

I Corinthians 1 – 7
“Caution: Temple Under Construction”
I Corinthians 3:10-23

We're in first Corinthians chapter three, looking at verses 10 through 23. We won't be digging deeply into the whole portion of this text. We're going to be looking at particular part of it as we build on this argument that Paul is making here at the church in Corinth with regards to worldly wisdom and why it's so important for them to recognize that as spiritual people, their mindset is not to be of the world, something that we would take for granted and think that we would know. But it's so easy to condemn the Corinthians when we ourselves fall into the same pattern of thinking so easily, so naturally, and so much that we do. We're going to be reading verses 10- 23. Let me urge you to please pay careful attention, because this is God's holy and inerrant word, 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, for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest for the day, will disclose it because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.

For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool, that he may become wise for the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness. And again the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.

So let no one boast in men, for 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 Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Pray with me.

Lord God, we need your Holy Spirit so that we might understand how important this passage of Scripture is like all of your word, but especially to understand what we are engaged in as your people, and that you even dwell not just among us, but within us as your church. And because of that, you are doing something amazing. I pray you bless our time. In Jesus name, Amen.

For 20 years, I had the privilege of serving at McElwain Presbyterian Church in Pensacola, Florida, which was the home of the Pensacola Theological Institute for many years from the mid 50s up through the, early 2000s. And it was, in many people's view, the place where the PCA really began in terms of it was the nursery which bred the PCA, as in the old denomination, the PCAs. Many of those who were discouraged with the liberalism that was growing in the church and the lack of emphasis on the Word of God would gather together according to the vision of the pastor of the church at the time, Don Graham, back in 1955, and he encouraged people to come. He called it a vacation with a purpose, and they would come down to the beach and they would hear the speakers and hear the gumption to invite men like Jim

Packer and James Montgomery Boice, Carl Henry early on, Francis Schaefer, Martin Lloyd-Jones, and a young upstart called R.C. Sproul. Just a few minor names... and they would come for a week long time preach in the morning, they would go to the beach and get fried, sunburned, and then eat fried food and then come back and just wince as they listened to the evening preacher. It was a big thing. Now, denominationally The Presbyterian Church in America is not huge. We have less than 3000 churches. It's small, but in terms of the impact that the PCA has had in the world, the MTW is the largest mission organization in terms of different partnerships among all evangelical denominations. It's amazing the impact the PCA is having around the world. And it can you could say it began with the vision of a man of a little church in Pensacola, Florida. It's a big deal. And I met a man at General Assembly, a young man who saw my tag that said McIlwain Presbyterian Church one time. And he said, oh, I went to the PTI as a kid every year. That was our vacation. At first, I thought it was great. We go to the beach and then we go in and listen to these guys go on and on. I had no idea what was going on, and I just remember there was one guy, he was so nice and would sit down, you know, at his feet, and he would let me take my toy truck and run it in between his legs. And he would sometimes stop it to make a barrier. And I would giggle and laugh. But then he would tell me to be quiet. I saw a picture and realized that it was J.I. Packer. I had no idea what I was involved with. As a little kid, something that was to have such an impact and affect so many lives. You know, I think the church is like that, generally speaking, evangelical churches, most churches, we have no idea what we're really engaged in as the church of the Living God. It's part of our culture. So we take so many things for granted being here in the South, and we go Sunday morning and then those who are really super serious go Sunday night. Here you are tonight, feeling really good about yourselves. Good thing we don't get saved by grace. Sorry. I mean saved by work. Sorry. It's saved by grace. But it's not a cultural thing. It's not just a cultural identity. And it seems like it's just something that we've lost sight of. We're involved in something tremendous and huge. And that's what Paul wants the Church of Corinth to understand. And of course us, as well.

From the very beginning of his letter, he makes this stark contrast between the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of men, and the wisdom of God. And what he's referring to by these phrases is that that thinking that's purely human, that operates on a purely human, non spiritual level. The culture that surrounded the church at Corinth was thoroughly secular in its view of what was wise and what was effective. In First Corinthians chapter one, he speaks of the wise man, and the wise man not only knew a lot, but he could also speak impressively. He could speak persuasively. He speaks of a debater who was skilled at using that impressive and persuasive power to win arguments. Obviously, many of the Corinth Corinthians were wowed by that worldly wisdom, and it crept into the life of the church in terms of which teachers, as we saw that they felt were the most powerful, apparently and most persuasive.

Last week, Doctor Doriani looked at verses one through ten where Paul addresses the Corinthians with the unvarnished truth, telling them that their thinking was not spiritual and that they were at best just spiritual babies. But he now sets out to do is to show them how the source of their thinking results in a specific outcome. What he tells them has been truths, what he tells them is true and remains true even today. Throughout every age, our mindset determines whether we act destructively or constructively in the church. Our mindset, how we think, determines if our actions are destructive or constructive. Well, very simply, if we think in an earthly, non spiritual way, that is according to the wisdom and standards of the world, then we will behave ultimately in destructive ways that harm the body of Christ. But if we think in a spiritually mature way, demonstrating and pursuing the fruit of the spirit, then we will behave in constructive ways that build up the body. That seems to make sense. Paul's language is direct. Paul's

language is strong. And because their unspiritual mind had caused them to forget, or at least to gravely misunderstand who they really were, the very temple of God.

Something big. Verse 16. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. Now there are three things I think important to note here. This is the first of ten times Paul uses this phrase in first Corinthians. Do you not know if you think it sounds a little condescending? You're right. What's implied by this is yes, you do know or you have been told. It's a rebuke, don't you remember? It's referring to what they should have known or should have understood. Do you not know that you are God's temple? Have you forgotten? Now the pronouns here are plural. It's, And I love to get to say this. It's y'all. It's not you singular. It's y'all. Don't y'all know? Don't all y'all know that you are God's temple. But this is not the same thing as first Corinthians 6:19 where he speaks about the body being the temple and taking care of the body, particularly with regards to sexual immorality, noting that it's important to recognize that this is different. This is not speaking about individuals. It's the corporate reality of who we are as the church. It's the word that is used to describe the holy place, not the temple environs, the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies where God's presence is. He says. That is what you we are. God's temple is holy. So the situation is pretty serious.

Paul wants them to realize that their thinking and behavior is destructive, destructive to the health and vitality of the body as a whole, and ultimately destructive to their witness. In Corinth. Now, let's look a little bit more deeply at his reasoning. If we have an unspiritual mind, we will behave in destructive ways. That seems to make sense now. Of course, it bothers Paul that he has to address the Corinthians as still of the flesh. Verse three. And he isn't saying they aren't believers, but in the strongest possible language. He stresses that they are behaving like unbelievers, those who are completely in the flesh, merely human. Now, this assessment ought to be pretty sobering to the Corinthians. It should get our attention as well, because he's saying from the time he first came to them, until now, time to the writing of this letter, they have only minimally matured in Christ.

Verse two, chapter three he says, I fed you with milk, not solid food, because you were not ready for it. Then he says, even now you're not ready, for you are still in the flesh. Now, as Doctor Doriani, he said last week, he's not saying that they aren't Christians, but again, he's saying something. That's a sense that's even worse. He says, you are indeed spiritual, but you're acting like you're not. I love what Gordon Faith says in his commentary on this. Paul, of course, does not mean to say that they do not have the spirit. They do. And that's the problem, because they are thinking otherwise. The argument has considerable bite, therefore, because his ultimate point is stop it.

People of the spirit must simply stop behaving the way you are. The destructive fruit of this merely human, fleshly thinking is that an unspiritual mind leads to jealousy, strife, self-deception. Now Paul says flatly in verses three and four that the jealousy and strife that's among them is because they're boasting in human leaders. We looked at that last week.

Now, Paul and Apollos both obviously had an impact on the congregation, but they're not the source of salvation. They are servants. Paul planted, Apollos watered, as we saw, but God brought the growth. He is the one who used their service, and they are, as he said, one in that purpose. But he says, this unspiritual mind leads to self-deception. And self-deception is particularly sneaky because you can think when you're self deceived that what you're doing, saying, or be how you're behaving is actually right when it isn't. Look at verses 18 through 21.

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool, that he may become wise for the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness.

And again the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile. So let no one boast in men. That's a powerful rebuke and a compelling call to repentance. He's saying, just stop evaluating yourselves and promoting yourself by human standards. Stop evaluating those around you by worldly standards of wisdom, behavior of power, control, the craftiness of scheming, arrogance, and conceit. Those things work in the world, and they work in the church, but they ought not really. And in the end they're futile because they're unspiritual. Anyone who thinks otherwise, Paul says, is self deceived and in fact, in God's eyes, foolish. Now, of course, the way we think has consequences, obviously. And when those who have influence in any body of believers do not rise above mere human thinking, it affects the whole health and strength of the body of believers.

Now Paul illustrates that using two metaphors one we saw last week that is farming. And now this week in this text, we're looking at building using the ladder. He says that mere human thinking is destructive because an unspiritual mind builds with earthly resources which are of temporary value. Look at verse ten. According to the grace given of God given to me like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation. Someone else is building upon it. Let each one takes. Take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on that foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest for the day. That is the day of judgment.

We'll disclose it because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one is done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward for anyone's work is burned up. He will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. Now we're not going to talk about rewards per se here, whether what they look like or anything like that. That's for another sermon at another time. but Paul does begin by referring to himself as the one who laid the foundation that door. And he spoke about that just briefly last week. And, of course, he laid a good foundation. The only real foundation that matters, the foundation is Jesus Christ as the one who brought the gospel of Christ to Corinth, he is the master builder. Interesting. The word there literally is wise. As a wise builder. Now, Paul is not being tongue in cheek here. He's making a point wise, not according to the world, because of course, the word of the cross is foolishness, but that is the foundation. It is Jesus that is the foundation, not the teaching of Jesus, not deeds of love and mercy, which are the fruit of the gospel.

But Jesus, who he is and what he did on the cross, that is the one foundation. So what we do on that foundation is critical. Now, it might seem natural for us to assume that from this point on, Paul is referring again to Apollos, or maybe Peter, as those who built on his foundation when he says, I laid the foundation and another is building on it, but that's really not what he's doing.

Remember back in verse eight, he spoke of Apollos and himself as one mutual servants in God's purpose. Certainly Peter, though he didn't lay the foundation at Corinth, was a foundation layer in other places where he ministered. And he in teaching there certainly didn't add to the foundation. But Paul is referring to the Corinthians themselves. Here's what he says. Each one should take care how they build upon it, warning them that they should take care in the sense that they build on that foundation with materials that are consistent with the eternal quality of the foundation that has been laid. Now, it's a

metaphor, obviously, but it's an important one so that they would understand. The foundation is magnificent.

And so what we build with and how we build must also match the foundation. He goes on to talk about building upon that foundation with these two kinds of materials, two kinds of resources. Now, I contrast these materials to show their value gold, silver, precious stones. They're the heavenly resources revealed by the spirit, that is the spiritual material that those who have the mind of Christ are able to discern gold, silver, precious stones. Those are the things that that dawn, significant building referring to the temple later. Certainly, it would be appropriate for the Corinthians to understand the temples around them if they didn't think of Solomon's or Herod's Temple. The temples of their gods, their secular gods would certainly be magnificent, as opposed to those things that were built with wood, hay, straw. Houses were made of mud and straw and sticks. Most houses were, you might think of a of a grand building or a shed, wood, hay, straw. That workmanship is some spiritual, whereas the other is clearly spiritual. That's the analogy he's making. Precious versus ordinary, uncommon versus common, not quality work.

Well, we moved into our house in Pensacola. It was a lovely home. It was already 30 years old when we moved into it. Beautiful non Florida looking house. It looked like it belonged in New England somewhere, and that's one of the reasons why we were drawn to it. Just beautiful sitting there amongst the live oaks and the Spanish moss and it was filled with all kinds of charm, meaning the guy who lived in it before us decided that he would do a lot of his own custom work, which meant things leaked regularly, that when I went to try to replace something, I found that he had used hurricane anchors to put things down. Why would you do that in the middle of a house? Obviously he didn't want it to blow away. We did live in Pensacola, but you practically had to get a jackhammer to get some of the things out he built with the also the best fiberboard you can probably get at Home Depot. When he put stuff together. I would go to put a drill in and it would just crumble.

Beautiful house, shoddy work, wood, hay, straw, stubble. Really, those who build with earthly resources like that. Not good material. It's temporary work at best. It doesn't last. And that's what Paul is talking about here in terms of those things that we build with on the foundation of Christ, those spiritual things. Certainly, it's talking about good doctrine, but it's also talking about the way that we behave, the way that we live, the way that we treat one another, the way that we demonstrate and pursue the fruit of the spirit in our interactions as the body of Christ that we build well, not with worldly behaviors towards one another, but with that which we've been called to do. And if we do use that substandard, temporary material, would hay straw, as it were, one day it will be revealed. Look at verse 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. Look at verse 15.

is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only through fire. Now it's worth noting that Paul believes again that the Corinthians there are saved. He says there will be saved but singed. They'll come through the fire. But those things that they built using worldly wisdom, they won't last. They won't stand the fire of God's judgment, but they will be saved. Now it's a warning. Clearly, if you keep thinking like unspiritual, unsaved people, he says, boasting about which leader you follow, calling yourself wise, using worldly means and ways to accomplish what you want to accomplish in the church, looking for control and power, or prohibiting others from having it. What you're building will never last.

In God's eyes, it is ultimately worthless and it could very well destroy you again. Verse 16. Don't you know that you are God's temple? It's as if he's saying, wake up! Do you not see who you are? Have you forgotten God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. It's not clear what that destruction is, although certainly it's speaking of the Day of Judgment, perhaps referring to that, or could very well be even what Jesus himself refers to in the Book of Revelation in chapter two, when he speaks of the church at Ephesus, and he says, if they do not repent, he'll remove their lampstand, the lampstand representing the church.

Which could mean that the church might physically exist. It might still have a footprint in its community, but its gospel effectiveness will be removed so that that could never happen here. There are churches all across America that were once filled with people.

That adopted worldly ways and are shells of their former selves, some of them restaurants. Now, just like we see in Great Britain and places in Europe, changed into museums or just torn down. Even here in Birmingham, one church was recently destroyed in Mountain Brook, torn down.

Do you not know your God's temple? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him and it might be a slow burn, destroy. Sometimes the worldly ways may seem right again, it's that self-deception. But he's saying, wake up, think. Look around you. Listen to what I'm saying. Now let's stop for a moment and just let Paul what Paul is saying, just settle in because they are his feet said they're biting words.

Of course, Paul's words are the Holy Spirit's words, not just his opinion. So what is the bottom line? Even though we may be born of the spirit, it's still possible for us to fill our minds with the world's wisdom. And I think it's also wise in God's eyes.

The stark reality is that being a Christian doesn't automatically prevent us from sometimes defaulting to mere human thinking and mere human behavior in the worldly mindset, those drivers are often, again, as I said, achieving and maintaining power control, sometimes even just trying to ensure that others are exposed or embarrassed. That's not just worldly, that's actually demonic. And we behave sometimes, and I've seen it in my work.

So sadly, in church revitalization, in churches that get caught up in power struggles. Personal battles, divisions that, when you step back, seem so petty and yet they're so consuming. Our minds stand in need of renewal.

Away from merely human thought patterns that are natural to us. Towards the spiritual patterns of the mind of Christ. They're the fruit of the spirit. It's about the heart, not just the actions. Now, Paul doesn't give these Corinthians a worldly wise error pass. Okay, that's I'll let you go. One time, in the midst of his rebuke, he shows them how they should be thinking positively. Those who have the mind of Christ, those who are in Christ, who are spiritual people, and of course, what is true for them is true for us as well, particularly in verse 33. As we'll see in a moment, he wants them to see the bigger picture and the positive reality. That big thing that they are a part of.

He isn't just rebuking them, he's encouraging them. If we have a spiritual mind, we will behave in constructive ways, ways that build up the body of Christ. Well, we saw that last week when Doctor Doran focused on that first ten verses. We will boast in God and view leaders as servants. That's the first thing. And one of these behaviors we've, that we've talked about here in terms of that, that jealousy and strife will dissipate instead of competition. As our spiritual mind begins to run, those things out will begin to

pursue the fruit of the spirit. Because of what we're building with on this foundation. So returning to that metaphor of the builder, we see another beneficial behavior of a spiritual mind. We will build with spiritual resources which are of eternal value.

Back to verse ten, according to the grace of God given to me like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation. Someone else that is you. Corinthians is building upon it. So let each one take care how he builds, for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, each one's work will become manifest for the day, will disclose it.

But you know, the great thing about that is we don't have to wait till the day whenever we build with gold, silver and precious stones, because these things metaphorically, they're they're the fruit of the spirit, those things which God has called us to pursue, which the spirit produces in believers who have this mind of Christ and those things are evident.

They are manifest. I love what Paul says in Galatians five, the fruit of the spirit. No one wants to put a law on that. We don't want to restrain it. We want it to expand. The one foundation is Christ. And these precious resources gold, silver, precious stones are those spiritual truths that are consistent with the gospel true sound teaching, but also the way we treat one another, the way we love one another.

Gospel behavior is what it is. The way we treat one another demonstrates what we believe not only about each other, but also about Jesus and also about his kingdom. Now, ultimately, Paul will address this when he gets to chapter 13. But I want to look at chapter 13 because this is the gold, the silver, the precious stones. Look at first Corinthians 13.

If I speak of the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind. That's not worldly. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable, resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Everything is not just an ideal. Or is it the real fruit of the spirit that God begins to demonstrate in his people? Right here on earth, in his church? It must be around us. Paul would not have said what he did at the end of chapter 12. I will show you are still more excellent way. This is the way. This is not worldly wisdom, it's the wisdom of God. It is the gold, silver and precious stones that you build on that foundation. Now, what is the most important thing for Paul? Ultimately, and that is that the Corinthians stop behaving in a worldly manner and recognize the wonder of what God is growing and building among them. Remember how he started off the book? Not many of you were wise by worldly standards. Ironically, now you're appealing to them. Not many of you were powerful, influential. God chooses the weak things of the world, right? Those things which are not in the world's eyes. We've seen the power of God in saving us from our sin, bringing sinners together to build something that bears his name. We're part of something huge. So it's no surprise, I think as Paul lays this foundation, he wants them to recognize that God is himself building through them somewhere for him to live.

I love what he does is he points their attention to verse 21 here as he brings this to a conclusion. So let no one boast in men. Some translations say this. So enough boasting and men be done with boasting in men. We're done with that. We're done with the world, for 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 Christ, and Christ is God. He's saying that your view is too small when you argue amongst yourselves and jockeying for positions so that you might have a place of influence, your vision is so small you're looking at your little place, lift your eyes and look. You've got so much more. The world, the future, the kingdom belongs to you.

Not because of anything we've done, but because of that grace of God by which he has determined that he is going to advance his kingdom through sinners on this earth. I love a pastor reader used to always say, the church is God's plan for advancing the kingdom, and there is no plan B. That's it. It's all about the proper spiritual perspective.

It's bigger than we are would ever believe. But it is. And we should believe all the blessing, all the grace, the full inheritance. God himself, the kingdom advancing. We must build on that foundation with those things. The proper mindset brings the proper perspective. Large, not small, kingdom advancing, not agenda, protecting. It's a whole lot bigger than any one of us, and even us together.

I'd like to close with an illustration that I think sums this up. We've all heard it before. I don't know how many times I've heard this, but every time I hear it, I stop and I think, and I think what a beautiful picture so powerfully captures this important truth of perspective that we are engaged in something beyond us, and the way we think about it is critical.

Hundreds of years ago, a man was visiting a new city in Europe and he came upon a construction site, looked like a construction site. There were stones and timber and workers all around, but it just was a big mess. So he walked around, found someone, a worker who was laying stones, and he asked him what he was doing. The man looked at him with a dull, tired stare. Er. He said, I'm making a wall. And then he went back to his monotonous work, went a little bit further down, saw another man sitting at a bench next to a pile of stones, dutifully chipping and shaping these stones into square and rectangle shapes, and the pieces of rock were flying all over. He asked him, what are you doing? He said, I'm making bricks. And then he returned to his work. So he surveyed the work site a little bit longer, looked around, and then decided to leave when he almost literally ran into a man grunting behind a wheelbarrow filled with stones that he was bringing to the brick cutter, and he was startled and he dropped the wheelbarrow, took out a rag and wiped his face and apologized. And he said, well, what are you doing? He said, I'm building a cathedral. He picked up his wheelbarrow and went on his way.

That's the perspective we need. Jesus Christ is building his church, a temple in which the father, the son, and the spirit live. That's us. That's Briarwood. And by his grace, though it may seem foolish to the world, he has determined that he is going to do that building through saving, gifting, and equipping sinners as the builders. Ephesians 4:11 - 16 and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes, worldly, unspiritual thinking, rather speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with

which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Let us only boast in Jesus and let us build on that foundation with these gold, silver and precious stones. The gospel of grace, the more excellent way of loving one another, forgiving one another as Christ forgave us. Living lives of humble repentance, having our minds renewed each day by God's Word because the greater work we do together, and building this temple in turn advances the kingdom.

And that's a big deal.

Let's pray.

Oh Lord God, thank you for what you're doing among us. I am so encouraged by your Spirit's work among us and the godly men and women that you have pulled together here who are building on the foundation. The only foundation that is Jesus Christ. And I thank you, father, that you love your church more than we love your church. And you are faithful, and you will do it. So, renew us, revitalize us, encourage us, and make us pursue those things which make this building beautiful. By your grace we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.