

Distracted from Jesus is Lord 2023  
 1 Cor. 1:10-13, 18, 25-31 Phi. 3:7-11, 14-16, 20

### 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, 18, 25-31 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

### Philippians 3:7-11, 14-16, 20 (New Revised Standard Version)

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

During high school, the church I attended organized a team  
 so that we could play in our local church softball league.  
 We got together a couple of times to practice  
 and then decided which positions we'd each play ...  
 ... and we were ready for the season.

We played hard, but didn't win any of our games that first year.  
 We had fun and didn't worry too much about finishing in last place.

The next summer we played in that same church league again,  
 and we actually managed to do a little better that season.

Well somehow, we tied with the Methodists once,  
 and when not enough Episcopalians showed up  
 they forfeited the game which was a win for us.

The next year,  
a former professional baseball player joined the church  
and he was willing to coach and play on our softball team.  
And as it turns out, **it made a huge difference,**  
**having a guy on our team who had played in the World Series.**

As our new coach, he taught us how to play our positions better,  
and went on to explain and constantly stress how each position  
contributed & was necessary to the team's winning strategy.

**He was also real big on how each team member was responsible  
to support and encourage all of the other players on the team.**

**The whole atmosphere and attitude of the team changed dramatically,**  
and we started winning games, almost all of them that summer.

Our team standing moved from last place to first place,  
and over the next couple of years we got used to winning.  
We became the team to beat in that church softball league.

But then he moved away to coach baseball at a large university,  
and we all expected that our team would be terrible again.  
But surprisingly, even without him, **we still won most of our games.**

**As it turns out, we didn't have to have a superstar playing to win.**  
**We just needed to play well together as a team,**  
**with each player doing their best in their position**  
**for together we were better than our individual talents.**

We learned that no one player could win the game on their own,  
but that we all had unique and needed skills and abilities,  
which together functioned remarkably well when we cooperated  
**... as a team bringing out the best in all the players...**

**... and I'm pretty sure**  
**that churches and church members are also something like that,**  
**-- or at least that's how God intends for us to be,**  
**bound together as one, because Jesus is our Lord.**

Paul wrote to the Christians living in Corinth,  
because of their serious problems of disunity and divisiveness,  
because of being distracted by things other than Jesus  
interfering with fulfilling their call to mission.

Paul's point was the same as our church softball team had learned,  
**that it's not about the gifts and abilities of any one individual,**  
**but each team member doing their best in their position,**  
**trying to grow and play better ball together as a team.**

Now a church is supposed to be the local gathering  
of those who have received God's grace through Jesus Christ,  
whose lives are being transformed by the Holy Spirit  
into a community that is sent back out into the world  
to live, to love, to share and proclaim the Good News.  
**But that was not happening among the Christians in Corinth.**

**Instead, there was disunity and jealousy between different groups,**  
with each assuming they were superior & more important than others,  
and so Paul wrote, urging them to get back on track, vs. 10-11

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.

my brothers and sisters, meaning that these are not non-Christians,  
but it's **a family feud**, and the whole letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians  
deals with a long list of troubling issues and problems  
that were dividing the people into separate factions.

Each saw their faction as spiritually superior to the rest,  
**ignoring the fact that they are sisters and brothers by faith,  
and all beloved, for whom our Lord Jesus was willing to die.**

For example, in the passage that Janet just read,  
some groups were focusing on the teacher who baptized them  
as somehow making them better than the others... vs. 12-13

What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas,"  
or "I belong to Christ." Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul is reminding them, neither Christ nor his church can be divided  
because all are equally precious to God through Jesus Christ,  
and that **if they realized the astonishing depth of God's love,  
that truth and blessing would guide, drive and inspire  
every thought, every aspect and detail of their lives.**

Jesus is Lord over all of them, and they must not allow or permit  
their stubborn preferences rip apart their Christian unity,  
or allow sinful and selfish divisiveness to distract them  
from the critical and uniting truth that Jesus is Lord.

One time Charles Spurgeon pointed out in one of his sermons,  
that if 100 pianos were all tuned to the same tuning-fork,  
then all the pianos would also be in tune with each other.

**So it is also for us as Church and congregation,  
if we all remain focused and in tune with our Lord Jesus Christ  
and are not distracted by things of this world our mortal life.**

Have you ever wondered, why our church choir can sound so good?  
Yes, they are talented and they practice faithfully,  
but that's not it -- that's not the main reason.

The choir sounds great because they listen to each other.  
**They carefully blend together with each one's unique voice,  
not trying to sing in unison or singing in competition,  
but linked and connected in delightful harmony.**

Their focus is not on any individual talent or performance,  
but on combining their voices to glorify and honor God.  
As I've heard several choir directors say,  
"if you can't hear other voices, then you are singing too loud."

**That's true among church members as well.  
Harmony requires that we listen to others,  
and adjust our heart, attitudes and behavior to blend,  
so that diversity does not distort into dissonance.**

If you read through the whole letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians,

the central issue and concern is that the church  
was struggling with competing factions and divisions...

... because some of the folks were thinking that they were better  
and more special than the others, then as Paul explains, vs. 27-29

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world  
to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing  
things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

**Paul is describing Christianity as a paradox of the unexpected.**

Consider the life, the ministry and teaching of Jesus,  
who went out of his way to seek the lost and outcasts,  
breaking with tradition to welcome & eat with sinners.

Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God where nobodies are somebodies,  
where the one who is great, is the one who serves other people,  
where to be first, then you must willingly be last and least,  
and to save your life, means willing to lose your life...

... **the very opposite of this world's sense of power and influence.**

Jesus is Lord, is about our God of grace, healing, change and hope,  
who has chosen and continues to choose each one of us-

-- not for who we are, or what we've accomplished or what we can offer,

**but entirely and totally --- it's all about God's grace and love,**

that even before we existed God chose to love & bless us, vs. 30-31

He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and  
righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the  
Lord."

That is the essence of the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ,  
which has the power to change, to heal and save human lives,  
regardless of our struggles or our situation in life ---

**--- and as we live into that faith-relationship through grace,**

we begin to see the world, ourselves, our lives and goals

through **a new perspective of God's mercy and blessings.**

Paul describes that new perspective in Philippians 3,

explaining that all of his past advantages and accomplishments

really don't matter, but counts to them as just loss and rubbish

compared to the grace we are given through Jesus Christ, vs. 7-8

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to **regard as loss** because of Christ. More than that, I  
regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have  
suffered the loss of all things, and I **regard them as rubbish**, in order that I may gain Christ.

These are the reflections & teachings of a life-weathered saint,  
someone who had drawn close to the Lord over the many years,  
by having endured struggles, adversity and tribulation,  
yet always knowing the steadfast faithfulness of God,  
a life lived that boldly proclaimed, Jesus is Lord.

For Paul, the very highest and most worthy goal in life,  
is to know and walk in faithful obedience with Jesus Christ,  
and to have a growing and deepening relationship with Christ.

**Paul knew that what makes us holy and acceptable to God ---**

it's not our human effort or our spiritual achievement

nor is it our good works or our goodness or religious ritual,  
but it is solely, entirely & purely by God's grace alone...  
... **and any other stuff –**  
**anything other than seeking to know, love & walk with God**  
**can be a distraction away from what truly satisfies.**

I believe we spend a lifetime finding out what it means  
that God actually does love us without limit or boundary.  
**We spend our lives exploring the many facets of God's gracious love,**  
**yet there's always more than we ever fully understand or explain.**

God intends for us to live free and joyfully fulfilled lives.  
Paul's driving ambition was an ever closer walk with Christ,  
and just to skip over anything that hinders and distracts  
from having a growing and true relationship with Jesus.

**Now this is so important and critical for us to hear, trust & absorb.**  
**It is not the mistakes we make that holds us back,**  
**It is not the success we achieve that raises us up,**  
but it's only the call of Jesus, the power of God's gracious love  
and trusting **Jesus is Lord** that ultimately and makes a difference.

So when I envision the final kingdom judgment in the end,  
and when I will stand fully exposed before my God,  
I do not expect that Jesus will ask me,

if I was a perfect pastor, an effective church administrator,  
if I lead a perfectly balanced and growing congregation  
that got every detail of our call to mission just right,  
or if I figured out every truth and mystery of the Bible.

**The two questions that I do expect Jesus will be asking me,**  
**will be more about grace, and my response to God's blessings,**  
1<sup>st</sup> Norm, in your life and ministry, did you honestly try  
to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind & soul?  
and 2<sup>nd</sup> did you love your neighbors, your sisters and brothers?

**Today, in the abundance of God's Spirit, healing purpose and mercy,**  
**may the Lord do something incredible within each one of us,**  
**that is amazing, wonderful, disturbing and life-changing!**

Or as the Apostle Paul wrote, (Rom 15:5-6, Phi 2:1-2)

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in  
accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may **with one voice** glorify the God and Father of our Lord  
Jesus Christ.

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any  
compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the **same mind**, having the **same love**, being in **full accord**  
and of **one mind**.