

Time Audit Chronicles: The Church as God's Building

(1 Corinthians 3:1-23)

Prologue: Building on the Right Foundation

The Presswood family sat together in the cozy living room, surrounded by soft lamplight. The warm glow of the fireplace flickered gently, and the scent of Blair's lavender candles filled the air. They were reading 1 Corinthians 3:1-23, where Paul explains how the church is like a building, with Jesus Christ as the foundation. Ariel had been reflecting on how the early church had struggled with divisions over leadership, and how Paul's words pointed them back to Christ. Alice, hugging Mr. Fluffernutter, was imagining herself watching the building of a giant temple, brick by brick.

"Daddy," Ariel asked, "Why were the Corinthians so divided? Weren't they all supposed to follow Jesus?"

Ryan nodded, smiling at her insightful question. "That's a great question, Ariel. The Corinthians were divided because they were putting too much focus on their human leaders—some were saying they followed Paul, others were saying they followed Apollos, and still others were saying they followed Peter. Instead of being united in Christ, they were arguing over which leader was better. Paul wanted to remind them that all leaders are just servants—the real focus should be on Jesus, who is the foundation of the church."

Ariel thought for a moment. "So, Paul was trying to tell them that the church isn't about the leaders—it's about Jesus, and that's what keeps them united?"

"That's exactly right," Ryan said. "Paul used the example of a building to help them understand. The church is like a building, and Jesus is the foundation. The leaders are just workers, helping to build on that foundation. Let's use the Time Audit Machine to go back and see how Paul explained this to the Corinthians."

The Journey Begins: Divisions in the Church (1 Corinthians 3:1-9)

The Time Audit Machine powered up, and the family found themselves in ancient Corinth, standing among the early church. The streets were bustling, filled with the noise of merchants shouting, the clatter of donkey hooves on cobblestones, and the scent of freshly baked bread and spices. The crowded marketplace was alive with energy, and the family could hear the chatter of people debating passionately. The believers were arguing passionately over who their true leader was—Paul, Apollos, or Peter. The divisions were creating tension and undermining the church's unity. Voices were raised, and the atmosphere felt heavy with frustration and pride.

Ryan pointed to the scene. "Look at how divided they are. Instead of focusing on Jesus, they're arguing about which human leader is the most important." He sighed, glancing at Ariel and Alice. "It's sad, isn't it? They've lost sight of what really matters—Jesus is supposed to be the foundation, but they're too caught up in pride over human leaders."

Ariel frowned, watching the arguments. "But aren't they all supposed to be following Jesus? Why are they so focused on the leaders?" She shook her head, feeling a sense of confusion and sadness. "It just seems like they're missing the point."

Ryan explained, “The Corinthians were acting like spiritual infants, as Paul says in verse 1. They were still focused on worldly things, like pride and competition, instead of growing in their faith. It’s easy to get caught up in following people who seem impressive, but when we do that, we lose sight of what God is doing through all of us, together. Paul wanted them to understand that the leaders were just servants doing God’s work. The real focus should be on God, who gives the growth.”

Paul’s words echoed across the scene as he said, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

Ryan turned to Ariel and Alice, his voice gentle. “It’s like what we’ve seen in our own church, remember? When people started focusing more on the pastor’s personality than on Jesus’ message, it caused arguments and division. Pride in human leaders can distract us from God’s work, and that’s exactly what was happening here in Corinth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

Ariel nodded thoughtfully. “So, Paul is saying that leaders like him and Apollos are just workers—they can plant seeds and water them, but only God can make things grow.” She paused, thinking back to the arguments they had witnessed. “It’s kind of scary how easily people can lose sight of Jesus when they start focusing too much on the people leading them.”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “Paul is reminding them that their faith and the growth of the church come from God, not from human leaders. Leaders are important, but they’re just tools in God’s hands.”

The Church as God’s Building (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

Paul then shifted the metaphor, comparing the church to a building. He described himself as a wise builder who had laid the foundation, which is Jesus Christ. Other leaders were building on that foundation, but Paul warned that they needed to build carefully.

Ryan pointed to the construction site that had appeared before them in the vision. They saw workers lifting heavy stones, their faces etched with determination, placing beams with careful precision, and adding intricate decorative elements to a grand temple. The clanking of tools and the grunts of effort filled the air, as each worker contributed with focus and purpose. “Look at the building being constructed. The foundation is already laid—it’s Jesus Christ. Now, each leader is adding to the building with different materials. But Paul warns that their work will be tested by fire to see if it’s solid.”

Ariel watched the workers, her eyes wide as she took in the effort it took to construct each part. “It’s like they have to be really careful with what they use and how they build. If they use weak materials, it won’t hold up.”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “Just like this building, the church needs to be built with care and strong materials. Paul is talking about using things like truth, love, and faithfulness—qualities that will stand the test. The building represents our spiritual work, and if we use the right materials, it will endure.”

Alice, looking up at the grand temple, hugged Mr. Fluffernutter. “I think I get it now. If we’re building with love and truth, it’s like using the best materials, right?”

“That’s right, Alice,” Blair said. “Seeing this building under construction helps us understand how important it is to build carefully and with lasting qualities. When we build our lives and our church with things that honor God, it becomes something beautiful and strong, just like this temple.”

Ariel nodded, understanding more deeply. “So, Paul’s metaphor is like this building—it takes time, effort, and the right materials to make sure it lasts. And Jesus has to be the foundation, or it’ll all fall apart.”

Paul’s voice echoed through the scene: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire.” (1 Corinthians 3:11-13).

Suddenly, the Time Audit Machine transported the family to a new vision—one where they saw a completed building being tested by fire. Ariel and Alice watched with a mix of awe and anxiety as the flames roared through the structure. Ariel’s heart pounded as she saw the wood, hay, and stubble quickly consumed, leaving nothing but ashes, while the gold, silver, and precious stones remained, gleaming brightly. Ariel and Alice watched in awe as the fire swept through the structure. The wood, hay, and stubble were quickly consumed, leaving nothing but ashes, while the gold, silver, and precious stones remained, gleaming brightly. The sight was powerful, showing the difference between what lasted and what was destroyed.

Ariel turned to Ryan, her eyes wide. “So, the fire shows what’s really valuable? Only the things that can withstand the heat are worth building with?” She thought about how it must feel to see one’s work tested like that, and she realized how important it was to build with the right intentions.

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “The fire represents the testing of our work—whether it’s built with things like truth, love, and faithfulness, or with selfishness and pride. What endures is what’s done for God, with the right heart.”

Alice, still holding Mr. Fluffernutter, looked thoughtful. “So, if we build our lives with things like love and truth, they won’t burn up?”

“That’s right, Alice,” Blair added. “When we choose to build with qualities that honor God, like love, truth, and faithfulness, those things will last. They’re like the gold, silver, and precious stones. But if we build with things that don’t honor God, like selfishness or dishonesty, they won’t stand the test.”

Ariel nodded, understanding. “I think I get it now. It’s not just about doing things—it’s about doing them with the right heart, for God. That’s what makes them last.”

Ariel watched as the fire tested the materials, burning away the wood, hay, and stubble but leaving the gold, silver, and precious stones intact. “So, Paul is saying that leaders need to build with quality materials, things that will last?”

“Yes,” Ryan said. “The materials represent the teachings and efforts leaders put into building the church. If they build with truth, love, and faithfulness, their work will endure. But if they build with things like selfish ambition or false teaching, it won’t last when it’s tested.”

Ariel nodded, understanding. “And the foundation has to be Jesus, or the whole building will collapse.”

Alice, her imagination already running wild, grabbed Mr. Fluffernutter and declared, “Mr. Fluffernutter is the architect, and we’re going to build the most amazing temple! We’ll use gold, silver, and precious stones!” She jumped up, her eyes sparkling with excitement, and began giving enthusiastic instructions to her imaginary workers, her hands waving animatedly. She began pretending to oversee the construction, giving instructions to her imaginary workers.

Ryan chuckled, watching Alice's enthusiasm. “You know, Alice, those materials—gold, silver, and precious stones—represent things that last, like truth, love, and faithfulness. Just like in Paul’s message, they symbolize the quality of what we build in our spiritual lives.”

Blair smiled, adding, “When we build our lives on Jesus and use qualities like love, truth, and faithfulness, it’s like using gold and silver. They’re strong, and they’ll endure any test.”

Ariel looked at her sister, who was busy arranging invisible stones. “So, if we build with things like selfishness or pride, it’s like using wood or hay, and those things won’t last when they’re tested?”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “That’s why it’s so important to think about the quality of what we contribute to God’s work. It’s not just about doing things—it’s about doing them with the right heart. When we build with love, patience, and faithfulness, we’re creating something that honors God and will stand the test of time.”

Alice, still in her playful architect mode, looked up. “Then I’m going to make sure our temple is full of love and truth! Right, Mr. Fluffernutter?”

Ariel smiled at her sister’s determination. “I think we can all learn from Mr. Fluffernutter’s plans. It’s not about how big or fancy our ‘temple’ looks—it’s about what it’s made of. We need to make sure we’re building with the best materials, just like Paul said.”

Ryan nodded, his eyes filled with pride. “That’s right, Ariel. And when we build with the right materials—truth, love, and faithfulness—we’re honoring God and making sure our lives reflect His glory. For example, when you show kindness to someone who feels left out, you’re building with love. Or when you stand up for what’s right, even when it’s hard, that’s building with truth.”

The family reflected on the leaders they admired in their church. Ariel looked thoughtful and asked, “How can we honor our leaders without placing them above Jesus?” She remembered a time when she felt confused because people seemed to admire their pastor more than the message he was preaching. This question felt personal—she wanted to understand how to keep Jesus at the center.

Ryan smiled, recognizing the depth of her question. “That’s a really important question, Ariel. The key is understanding what true leadership looks like. In the Bible, Jesus shows us that real leaders are servants. They don’t seek praise or put themselves above others; instead, they lead by example, in humility and love. This is called servant leadership.”

Ariel nodded slowly. “So, it’s not about how popular or impressive a leader is—it’s about how they serve others and point back to Jesus?”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “A true leader always points people back to Jesus, not to themselves. They serve because they love God and want to help others grow closer to Him. It’s important to honor our leaders

by respecting them and appreciating their work, but we should never forget that they're just tools in God's hands. Jesus is the foundation, and everything we do should ultimately be about Him."

Blair added, "This also means that you, Ariel, have the potential to be a leader in the church too. It's not about being the most noticeable or having the most authority. It's about serving others with love and humility, just like Jesus did."

Ariel smiled, feeling a sense of purpose. "I guess I can start by helping others in small ways and always remembering that it's about Jesus, not about me."

Ryan nodded, his expression warm. "That's exactly it, Ariel. True leadership is about serving, loving, and pointing others to Christ. When we keep that in mind, we're building something that will truly last." He paused, glancing at the scene of the arguing Corinthians. "And if we forget that foundation, if we let pride in people take over, everything we build will fall apart. That's why it's so important to stay focused on Jesus—He's the only foundation that can hold us together."

Ryan smiled and added, "Think of it like a skyscraper, Ariel. A skyscraper needs a strong, solid foundation to stand tall and withstand storms or even earthquakes. Without that foundation, the whole building would crumble at the first sign of trouble. Jesus is like that foundation for us—He's the one who keeps us steady, no matter what challenges come our way."

Ariel's eyes lit up with realization. "So, just like a skyscraper needs a strong foundation to stay standing, we need Jesus as our foundation to help us stay strong in our faith?"

"Exactly," Ryan said. "When Jesus is our foundation, we can handle the storms of life. We're able to grow, to stand firm, and to be part of something much bigger—the church that He's building."

"Exactly," Ryan said. "Jesus is the only foundation that can support the church. Without Him, nothing else matters."

Believers as God's Temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Paul then made a profound statement: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

Ryan turned to Ariel and Alice. "Paul is saying that the church isn't just like a building—it's also a temple, where God's Spirit lives. That means the church isn't about a physical place—it's about the people, the believers, who are filled with the Holy Spirit."

Back home, the family gathered in the living room to discuss what they had seen. Ryan explained further, "Paul talks about each of us being like living stones in God's temple. Every believer is a part of this temple, and each of us has a role."

The family then began brainstorming ways they could help foster unity in their church. Ariel suggested, "Maybe I could help out with Sunday school. I think teaching the younger kids and helping them learn about Jesus could be a good way to contribute."

Alice, her eyes lighting up, added, “What if we made a friendship mural at church? Everyone could put their handprint on it, and it would show how we’re all part of the same building—like all the living stones coming together!”

Blair smiled warmly at Alice’s idea. “I love that, Alice. A friendship mural would be a wonderful way to show how each person is important and that we’re all united in Christ.”

Ryan nodded, impressed with their ideas. “These are both great suggestions. Helping with Sunday school, Ariel, is an excellent way to build up the next generation, and Alice, your mural idea is a beautiful way to symbolize our unity. When we each contribute in our own way, we’re building on Christ’s foundation together.”

Ariel reflected on this, feeling a sense of purpose. “It’s amazing how even small actions, like helping with a class or painting a mural, can be like adding bricks to the church. It all adds up to something bigger.”

Later that night, Ariel sat down with her journal to reflect on what she had learned about the church being God’s building and His temple. She wrote:

“Today, I learned that being part of God’s church means I’m like a living stone in His temple. It’s not just about the leaders or the big things people do—it’s about each of us contributing in our own way. I’ve realized that I need to think more carefully about the ‘materials’ I’m using to build. Am I building with love, truth, and service, or am I sometimes building with things like pride or selfishness?

I want to be more intentional about the choices I make. I want to help with Sunday school, not just because it’s a good thing to do, but because I want to show love to the kids and help them grow closer to Jesus. I also want to be kinder to Alice, even when I’m tired, because that’s a way of building with love. And I think I’m going to suggest the friendship mural to our church leaders—it could be a great way to bring everyone together and show that we’re all important parts of God’s building.

It’s not always easy, though. Sometimes I feel tired or frustrated, and it’s hard to choose love or patience. But I want to keep trying. I feel like I understand more now about what it means to be part of something bigger than myself. I want to make sure that everything I do points back to Jesus, because He’s the foundation. Without Him, nothing else matters.”

Alice beamed, hugging Mr. Fluffernutter. “We’re all important bricks, even if we’re tiny! And when we work together, we make the church stronger.”

Ryan smiled at both of his daughters. “That’s exactly right. When we focus on building with love, truth, and unity, we’re making sure that what we build will last and honor God.”

Ariel thought for a moment and then said, “If we’re like living stones, that means I have an important role in my church community too. It’s not just about the leaders or the adults—everyone matters.”

Alice, holding Mr. Fluffernutter tightly, chimed in with a smile, “I’m a tiny but important brick, right? Even if I’m small, I still help hold everything together!”

Blair nodded, smiling at Alice. “That’s right, sweetheart. Just like every stone is necessary to make the temple complete, every one of us has something special to contribute. No matter how small it may seem, it’s important to God.”

Ryan added, “Exactly. The church is built up by the contributions of each believer—whether it’s through love, serving others, sharing truth, or simply being there for one another. It’s the quality of what we contribute that matters, not how big or flashy it is.”

Ariel looked at Alice and smiled. “I guess that means even when I’m helping out in small ways, like cleaning up or being kind, I’m still building up the church.”

“Absolutely,” Blair said. “We’re all living stones, and when we work together, we’re building something beautiful for God.”

Alice beamed, looking at Mr. Fluffernutter. “We’re going to make the best temple ever, aren’t we, Mr. Fluffernutter?”

The family laughed, and Ariel hugged her sister. “I think we’re all building something amazing, one brick at a time.”

Ariel’s eyes lit up. “So, we’re like living stones in God’s temple, and we need to take care of the church by being holy and united?”

“That’s right,” Ryan said. “Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that they weren’t just a group of individuals—they were part of something much bigger. They were God’s temple, and they needed to treat that temple with respect and honor.”

Warning Against Pride in Human Leaders (1 Corinthians 3:18-23)

Paul ended the chapter with a warning: “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” (1 Corinthians 3:18-19).

Ariel, her brow furrowed, asked, “Why does Paul say that the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God?”

Ryan smiled. “That’s a great question, Ariel. Sometimes human wisdom can be limited because we only see a small part of the picture, while God sees everything. Remember when you tried to fix your toy without looking at the instructions, and it didn’t work out until you got the full picture? It’s like that. Think about early science—like how people once thought that the Earth was the center of the universe, and everything revolved around it. That was the best understanding they had at the time, but it turned out to be wrong. God’s wisdom is often different from what we might think or understand, and sometimes, what seems foolish to us is actually part of God’s greater plan.” }] } Think about early science—like how people once thought that the Earth was the center of the universe, and everything revolved around it. That was the best understanding they had at the time, but it turned out to be wrong. God’s wisdom is often different from what we might think or understand, and sometimes, what seems foolish to us is actually part of God’s greater plan.”

Ariel nodded slowly, her eyes thoughtful. “So, just like people were wrong about the solar system, sometimes we think we’re wise, but we’re missing the bigger picture that only God knows?”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “That’s why Paul says we need to trust in God’s wisdom rather than our own. God’s understanding goes beyond what we can see or figure out. Trusting Him means believing that He knows best, even when it doesn’t make sense to us.”

Ariel smiled, the idea clicking into place. “I think I get it now. It makes me want to trust God more, even when I don’t fully understand.”

Ryan explained, “Paul was addressing the pride that had caused the divisions in the church. Some of the Corinthians thought they were wise because they followed a certain leader, but Paul reminded them that worldly wisdom is foolishness to God. The church belongs to God, not to any human leader.”

Ariel smiled, understanding. “So, Paul was saying that the church is about God’s wisdom, not human wisdom, and we shouldn’t put leaders on a pedestal.”

“Exactly,” Ryan said. “Paul wanted the Corinthians to focus on Christ, who is the true foundation of the church. Leaders are important, but they’re just servants. The church belongs to God, and everything we do should point back to Him.”

Takeaway: Building on the Foundation of Christ

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-23, Paul uses the metaphors of a field, a building, and a temple to teach the Corinthians about the church. He reminds them that Jesus Christ is the foundation, and leaders are merely servants working to build on that foundation. The church’s unity and spiritual growth depend on focusing on Christ, not on human leaders. Paul also warns that the work of leaders will be tested, and only what is built with truth and love will endure.

This passage teaches us that as believers, we are part of God’s building and God’s temple, and we must take care to build with materials that honor Him—truth, faithfulness, and love. It also reminds us to avoid pride in human leaders, recognizing that all glory belongs to God, who gives the growth. When our foundation is firmly in Christ, we can stand strong, united, and holy, as God’s Spirit works in and through us.