of the building, survives, and he will receive a reward.

Now, the reward Paul is referring to is not salvation, as if our building and good works earns us salvation.

- No, to **receive a reward** means to receive praise from God.
- To hear, *“Well done, my good and faithful servant.”*
- To have God pleased with how we lived and built!

But there is a second category of worker. Verse 15:

### **1 CORINTHIANS 3:15**

**[15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.**

### **EXPLAIN: THE FOOLISH WORKER**

I'll call this second category **SLIDE** THE FOOLISH WORKER. Now notice, this worker is saved. It's not as if their salvation is a result of their work...

**our salvation is never a result of our work, but only of the work of Christ on the cross.**

- So, brilliant work does not earn salvation,
- and lackluster work does not lose it.

But as one commentator puts it: “Even failures will be included in salvation, but they will enter salvation ‘smelling of smoke,’ their labor gone up in flames.” ii

- So, although this worker is still saved...
- They somehow miss out on the blessings that come from working faithfully.

Everything they build with their time, talents, and treasures was ultimately for themselves...and it will be burnt up. They may be saved...but they miss out on part of the reward.

### **ILLUSTRATION: ANNIVERSARY**

A way to think about this is like a marriage anniversary. Imagine you're coming up on a big anniversary. Five years, ten years, twenty, twenty-five. Ok?

And so, you're gonna plan that date, that special anniversary date.

- And your girl is into the symphony,
- and fine dining,
- and being pampered.

But you're not so into that. You're into:

- Sports
- and wings
- and breweries.

So, you plan the anniversary date...

- and you get floor seats to the Nuggets,
- and you take her to Buffalo Wild Wings beforehand,
- and then you cap the night off at that new local brew-pub.

Now, you may not KILL your marriage in doing that. It would not go well for you, alright! But your marriage might survive that.



But who are you planning that anniversary for? Her? Or you?

- Wouldn't you want to give your wife
- the very best for your anniversary...
- to please her...
- to woo her...
- to show her your great love for her?

## TRANSITION

Paul is saying,

- *“Christian, don't you want to give God your first and best?*
- *To show him your love for him...*
- *your thankfulness for all he is!*
- *Yeah, you're saved,*
- *but is that all you want?”*

And frankly, if you have no desire at all to give Christ your first and best, it could be cause for concern. Notice, the foolish worker at least tried to build...

So, there's the faithful worker, the foolish worker, and then one last category, and it takes it one step further. Look at verses 16-17.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-17

[16] Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? [17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

## EXPLAIN: THE CHURCH IS GOD'S TEMPLE

Now, the building metaphor expands a bit, because this building that's being built up isn't just any old building...it's God's temple, where God's Spirit dwells.

And there are other places in 1 Corinthians where Paul mentions you individually being the temple...but what Paul means here is not *you* as individuals. He's talking about you, as in, the whole church. Because when he says, **do you know that you are God's temple**. The pronoun he's using in the Greek is plural.

And in English we don't have a plural *you* like this,

- unless you're from the south,
- and you say y'all,
- or, you really to take it up a notch,
- all-y'all!

He's saying, all of you, the church, are God's temple.

And the word for temple can also be translated as sanctuary.

- He's saying you, church,
- are the place where God dwells!
- He doesn't dwell in buildings anymore,
- no, he dwells in his people
- and you are his people.

This is why the church is such a big deal to God!

**God is MORE present in us here, gathered this morning, than he is in any one individual alone.** This is why church matters.

## EXPLAIN: THE FAITHLESS WORKER

And so, the third category is to those who would attempt to destroy the church. I'll call them **SLIDE** THE FAITHLESS WORKER.

- Now, this is a stern warning to anyone who would divide God's church.
- This is a stern warning to anyone who would harm God's church.
- The faithless worker will be destroyed.

Another analogy for the church that's given in the New Testament is God's bride. The church is the bride.

- And yo, you can mess with me.
- But you mess with my bride?
- Whoo...that's anger on a whole different level.

I heard a pastor say,

- "You mess with my wife..."
- I will hurt you...
- and start a prison ministry from the inside."
- Yup.

Do you realize that the church belongs to God?

- It's HIS church.
- It's his bride.
- This is his.

And so, if you mess with it...

- if you divide it...
- if you form factions in it...
- if you attack it.
- You're not just attacking a pastor,
- or elders,
- or an organization,
- or even people.
- No, you're attacking God's bride.

And Paul's warning is stern here. **You better be careful.** Paul takes this very seriously.

## CONCLUSION

So, a faithful worker...a foolish worker...and a faithless worker.

All bringing us back to the admonition from Paul: **SLIDE** BE CAREFUL  
HOW YOU BUILD.

And each one of us has to ask ourselves the question: what type of worker are you?

- Are you a faithful worker?
  - Are you investing your lives in things that really matter?

- Are you, if you're honest, a foolish worker?
  - Do you recognize that your life has primarily been just about you?
  - You attend church when it's convenient...
  - you kinda prioritize being a Christian...
  - but really, you have not invested in building the way that God has called you to?
  
- Or, even worse, are you the one who will face the wrath of God because your faith isn't in Christ...it's in yourself? Are you faithless?

You have to ask yourself that question.

And you need to ask yourself that question today.

- Not later...
- not when you're older...
- not when you graduate,
- or get married,
- or have kids,
- or retire,
- or whatever.

Because the Day of the Lord is coming, and no one knows when.

## ILLUSTRATION: PROPOSAL

It's like this: when I was preparing to propose marriage to Maryse, I met her oldest brother to fill him in on my plans...really just as a courtesy...but he shocked me a bit.

We met at Starbucks, and right out of the gate he started peppering me with questions. He was like,

*"Well, Chris, how are you gonna provide for my sister?"*

- And I had blown all my savings on a ring,
- so, I was broke.
- And it's bad form to say something cheesy like,
- *"Our love will sustain us!"*
- So, I said I wanted to be a pastor
- and there was a living to be made in ministry.
- And he bought it!

So, then he was like, *"Well, what about your plans for financial future:*

- *wealth management...*
- *life insurance...*
- *children's education...*
- *retirement...*
- *are you putting away for those things?"*

And I thought,

- *"bro, I didn't even have to ask you for her hand."*
- *This is a courtesy coffee.*
- *I already schmoozed your dad.*
- *Why you grilling me?*

- *Wealth management?*
- *Bro, I got a black coffee...*
- *I didn't even spring for the latte."*

## ENDING

But listen, it got me thinking about,

- not just the engagement,
- or the wedding day,
- or the wedding night
  - (which was pretty much all I could think about at the time
  - we'll get into that in chapter 7)...

But I started thinking about the long game.

- Not just the wedding...but the marriage.
- Not just the career, but the retirement.
- Not just the start of life, but the end of life.

That day is coming! For me! And for you.

And Paul's reminding his church that there is an even more important Day to prepare for!

- The Day of the Lord is coming,
- so BE CAREFUL HOW YOU BUILD.
- What needs to change in your heart and your life
- for you to hear on that day,
- *"well done my good and faithful servant?"*

Let's pray

## COMMUNION

We respond in 4 ways:

- Communion
- Tithes & offerings
- Prayer
- Singing

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” [25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>

<sup>ii</sup> Fisk, B.N. First Corinthians.