

## *Being Strengthen In Christ*

**Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind— just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you— so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Paul is writing to the Corinthians with the utmost concern and desire to help heal what ails them. There is division in the church, people don't seem to be focused on the same goals, so Paul is trying to unite these people in order to strengthen the church, to get them to focus on things outside of their own perceptions, to get them to focus on the one thing that can unify and encourage and empower everyone! And that is on Christ.

Christ is mentioned 9 x in 9 verses, and God is mentioned 6! Paul is using language to help the people to live into their best callings. He reminds them that they are sanctified - set apart/holy! Called to be Saints! Not alone but together will all the other growing churches in the world. Knowing you are a part of a movement does help one's confidence that we are not mistaken, it empowers one to continue on - on the path we have found ourselves - the path of knowing God more and more through Christ.

Paul reminds them of all the ways they have grown in knowing Christ and encourages them ~ in fact promises them ~ that Christ will continue to be with them and give them what they need for the rest of their lives and beyond. Paul ends by saying, "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." This is how he begins his letter to them. Pointing out reasons for hope - from their own skills, as well as what God offers them through Christ!

These words were sorely needed then, for there was much to be concerned about in Corinth at the time of this letter. Paul continues the 1<sup>st</sup> letter to try to deal with all of those concerns! But this beginning is where we must stay for now. For it is here where we all need to grow ~ in faith and in service. The desire to grow and learn and to be more like Christ today than we were yesterday is what a true life of faith is all about. We have not been called to seek our own perspectives and have them reinforced, but to look at Christ and see how we can grow.

And face it, we know, we really do, if our first impulse thought or action comes from a place of self fulfillment. I dare say most of our first thoughts do come from our personal history, often clouded with various emotions, good and bad. Believe it or not, those thoughts can be stopped, reexamined, and additional impulses could be added to them. Are we even aware of how often our reactions to someone is related to something that happened to us in the past, causing us to be responding

presently to something that is not even true at this time? Reacting in the present to something perhaps not fully seen clearly from the past.

For example, someone does something to us that causes us pain and anguish. We learn from that, that this person cannot be fully trusted. We withhold our pure love and joy and trust from them. We protect ourselves from further pain. But we also hinder ourselves from ever feeling the joy and the hope of the love that God can offer us.

Each soul we come across has some joy to offer us. Some people need more patience than others to get to that source. They are often the ones who need the diligence all the more. More importantly, we deprive ourselves of the joy that we could get in our hearts from within ourselves, just by practicing forgiveness. Whether the other accepts our forgiveness or not, there is a great deal of joy to feel when we let go of all that we have learned to separate us from each other. Discovering from within ourselves those moments of distance and separation, and then imagining that there is forgiveness there, is so freeing! It releases us from our own pain.

Try it for a moment. Take a moment to think on someone you do not like. And contemplate why you don't like them. Now, just pretend that it would be as easy as *thinking* to get to the point of no longer distrusting them. Pretend that all you had to do was to forget that bad experience, and place the *concept* of forgiveness there. Pretend for one minute that forgiveness was as easy as *pretending* that forgiveness is possible and real. How would you feel about the person you don't like, if forgiveness was as easy as pretending and thinking they were lovable? Because Christ offers us that power to forgive and love. Why do we think that we are smarter than God by withholding love and forgiveness from each other? Why do we think that we are smarter than Christ when we do not trust God? Why do we think that we are smarter than God when we worry?

Because that is what we are doing when we refuse to adhere to Christ's teaching. When we make excuses as to why we cannot love someone - we are holding onto something in our *brains*, in our *history*, in *our* lives that contradicts Christ's teachings, we are claiming those experiences as having more validity than God's historic proofs.

Paul is calling the people of Corinth to be strengthened in Christ! As we hear these ancient words, they hold just as much meaning today as then. Those who have discovered the preciousness of living for Jesus have witnesses our lives become kinder, more amazing, richer, wiser . . . we have grown into more peaceful and active humans. We find ourselves led to be drum majors for justice.

As it is the weekend of celebrating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, in his honor, and because his words still ring so true today, I would like to share a part of his sermon from 4 February 1968, "The Drum Major Instinct".

[L]et us see that we all have the drum major instinct. We all want to be important, to surpass others, to achieve distinction, to lead the parade. Alfred Adler, the great psychoanalyst, contends that this is the dominant impulse... saying that this quest for recognition, this desire for attention, this desire for distinction is the basic impulse, the basic drive of human life, this drum major instinct.

. . . Now in adult life, we still have it, and we really never get by it. We like to do something good. And you know, we like to be praised for it. Now if you don't believe

that, you just go on living life, and you will discover very soon that you like to be praised. Everybody likes it, as a matter of fact. And somehow this warm glow we feel when we are praised or when our name is in print is something of the vitamin A to our ego. Nobody is unhappy when they are praised, even if they know they don't deserve it and even if they don't believe it ... But everybody likes to be praised because of this real drum major instinct.

... There comes a time that the drum major instinct can become destructive. And that's where I want to move now. I want to move to the point of saying that if this instinct is not harnessed, it becomes a very dangerous, pernicious instinct. For instance, if it isn't harnessed, it causes one's personality to become distorted. I guess that's the most damaging aspect of it: what it does to the personality. If it isn't harnessed, you will end up day in and day out trying to deal with your ego problem by boasting. Have you ever heard people that – you know, and I'm sure you've met them – that really become sickening because they just sit up all the time talking about themselves. And they just boast and boast and boast, and that's the person who has not harnessed the drum major instinct.

... When the church is true to its nature, it says, "Whosoever will, let him come." And it does not supposed to satisfy the perverted uses of the drum major instinct. It's the one place where everybody should be the same, standing before a common master and savior. And a recognition grows out of this – that all men are brothers because they are children of a common father.

... And not only does this thing go into the racial struggle, it goes into the struggle between nations. And I would submit to you this morning that what is wrong in the world today is that the nations of the world are engaged in a bitter, colossal contest for supremacy. And if something doesn't happen to stop this trend, I'm sorely afraid that we won't be here to talk about Jesus Christ and about God and about brotherhood too many more years. If somebody doesn't bring an end to this suicidal thrust that we see in the world today, none of us are going to be around, because somebody's going to make the mistake through our senseless blunderings of dropping a nuclear bomb somewhere. And then another one is going to drop.

... But this is why we are drifting. And we are drifting there because nations are caught up with the drum major instinct. "I must be first." "I must be supreme." "Our nation must rule the world." And I am sad to say that the nation in which we live is the supreme culprit. And I'm going to continue to say it to America, because I love this country too much to see the drift that it has taken.

... But let me rush on to my conclusion, because I want you to see what Jesus was really saying. What was the answer that Jesus gave [James and John from Mark 10, beginning with verse 35 when they to sit at his right and left side in his glory]? It's very interesting. One would have thought that Jesus would have condemned them. One would have thought that Jesus would have said, "You are out of your place. You are selfish. Why would you raise such a question?"

But that isn't what Jesus did; he did something altogether different. He said in substance, "Oh, I see, you want to be first. You want to be great. You want to be important. You want to be significant. Well, you ought to be. If you're going to be my disciple, you must be." But he reordered priorities. And he said, "Yes, don't give up this instinct. It's a good instinct if you use it right. It's a good instinct if you don't distort it and pervert it. Don't give it up. Keep feeling the need for being important. Keep feeling the need for being first. But I want you to be first in love. I want you to be first in moral excellence. I want you to be first in generosity. That is what I want you to do."

And he transformed the situation by giving a new definition of greatness. And you know how he said it? He said, "Now brethren, I can't give you greatness. And really, I can't make you first." This is what Jesus said to James and John. "You must earn it. True greatness comes not by favoritism, but by fitness. And the right hand and the left are not mine to give, they belong to those who are prepared."

And so Jesus gave us a new norm of greatness. If you want to be important – wonderful. If you want to be recognized – wonderful. If you want to be great – wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's a new definition of greatness.

And this morning, the thing that I like about it: by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And you can be that servant.

People of Hyattstown Christian Church, we can be those servants, can the people say AMEN?