

# The Way of the Temple

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[ 0 : 00 ] So as we start, I'll begin with a question. The question is, who are you? Who are you? Because we're all many things to many people, aren't we? We're parents, we're grandparents, we're children, we're siblings, we're uncles, we're aunties, we're friends and neighbours, we're colleagues and co-workers, we're bosses and underlings, we're doctors, teachers, architects, engineers, nannies, students, church workers, and so many more things besides.

Who are you? Your identity has implications. Being a doctor, for example, brings with it the responsibility to care for the sick. Being a parent brings with it the responsibility to care for a child and raise a child.

Being a Christian brings with it a responsibility to follow the Jesus way. Paul, he came to Corinth preaching Christ crucified and knowing nothing but, Christ crucified.

That is, he came in the same weakness that characterised the crucified Christ. And for the Corinthians, nothing could be weaker than a man on a cross.

The Corinthians believed that Jesus' death on the cross had taken the punishment that their sins deserved, had brought them back into relationship with God and had given them new life in Christ.

[ 1 : 24 ] But where they went wrong was the way in which they expected this new life to look rather like the old one. Their values were still their values. Their values were still their culture.

Their values were still their culture's values. The people they listened to were the impressive-looking people who mirrored their culture. They didn't think that belief in a crucified Messiah meant following the same pattern as the crucified Messiah.

They didn't think that belief in the same thing. They didn't think that belief in their life was really good. It's a weakness and foolishness in the eyes of their friends, families, city, and culture. Identity, it has implications.

To be a Christian has implications. if you are a christian what does that mean for your identity and for your life if you're not a christian what is it about being a christian that is so remarkably different who are you here in chapter three of first corinthians paul uses several different metaphors to describe the corinthians we've got one negative which we really want to avoid and four positive which we want to understand and apply now those are five points we're pushing the boat out with five today and they are you are infants you are god's field you are god's building you are god's temple and you are of christ and they're up there on the screen and really all four of the positive metaphors are developing the idea that the church is god's temple and that's a radical idea with profound implications which we're going to work through as we work through this chapter but let's start with the negative you are infants if there's good news and bad news i tend to want to hear the bad news first and paul is similarly giving the corinthians the negatives before he gives them the positives you are infants he's just told them that they have the mind of christ and after that theological high well he brings them right down again chapter three verse one brothers and sisters i could not address you as people who live by the spirit but as people who are still worldly mere infants in christ it's a pretty galling experience to be told you're acting like a child isn't it it brings us up short makes us feel ashamed embarrassed small and paul isn't paul's not saying this out of cruelty the corinthians they mistakenly thought that they were really mature so they needed some heavy correction and a shock to the system before things got any worse because they were anything but mature and paul develops this image of them as infants as babies he says i gave you milk not solid food for you were not yet ready for it indeed you are still not ready you are still worldly that word worldly signified that the corinthians like the culture around them were only invested in themselves they were overly influenced by the world's values sometimes translated more literally as people of the flesh their eyes were turned inwards and they thought they were so grown up but in actuality they were basically still in need of potty training what was the evidence for such

worldliness paul tells them 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 apollo are you not mere human beings now context that in chapter two paul had made a clear distinction between christians on the one hand who have the mind of christ and the rest of humanity on the other who are unable to see the world as it really is but despite this the corinthians are not behaving like those in christ they're behaving like mere humans even though they should know so much better they want to apply the world's standards of wisdom to the church when they divide over church leaders like paul and apollo they are basically following the patterns of the world factionalism division elevating other humans to celebrity status and idolizing them and that's not the jesus way that's infantile christianity according to paul when the the life and outlook of you as a christian is basically no different from everyone else in your your street your office or your zoom meeting

then you may be in danger of infantile christianity for infantile christianity is worldly christianity growing up as we all know can be a painful process at times when we grow up we change and life more often than not becomes more difficult nevertheless we recognize that to grow up is essential we know that it isn't right to remain a child forever nor is it possible just so with the jesus way and the christian life and whatever stage of growth we are at and within this room and tuning on the live stream there are going to be a variety of stages of growth as we grow it's essential to reflect on how we grow we grow by understanding our identity in christ better only then can we escape spiritual infancy and that's why the following four points are all positive descriptions of christian identity to help the corinthians and they're all related to the central idea which is being god's temple so let's go into our second point and our second point is this you are god's field paul picks up on this problem of division and factionalism in corinth and he uses the image of a field or a garden to show that the corinthian attitude is wrong what after all says paul is apollo and what is paul only servants through whom you came to believe as the lord assigned to each his task don't don't put me up on a pedestal guys says paul and don't put apollo or anyone else up there either we're just servants doing the job god has given us verse six i planted the seed apollo watered it but god god has been making it grow paul and paul they've got the same goal in mind paul plants paul's waters but god is the one who actually makes things happen paul writes so neither the one who plants or 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 when paul apollo and others are tending to the field that is the church they're not working against one another for the corinthians to divide into factions over them is really to tear apart what is already whole and it's also to forget that god is the one who is actually causing the growth for we are fellow workers in god's service says paul god is the master paul and apollo are only workers in his field and you writes paul you are god's field god's building when it comes to church growth charismatic speakers strong leaders and clever administrators ultimately don't count for anything to have such gifts amongst church leadership is indeed a blessing but it's god who makes things grow just as adam and eve were called to cultivate and work the garden of eden the very first temple in the bible story so paul apollo and all christian pastors and elders who have come after them were to tend god's field the church and in both it is god who gave and gives the growth it's true workers are essential jesus himself said the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few ask the lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his harvest field but they are never the ones making the fruit come forth that role belongs to the creator and he has the power to produce a crop some 30 some 60 some 100 times what was sown to borrow imagery that

[10:10] jesus himself used in his parable of the sower and so if god gives the growth well the corinthians have no reason to be divided over personalities if they are god's field they have no reason to divide over those who are working intending to it and so understanding the christians identity as part of god's field is a call to unified growth there's no room for division in this field and helps us understand the role of teachers and elders in the church they are there to work on behalf of god to plant churches and to water them trusting god to be the one to give the growth the christians are not just god's field they're also god's building that's paul's next metaphor and the foundation of god's building the church is christ listen to paul in 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 jesus jesus is the bedrock of the church there cannot be any other foundation and that is the foundation that paul laid in corinth and that is the foundation of every true church of god but did you

notice in paul's words that even after the laying of the foundation care has to be taken 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 jesus christ the building work amongst god's people needs to be in keeping with the foundation already laid yeah i don't know a whole lot about architecture but i feel like that's probably common sense the foundation of christ is solid there could be no other but the building works that go on top of that foundation they have to be solid too which is why paul goes on to say 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 it will be revealed with fire and the fire will test the quality of each person's work the day there is the day of christ the day when jesus returns to judge the earth and in the old and new testament this day is often described using the imagery of fire listen to the prophet malachi whose imagery paul's riffing on if you like malachi says then suddenly the lord who you are seeking will come to his temple the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come says the lord almighty but who can ensure the day of his coming who can stand when he appears and here's where paul really borrows the imagery for he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver he will purify the levites those are the temple workers and he will refine them like gold and silver in short when jesus comes his coming will be like a fire that shows up the building work for what it really is those who have built well and with solid and imperishable imperishable materials their work will survive those who have cut corners and built with shoddy materials well their work's not going to suppose really focusing here on the ones who are doing the building work those who are the teachers pastors and elders in the church is their work going to survive christ's purifying fire in the summer of 2018 i was in belfast when the bank buildings went up in flames and they were built in 1900 and had more recently become the home of primark it's rather odd watching the flames engulf what was a really familiar building that i've walked past countless times by the time the fire had actually been got under control there was no sign at all that it had ever been a primark the inside was completely burnt out and it was completely gutted but the outside still remained it was damaged for sure a shell of what it had been but you could still make out the sign that said bank buildings and you could still see the distinctive shape of the building that still remained intact although very much burnt the solid material is what survived and that's kind of like what it's going to be with the church if we are god's building it's going to be a wise idea says paul for us to be built up with solid materials that are going to last like gold silver precious stones and incidentally those were key materials in the construction of god's temple would hay straw however well they're not going to leave any trace of ever having been there once the fire rips through them if what is built survives writes paul 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 paul apollo whoever was teaching the corinthians now they are the builders whose work will be judged those who have built on the foundation of christ and those who build on the foundation of christ with teaching that truly reflects christ crucified the jesus way rather than the world's way well their work will remain their work will remain because it will show itself in mature christians who understand what jesus did to save them and how they should live as those whom jesus has saved but those whose building work has been burned up so to speak well not they'll not be condemned after all they are still believers and they are still saved by grace in christ's death on their behalf but they will be saved only as if they've just escaped from the flames of the burning building saved by a whisker and so there's an important lesson here for those involved in leading and teaching in the church church leaders are to proclaim christ crucified and live in a way that reflects not the world and its strength but christ and his weakness in the past year you may or may not know there have been really quite a lot of uncomfortable stories coming to light of respected ministers and christian speakers who have abused their authority and have thrown their weight about in ways that were manipulative cruel self-centered and abusive and that's what happens when christ crucified and his pattern of weakness is not shared by those who build up god's building until his field and it is destructive it's really destructive and we mustn't ever think that the free church or christ church glasgow will be automatically immune from those sorts of problems all pastors are human and so this is going to be an ever-present danger in every church of jesus we need pastors who share in the weakness of christ and so i hope that you the church will keep jonathan and myself and others who preach and teach accountable to christ in the way that we serve and do please pray on for us in that because modeling the world in the church rather than christ is so so dangerous and it's the

last thing that we ever want to do there's poor building which doesn't produce much growth but sometimes those who teach can be actively destructive and we want to avoid that that's why paul says in verse 17 if anyone destroys god's temple god will destroy that person for god's temple is sacred and you together are that temple it reminds me of jesus words to his disciples which were equally strong if anyone causes one of these little ones those who believe in me to stumble it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea those are strikingly harsh words and it's because god loves his church jesus bled and died for his church he is the bridegroom and the church is his bride so he will act with deadly severity when he comes with regards to anyone who has wrought destruction and havoc upon his church he loves his people he loves them and that's why he will not suffer anyone who causes them to stumble and sin and so here we see that being identified as god's building showcases the importance of faithful teaching that proclaims christ crucified we have the world at our fingertips don't we we can and do listen to so many voices and paul's not just writing to church leaders he's writing to church members isn't he and so implicit in what he says is a warning be wise about who you listen to and who you allow to shape your worldview let your worldview be shaped by those who proclaim christ crucified be deliberate about spending time in god's word be deliberate about spending time with god's people and listening to faithful teaching make every effort to listen to those who are going to be building with gold silver and precious stones those who want to build god's temple according to the message and the way of jesus and this brings us to our fourth metaphor you are god's temple let me read verse 16 and 17 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 god's temple basically all the images that we've seen so far have been building towards this image because to be god's people is to walk the way of the temple it is to be the temple consider paul's choice of agricultural imagery followed followed by architectural imagery i suspect this is theologically motivated as much as it is rhetorically motivated in verse 9 he juxtaposes them very closely you are god's field god's building consider this interesting feature about god's temple in jerusalem and the tabernacle that preceded it this was the the place where god dwelt amongst his people his holy presence was was there and it was hidden behind a curtain in what was called the most holy place and in both the temple and the tabernacle there was a rich array of agricultural designs there were pomegranates palm trees lilies and other flowers there were lions and bulls and cherubim even the lampstand was designed to look like a flower this is there's an architectural element as well as um sorry there's an agricultural element as well as an architectural element to the temple that stretches from eden all the way into the temple today god's church and so i suspect that over the course of this chapter paul's been developing

this temple idea from the agricultural to the architectural and then to the point where he can say that you are god's temple but why is this important what's important because as paul says god's spirit lives among you we say this often as christians and as a church but take a moment to consider just how amazing this is here in the past god lived among his people in a tent and then in a temple made of stone but in that there were physical and spiritual barriers to coming close to god but when jesus died on the cross those barriers were lifted the temple curtain literally tore in two as jesus died access to god could no longer be denied jesus himself he said he was that temple he was god incarnate dwelling with man and then when he ascended into heaven he sent his spirit down upon all who believe so that we could be united to him and become part of god's temple the same spirit that dwells in the temple in jerusalem the same spirit that dwelt in jesus now dwells in all who believe in jesus god himself dwells with his people who are you well if you're a christian this is who you are you are god's temple who are you if you're a christian god has chosen to give you his spirit who are you if you're a christian you are a member of the church that can sound kind of boring candid church membership it sometimes sounds so parochial and twee even to those of us who are part of the church but i hope you can see just how revelatory and powerful paul's words here are if you're a member of christ's church the very god who existed in eternity before time and creation had even begun the very god who is all-knowing and all-powerful the very god who is holy and perfect this god the one and only god his spirit lives among you this is our identity as god's people we are the temple of the living god this is why it's so important this is why paul is so concerned that christians are being built up and growing the temple christ's church is a building that keeps growing numerical growth yes but also the growth that comes when believers mature and stop being infants our last point is this you are of christ because to be the temple is to be of christ and vice versa there

are two ways of saying the same thing in these last verses of the chapter paul's basically applying all of what he said and it comes down to this because of who you are christ temple focus on christ and not on the world don't deceive yourselves says paul if any of you think you're a wise by the standards of this age you should become fools so that you may become wise for the wisdom of the world is foolishness in god's sight as is written he catches the wise in their craftiness and again the lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile in each successive installment of first corinthians so far paul's come back to this idea hasn't he christians have to be fools in the eyes of the world it may seem like he is repeating this point ad nauseum but clearly he thinks it's important because we like the world don't we we live in it after all but says paul don't deceive yourselves if you are living and thinking in the same way the world does you are not wise in god's eyes and that means taking our moral cue from what the world rather than christ is completely wrong it means we need to put christ and his church before the things of this world career pleasure even family should events call for it and now that's that's going to look like absolute foolishness in the eyes of the world but it will build up the church so then no more boasting about human leaders says paul because that doesn't build up the church that rips it apart and tears it down and that corinthian problem it's illustrative for us showing how a worldly attitude can cause so much damage to christ's church it could be abusive leadership it could be a culture of gossip it could be superficiality in our teaching it could be false teaching it could be divisions it could be a focus on peripheral things rather than on christ and him crucified it could be bitterness and unforgiving hearts it could be sustained biblical illiteracy it could be materialism it could be laziness when it comes to weekly church meetings it could be prayerlessness all these things and more are examples of the world shaping us and they all damage the church the solution for them all is christ for you are of christ we are his temple all things are yours says paul whether paul or apollo 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 in other words don't let the forces of the world box you in and trap you in the destructive obsessions of the world don't let the the culture of individualism overtake you to the point where like the corinthians you obsess over christian leaders and other things rather than christ don't let the world and its problems dictate your faith don't let life and death which cause so much pain suffering and grief lead you from jesus don't let the present and its problems or the future with all of its hopes and fears of what may be don't let them drag you down to the level of the world all these things are yours which means that all these things are not the governing forces in your life anymore you are not merely human but you are of christ and christ is of god and this is who you are this is your identity and this is the way of the temple the way of the temple is knowing that you are of christ and the spirit of god lives among you and so as we close there's been a lot of talk from the government and from you in london about building back better whether you love boris or you loathe him i want us to question how much the government humanity can really deliver on this promise and even if they can there's always those who fall through the cracks isn't there and all human projects they're bound by time nothing lasts forever except that is god and his temple us the church we are privileged to be part of god's building project in his church god is building a people who will inherit eternity [ 30 : 29 ] so let's not build things here on earth where things rust and age and decay let us instead focus on building god's temple and embrace our identity as christ's because you are of christ and christ is of god this is who you are