

The Concerns of the Church

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- [0 : 00] So not everyone is an Anglican. We'll pray for you, don't worry. But as I've gotten to know lots of you, what's clear to me is that the reason so many people from different sorts of church backgrounds come to this church is because of Andrew Price's commitment to solid Bible teaching.
- A commitment he inherited from Andrew Reid, who inherited it from Paul Barker and so on and so forth. And that's a great thing to thank God for, isn't it? Because to take his word seriously.
- But when all is said and done, this church really is the best church in Melbourne. I mean, it is. It is. It's the best church in Melbourne. I mean, surely we are better than anything another denomination could muster.
- Surely we are the largest and therefore the best church in the East. Isn't that right? Well, I'm glad. I really hope I'm not serious and I can tell you don't think I'm serious.
- But I really worry that I am serious. Because to think like that is to be a Corinthian. You see, Corinthians had the hugest egos in the ancient world.
- [1 : 17] Often in this series we've said things like, We are already so spiritual, they thought. See, they thought they were the best church, with the best preachers, with the best worship and the best gifts.
- But behind their egos lies insecurity. It's insecurity that strives to be the best at the expense of all others.
- And in this chapter, this last chapter, which seems to be a boring list of jobs, is how Paul addresses the arrogant and insecure church.
- And so we're going to get straight into it. Please look at the handout and please keep your passage open. We'll be in the passage all the time. And this past two weeks, we've focused on verse 58 of chapter 15.
- I printed half of it on your handout. So verse 58 says, Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.
- [2 : 23] Because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. And the work of the Lord, it gets repeated a few times in our passage today. It's there in verse 9. Paul says that in Ephesus, a great door for effective work has opened to me.
- In verse 10, it's about Timothy. Timothy's carrying on the work of the Lord. Verse 16, it says, To submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labours at it.
- And the work of the Lord, it can be a very general thing to lots of people. Some people might say that every good deed is God's work. Or that social justice, looking after the poor.
- That's God's work. But here in 1 Corinthians, in chapter 16, it's a much tighter definition. And so what I did on your handout, I grouped the works of the Lord.

From all the jobs, he says, I grouped them into four categories. And I put it on your handout. So verse 1 to 4 is about financial giving. Verses 5 to 11 is about gospel partnership with Timothy.

[3 : 29] Verse 15 to 18 is about serving other Christians. And verses 19 to 24 about brotherly love and hospitality. And so the work of the Lord might mean different things to different people.

But here in chapter 16 in Corinth, it is about building the church. Every one of those four things builds the church. And here's what's interesting.

Did you notice how practical and day-to-day those activities were? And as the Corinthians would have read out chapter 16, they would have done this.

They would have gone, oh, oh my goodness. Where's the spiritual work, they would say? Where's the glamorous, mystical stuff like speaking in tongues?

I'm not signing up for 2019 of just welcoming people. How boring, they would say. And this is the key. See, their arrogance would struggle to get on board with such menial activities.

[4 : 32] Their insecurities would struggle finding peace with jobs like these. See, they thought the more wise and powerful and mystical something was, the more spiritual it was.

Remember, they followed eloquent and wise Apollos and rejected weak and stuttering Paul. Paul says to act like that in chapter 3 is to be a mere infant rather than a mature Christian.

This work here, it's about giving and partnering and serving and loving. Very practical. But also very spiritual.

Because look what comes just before it. Have a look at chapter 15, verse 51. So 15, verse 51. I'm going to read a few verses. Listen, I tell you a mystery.

It's a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed. In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound. The dead will be raised imperishable and we will be changed.

[5 : 39] For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. And you see, the Corinthian egos would love that Paul is giving them a mystery. It would feed their arrogance.

The insecurity would love the spiritual end times feel of the language. Trumpets and imperishable bodies. But then chapter 16 isn't full of mystical, spiritual kind of work.

It's full of practical jobs instead. And on your handout, I printed an equation there. And that's because mysterious spiritual truths lead to giving yourself fully to the practical work of the Lord.

Do you see that? Spiritual truths motivate practical work. I'm not sure what motivates you to get out of bed each Sunday and come here.

[6 : 47] I've said it before, 9 o'clock, very good brunch time. I'm not sure what motivates you to sign up to serve at church. A few weeks ago you filled out those yellow forms. A lot of serving here.

Maybe some weeks. Some weeks maybe it's a bit of a slog, like the Corinthians. Maybe it is. But Paul says spiritual truths motivate practical everyday service.

And if you think about it, that strategy is genius. And here's why. Imagine if serving at this church was motivated by how successful and how happy our church life was.

Of course, those things can be motivating. But if that's all it is, if the numbers on Sunday are the main driver for why you get stuck in, what happens during seasons of low attendance?

This church hasn't always been the hub of activity that it is these days, has it? What happens if our service is motivated only by how happy we are with our ministers?

[7 : 54] What happens when we are unhappy with decisions the church makes? What if our close friends leave the church or we have no friends at the church? Would that discourage us from serving and getting stuck in?

How much better is it that our service, our discipleship, is fed by spiritual truths first? So we can give this life, not because all our friends are here at Holy Trinity, but because we have another life to come.

We can give this body, not only because we love the idea of a St. John's plant, but because when that final trumpet sounds, when the dead are raised imperishable, you will be there as well.

And this is the important thing as well. Paul seems to be defining what spirituality is. You see, Corinthian arrogance and insecurity says spirituality has to be wise and powerful and mystical.

Our culture out there says spirituality is humming on a top of a mountain. It's swimming with dolphins. It's having some weird experience.

[9 : 07] It's going on four-day silent retreats. That's what our culture says spirituality is. But here, Paul says spiritual truths motivate spiritual behavior, regardless of how practical it looks, regardless of how mundane it seems.

And that means that any work you do at Holy Trinity, serving morning tea, welcoming, finding out how someone is going and then praying for them, catering, driving people to church, turning up each week, financial giving, serving up front, all of that is true spirituality, if motivated by spiritual truths and the spirit for the sake of building the church.

It would be hard for Christians, whose service is motivated by arrogance and insecurity, to accept that practical work can be spiritual work. So point one, the work of the Lord is practical, but truly spiritual.

Point two, the work of the Lord is other person-centered. So in Corinth, they loved being rich and successful. But in verse two, Paul says, set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up so that, in verse three, that money can go to someone else in Jerusalem.

The Corinthians love looking after themselves, but in verse 10 to 11, they're to look after Timothy when he comes to them. In verse 16, they're to serve the household of Stephanas.

[10 : 45] And it says, everyone else who is doing the work of the Lord. In verse 20, they're told to greet others with a holy kiss. This random list of jobs is all other person-centered.

And the key to putting others first is verse 13. Have a look at verse 13. Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.

You see, a Christian like that, firm in the faith, courageous and strong, would be secure enough to put others first rather than use Sundays to hog the limelight.

Verse 13 is battle language. They're commands that you would give a soldier on a mission. They're words that our culture might associate with being a sort of alpha male.

You know, a guy who's really huge and loud and angry, who eats raw eggs and small animals for breakfast. You see, that's one version of courage and strength out there.

[11 : 46] But that doesn't have a lot to do with Jesus, does it? Jesus was verse 13. Jesus stood firm even when opposed, even to his death. Jesus was strong.

He defeated death and the devil, in fact. But as far as we know, he didn't act like a brute. He wasn't loud and angry. Jesus cried, in fact. Paul says, be courageous and strong enough to, verse 14, do everything in love.

Love is repeated in verse 22 and 24. Remember, when we looked back at chapter 8, remember, we said that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

Chapter 13, even the most extravagant spiritual gift, if I have faith that could lift up Mount Dandenong and plonk it into the Port Phillip Bay, but have not love, that would all be for nothing.

See, arrogance is about loving yourself more. Jesus' way is being firm enough to love someone else instead. See, insecure weakness in church says, look at me, let me tell you about me.

[12 : 59] Whereas courageous love says, I'm not going to speak in tongues if it's more helpful for you. Remember chapters 8 to 10?

Some Corinthians were showing off they were eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. Paul said, that's very dangerous and it's also very selfish. Remember, we asked the question, we said, who is your Christianity for?

Is it just for you or is it for other people as well? See, a love that builds up would never eat meat again if it caused a weaker brother to stumble.

Remember Paul said that in chapters 8 to 10? The insecure Christians, they tried to be the best. They refused to recognize a crowd of equals.

And that's exactly what Paul does to them in chapter 16. He clips their wings. And so, let's look at that. So, 16 verse 1. Can you see it? 16 verse 1.

[14 : 02] Have a look. It says, now about the collection for the Lord's people, do what I told the Galatian churches to do. You see, Corinth is no different from Galatia.

They clip their wings. In verse 5, Paul wants to go to the Macedonian churches first. In verse 7, he'll stay with Corinth if he can for a while, but they aren't his only priority because, in verse 9, he really wants to go to Ephesus as well because some great and effective ministry can be done there.

Verses 10 to 11 are about looking after Timothy. Timothy is Paul's protege. Remember, in Corinth, they don't really like Paul terribly much, much less liking his protege Timothy, but Paul clips their wings.

He says, send Timothy on in peace. Don't treat him with contempt. Make sure he has nothing to fear. In verse 12, Corinth loved Apollos, but Apollos was quite unwilling to go to them.

He will go when he has the opportunity, it says. See, he may be too busy to go to Corinth in the end. They're not as special as they think. Verse 15, Paul mentions the household of Stephanas, which may actually be the best church in Asia.

[15 : 24] And the reason why? Because they devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. They were secure enough to love others first. And in verse 18, the recognition that Corinth craved is given to the household of Stephanas instead.

And the things in chapter 16, the things in chapter 16 are the things that our culture really wants. Maturity, consistency, boldness, courage, strength, and love.

We recognize we need them in our relationships. Where do they come from? Verse 22, from a love for the Lord Jesus.

copying his example. A desire for his return. Verse 22 says, come Lord Jesus. Verse 23, for remembering his grace.

There's something that would help an insecure church. Remembering that everything you have and need was a gift from Jesus in the first place. loving others. And verse 24, loving others.

[16 : 36] That's where those things come from. It's very isolating to be arrogant. It's very lonely trying to be the best. It's good to be good but not like a Corinthian.

See, arrogance has led to disconnection and disorder in their churches. It stops them serving others. It stops them being humble. It stops all the things Jesus cares about.

And so, stand firm on your faith, says Jesus. He died for you. You don't have to make up for how weak and unimpressive and common we are.

He loves you. He made our bodies into a temple of his Holy Spirit. We are already spiritual enough. And so, as we finish, what I'd like to do is look at all four of those works of the Lord and in every work, what would arrogance and insecurity say and what would love say.

So, we'll do that to finish. Work one is in verses one to four. It's about financial giving for ministry. So, in verses one to four, Paul details how to give in Corinth.

[17 : 54] He says, collecting money each week, which I assume is budgeting and planning. He says, in keeping with your income. So, not if it means you can't look after your responsibilities.

Arrogance says, I'm more important than others. My money is too good for them, too precious for me to give to mission or ministry.

Insecurity says, I need to know where and how this money is spent. I need to know where and how I'll get it back again. Love says, there are other Christians or ministries that really need our money.

Love is secure enough in its faith to know that Jesus will provide. It's a very strong and courageous thing to set aside money every week, even though you know you probably won't get it back again.

That's very courageous and strong. Work two is about gospel partnership with others. Arrogance and insecurity says, treat them with contempt because they're not from Holy Trinity.

[19 : 01] Sure, they might love Jesus. Yeah, they might want to see his name glorified, but their teaching over there is not the standard over here. Love says, make sure they feel comfortable with us.

That's the language for Timothy. Make sure we look after and support them as brothers and sisters in Christ. or other gospel organizations. Love says, deal with them and leave them in peace.

Work three is about serving other Christians. Arrogance and insecurity says, we will not submit to others at church. We must be better than them instead.

But love is strong enough, firm enough in its faith to, verse 15, devote yourself to the service of the Lord's people, to submit to others.

And finally, work four. Work four is about brotherly love and hospitality. See, arrogance and insecurity says, I can't possibly welcome that new person or that visitor.

[20 : 07] They're just a sweaty Ephesian, not a brilliant Corinthian. They're not like me. My coffee break is just for me, not for them to feel welcome.

Besides, I'm too nervous and insecure to greet them with a holy kiss or a holy Christian side hug or whatever. Love recognizes that Holy Trinity gets lots and lots of new people and visitors.

Love is courageous enough to go outside its comfort zone to welcome people we don't know. Love is strong enough to persist even with the most annoying person you can think of because you know that that person doesn't have anyone else to look after them.

Love allows you to come to church to serve others rather than arrogantly and insecurely getting what you can and then going home. Jesus died so we could be forgiven.

He rose again so we could have another life to come and therefore as long as you are in this life, verse 13, be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous enough, be strong enough to do everything, do the work of the Lord in love.

[21 : 26] So let's pray that we would do that.