

The Love of Christ Urges Us On 2023
 1 Corinthians 3:1-10 2 Corinthians 5:14-19

1 Corinthians 3:1-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

2 Corinthians 5:14-19 (New Revised Standard Version)

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

The Apostle Paul had started the church in Corinth, but after he left
 issues arose that led to divisive and destructive conflict,
 which distracted them from the true mission of the Church.

As a group, the church in Corinth had been blessed abundantly
 with a vast array of spiritual gifts, resources and abilities,
 and as a faith community, they had it all going for them.

The problem was, those with the more visible and prominent gifts
 assumed and promoted the idea of **a hierarchy of spiritual gifts**,
 in which they saw themselves as superior to all the others.

Paul interprets conflicts over status as a spiritual issue, vs. 1~3

And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ... Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?

Since all of our gifts and talents are entirely unearned,
 and freely-given **expressions of God's gracious love for us**,

rival groups in Corinth were indicative of being spiritual toddlers.

As Paul goes on to explain it, by God's deliberate selection,
every-one of us has been given exactly the right spiritual gifts,
and they are all necessary in accord with God's will & purpose,
which connects all of us as **the blessed children of God,**
which also calls for mutual respect and appreciation.

God has chosen to use, to work within and through human agency,
so there really is no cause, no room or place for human pride.

What God chooses and gives is always appropriate & fits perfectly
to build up the church and to serve its mission out into the world.

Our creative and wise God has never once made the same person twice,
and each one of us is different, uniquely special, gifted and loved,
and so we are each called to our unique and God-given purpose,
toward accomplishing the mission and ministry of the Church.

Each one of us are created special and unique – we are like no other.

Every single person created by God throughout all human history
has always been special & unique, and lovingly irreplaceable.

**And nothing is ever more satisfying, fulfilling or rewarding than
doing that for which we are well-equipped & gifted by God to do well.**

Paul explains and describes that important truth, vs. 3:5-7,9~10

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but **God gave the growth.** So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but **only God who gives the growth.** For we are God's servants, working together. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

As servants, Paul and Apollos or whoever the Lord calls and equips,
are loved and blessed to do the bidding and building for the master,
always as cooperative fellow workers in the service of God. vs. 8

The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose.

So, all are needed and fundamentally equal as Christian workers,
each under God, each in obedience to God's mission, purpose & call.

Since it is **only God who gives the growth,** and not by our human effort,
and since it is God who brings about the success and accomplishment,
no one has cause to boast or feel more important than anyone else,
for each is building upon the faithful work & efforts of others.

In 1962, the Nobel Prize was won by a pair of brilliant scientists,
by James Watson and Francis Crick, for their work & research
in describing the 2bl helix structure of the DNA molecule.

Theirs was a most critical advance in the field of molecular biology,

leading directly to some remarkable benefits & amazing new things,
such as genetic engineering, DNA testing and gene therapy,
& most recently the vaccines & boosters used against Covid.

In their Nobel Prize acceptance speech, given in Stockholm in 1962,
the pair of researchers, Watson and Crick described their work
using the phrase, "**standing upon the shoulders of giants.**"

Standing upon the shoulders of giants was in recognition of the fact
that it was not just their research and work or their genius alone,
but that DNA was actually first discovered way back in 1869
by the German research chemist, Frederick Mieschner.

DNA had been researched and studied continuously since that time,
as all along the way each scientist and each research team
was building upon the hard work of those who proceeded them.

It was certainly not the work and genius of just any **one** individual,
but it was a vast **continuum of contributors** and all their efforts,
of each scientist bringing their individual gifts and talents,
each one contributing piece by piece to resolving the puzzle.

And isn't it a most striking and revealing irony, that even
the much publicized phrase, **standing upon the shoulders of giants,**
was actually a quote from Robert Burton who wrote back in 1621,
a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant may see further than the giant himself ?

That image expresses an important truth of leadership and ministry--
that we are all called to build upon the prior work of others,
and that we all owe a great debt to those who came before us,
to those who blazed & paved the roads upon which we travel.

Jesus taught the apostles, who then taught the early Christians,
and so the gospel truth has been passed down through the ages,
and so it goes, so that even now, as it has come down to us.

Today, we are charged to build upon what those who proceeded us
upon what they built and left behind for us now build upon,
to bring our best effort, our dedication & determination...
... and so the question is, what are we going to do with it in our time?

During seminary I went to Syria, and spent several days in Damascus.
Very early one morning, we drove 150 miles north from Damascus,
through endless dry sand dunes with absolutely no vegetation,
until we got to an oasis, the very ancient city of Palmyra,
a stop along a major trade route, known as, The Silk Road.

After lunch, one of the site archeologists served as our guide
showing us around the ancient ruins of Palmyra, which date back
to bronze age, way before the Canaanite and Roman civilizations.

It was amazing, incredible and overwhelming to be out walking among the buildings and ruins of such fascinating ancient world history,
and truly exhausting out in the desert sun and hot winds all day.

Toward evening we got back to the hotel, collapsed in the lounge,
and our guide offered another excursion, he'd drop-off anyone
who still wanted to hike up to the castle on the mountaintop.
He said, the trail would be about a 2-3 mile fairly steep hike,
and that if we moved along, we could probably reach it by sundown.

Most of our group was quite content to recover & relax in the lounge,
and felt no desire for anymore walking or archeology that day –
- but some of us really wanted to see that crusader castle.

The hike was very strenuous, and it took all I had to get there,
but finally I made it into the castle and up to the battlement
that overlooked ancient Palmyra just as the sun was setting.

It was one of the most remarkable & amazing sights I have ever seen,
as the eerie shadows lengthened across from the palm trees,
which seemed to highlight the columns of the ancient ruins.

I was grateful that day, that despite my weary and aching muscles,
I chose to make that strenuous climb up, it was well worth it.

The Apostle Paul writes in the 2nd Corinthians passage,
about how the love of Christ makes all the difference, vs. 14, 17

For the love of Christ urges us on, ... So if anyone is in Christ, there is a **new creation**:
everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

**The love of Christ urges and enables us to take a different path,
and that makes all the difference ... a new creation, vs. 18-19.**

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry
of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their
trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

**The critical message is,
God is up to something new, and you don't want to be in on it?**

**God's love and promises
are way beyond this world's perspective and limitations,**
for knowing that our true citizenship is in the Kingdom of God,
frees us up to live in hopeful confidence and assured trust...

**... a true hope far beyond the boundaries of these our mortal lives,
and unimaginable joy and delight that awaits God's children,**
as the love of Christ affirms and guides our how we live.

So if our focus is on the love of Christ, that will change everything.

God's message and call to hope through Paul is

don't settle for partial or complacent commitment,
and don't quit now, but go a little further and go for the best
for there is so much more and much better up just ahead, vs. 14.
as Paul wrote, for the love of Christ urges us on...

Our task, as a community of faith, of grace, of unity and discipleship
is to discover our gifts and to help others discover their gifts,
so that we can all be a blessing for building-up the body,
for that is how we as Christians grow deeper in our faith.

Consider the potential effect of the Church of Jesus Christ,
the ministry that could be accomplished by **this body of Christ**,
if **every member** were fully committed and using their gifts,
as Paul describes and urges in his Corinthian letters.

The world has rarely seen what such a congregation could achieve,
if all our lives and gifts were fully dedicated to Christ,
and to showing love to others, as the Lord has loved us...
... so that we serve together and accomplish God's mission and purpose.

We are all blessed by God with some way that we can serve usefully
to build relationships and deepen our faith by serving together.
**Every one of us can make a real difference to further God's Kingdom,
by serving as conduits through which the grace & love of God can flow.**

Today we are going to ordain and install two new deacons,
who will serve to guide and carry out our ministries of compassion,
because they love God, and they want to serve and follow Jesus.

I urge you, that as we celebrate God's call for **them to serve**,
please reflect on your own calling and your gifts from God.

**Remember that you too are called and gifted by the Lord to serve
in what whatever service and mission God has entrusted to you.**

God has chosen to use each one of us in uniquely ideal & wonderful ways
to accomplish various tasks at various times and in various places.
And we will either be faithful to God's call, or we will not.

Consider God's word and call from (Ephesians 4:11~15, 1 Peter 4:3)

The gifts he gave were ... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

... Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.

... Whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ.