

The Corinthian church had a conflict problem, a love of personal power which led to self-seeking, party schisms, and the denigrating acts and remarks which demeaned one another. Fear dominated them, evidenced by their unwillingness to show grace to one another, to edify one another, to honor one another. The result of these schisms was that their only unity was that so-called unity found in the lowest common denominator of all the parties involved. Every schism in the church, every lowest-common-denominator mentality is the result of a singular foolishness: taking our eyes off of Christ Jesus as our only source of wisdom, righteousness, and sanctification through his vicarious death and resurrection and present authority over all things. When we lose sight of the good news of the King who came to rescue powerless and corrupt enemies enslaved to and abused by sin we tend to become the enslaver and abuser of others, either in word or deed. We crave power and militantly defend it.

But the cross of Christ shows us both God's divine love for enemies, the essence of mercy and grace, and God's righteous wrath against *our* injustice and sin, thus revealing that we have no real power to stand on, only a pretentious eggshell of our self-perceived *bigly-ness*, a mist and shadow without substance. We are fools. Man is merely a breath in the scheme of reality. Stagnant infirmity of death with boastful calls to remake the world around us when we cannot reign in our own tongues, succumbing to the most miniscule germ of illness of body and psyche. The simplest straw piercing the skin we wear on our bones or the skin we wear on our hearts, so deceptively thin. The only power we have is that which is unilaterally granted to us by God's grace through Christ and objectively received from His Spirit. No wisdom of ours can redeem society. No words are capable of discovering a rescue for our souls. Only the sheer grace of the Almighty God has the power to rescue us from our self-destruction to restore what is broken in us and done by use, to make things the way they are supposed to be.

In our ignorant arrogance we perceive ourselves to be controlling, capable of rescue, clinging to power and prestige and honor as is salvation. We did, too. But God, in the sovereign wisdom of His own counsel, laid aside His divine rights, humbling Himself to become a servant of sinners so that He might bring us to Himself. This powerful powerlessness of the gospel transforms the Christian's love of power into a powerful submission and humility which seeks to build others up, speak words which bring life to others, and subjects himself to the power of others that they might live, just like Jesus, our King.

Paul concludes this letter in like fashion, speaking the truth that in Christ Jesus the Church is united in a holy love for God and for one another which seeks not to cling to power, but to give it way for the glory of Christ Jesus and the building up of one another. Believers in Jesus have been converted from power-clinging death to power-giving life through the substitutionary grace of God. Even in this salutation God reveals through His servant that laying down power for the sake of others is a mark of Christian identity. This conversion to God leads to a devotion to one another which consists of submission to one another in the fear of God. And this submission to one another, in holy love, acts vividly in the reception of one another with open arms and a holy embrace. All for the glorification of the name of the divine King who laid down his power to rescue the puppet kings of fools.

Conversion of power, from ourselves to God. Devotion to one another as we seek to use our power to edify one another. Submission of our power to those who labor hard for Christ and His church. Reception of one another in whole-hearted sharing of power as mutual heirs of God in Christ Jesus. Glorification of Christ Jesus, the one in whose power we rest, the victor over sin and death and our only hope of life. The gospel transforms our use of power for the glory of God.

Jesus Rescues Sinners and Unites Them in Holy Love by Transforming Their Hearts from Those Who Crave Power to Those Who Give it Away

1. **Conversion** to God: The Grace of the King Leads Us to Admit That All Power Belongs to God Alone
 - a. Stephanas’ household were believers who were once in the domain of darkness and whom God transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son.
 - i. First-fruits – the first promise of a future harvest of those who were born again, recognized the King, and submitted to Him for life
 - b. All Christian ministry begins with such a conversion, a divine rescue
 - i. This divine rescue of sinners, rebels, and fools, means that Christians have no power of their own, but that all belongs to God
 - ii. God’s grace generates distrust in one’s self, and great hope in God alone, enabling the converted sinner not to walk in self-pity but in bold service to God and others with joy.
 - c. Those who serve the Lord and His people are not super-saints, but redeemed sinners
 - i. Recognizing this truth keeps us from elevating such ministers to pedestals of spirituality so high that disappointment is certain
 - ii. Godly leaders are mutual sinners redeemed by the grace of God, and ought to be prayed for as such, encouraged as such, and continually pointed to Christ as their hope, too
2. **Devotion** to the Saints: The Grace of the King Transforms Power into Devotion to One Another
 - a. Redeemed people *devote themselves*
 - i. They “appointed themselves”
 - ii. The positions of servant was something that the household of Stephanus assumed, they were not assigned it by the church
 - iii. In other words, this is how they viewed themselves and the respect and honor that they held for the saints
 - b. They appoint themselves “servants”
 - i. Ones who know their salvation was not owed, but was given by God’s mercy and grace, are grateful to be a member of the household of God and do not demand honor, expect honor, or even think about honor
 - ii. Stephanas’ household was the premier examples in Corinth of what Paul has been instructing regarding edifying others, loving one another, and entrusting their reputation and their honor to Christ Jesus, not to man
 - c. They serve *the saints*
 - i. There were dedicated to the flourishing of the Church, to the edification of the saints
 - ii. They were not dedicated to the world, notice, but to those who belong to Christ, first and foremost
 1. While seeking the ‘good of the city’ is a proper use of power, it must always be subsistent to the ‘good of the saints’
 2. We are to love our enemies, but not in the same way or with the same devotion as we love our family
 3. The distinction is important so that the church doesn’t lose its center, which is the marriage to Christ as unique, exclusive, and unwavering
 - d. They serve by “working together” and “striving hard”
 - i. It could be interpreted as “striving hard together”
 1. There is unity, mutual participation and respect, great effort, and perseverance here.
 - ii. **Christian service means using one’s power, through great effort with one another, to build others up in Christ as those redeemed from death to life by God’s sovereign grace**
3. **Submission** to the Servants: The Grace of the King Transforms Power to Submission

- a. The church is to subject itself to those who are converted, humble, devoted *servants*
 - i. In other words, the gospel transforms our incessant need to adhere to power and enters us into *the race to the bottom* – the leaders are racing to serve and the led are racing to subject themselves
 - ii. Since we have all that we need in Christ, and since we recognize in the gospel the futility of self-trust and self-wisdom, Christians ought to humbly submit to one another in love
 - 1. Eph 5:18-21 – submission to one another is the result of worshipping and giving thanks to God who has blessed with every heavenly blessing in Christ
- b. To those who “work together” and “strive hard”
 - i. Stephanas, Fortunatas, and Achaicus were personal applications of the Corinthians’ love for Paul
 - 1. They “filled up what was lacking” of their expression of love by personal, face-to-face fellowship
 - a. See the unity between sender and sent here: The Corinthians send their love to Paul, and the men whom they sent were a part of that Corinthian expression
 - b. Thus, they “fulfilled” or “completed” or “topped off the cup”
 - 2. They “refreshed my spirit”
 - a. There is a joy in participating in the Kingdom of God together with others so devoted
 - b. There is a joy in fellowship with brothers and sisters who are also equally devoted
 - i. Remember that Paul was dealing with some serious opposition in Ephesus
 - ii. To have friends visit, who are dedicated to the same gospel which was being proclaimed, with words of affection, encouragement, and participation, would have really lifted the soul
 - iii. ILLUSTRATION: Jason and the phone call...
 - ii. These three men were from different social strengths, but were considered equal and mutual partners in the Kingdom
 - 1. Clearly Stephanus is a landowner, but both Fortunatas and Achaicus have common slave names
 - a. They may have been a part of Stephanus’ household which was devoted and hard-working servants for the saints
 - 2. The gospel of God’s grace levels the playing field between all men, for all are equally in need of God’s grace and equally forgiven through union with Christ by faith.
 - 3. In this way, the Church is the community where one doesn’t need to assume power, but rather assumes servanthood, and every believer is mutually honored in Christ as one who belongs
- c. We ought to ‘recognize these *kinds* of people’
 - i. Not just the master of the house, but the servants as well, for service is the honorable work in the Kingdom of God
 - ii. Recognizes these *kinds* of servants as worthy leaders and well-doing workers for the King, and for our good
 - 1. There are ‘types’ of workers, of varying devotion, maturity, and perseverance. Recognize those who labor hard in such service.
 - 2. There is poison in complaining, and Paul wants the Corinthians to encourage the ones who serve well and don’t seek power, but seek to edify others

3. Those whose dedication, humble service, hard work and labor, indicate their love for the Lord and for His people, the saints, are to be respected and given the right hand of fellowship
- iii. This is a common command from the apostle, because it's a common issue in the Church
 1. Because you have been saved by the sacrifice of Christ Jesus, "...encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. ¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. (1 Thess. 5:11-13)
 2. Our hearts often grate against authority, even the best and most honorable authority
 - a. This is because we trust in our own power and rights rather entrusting ourselves to the sovereign goodness of God.
 - b. Yet, let us consider how we relate to those who are laboring for our good, even if they must exhort us, and treat them with honor
 - c. For Christ humbled himself to the point of death on a cross for our edification, so we, too, can humble ourselves to edify others
 - d. In what ways do we honor and show respectful submission to those who are devoted to the Lord and to us, who work hard for the sake of Christ and the saints in every type of service?
 - i. Do you speak well of your brothers and sister who labor hard, or do you only speak of their faults?
 - ii. Do you encourage them with your words, or complain? Do we even see them at all?
4. **Reception** of Fellow Heirs: The Grace of the King Transforms Power into Mutual Reception as Heirs
 - a. There is a familial *embrace* because of the work of Christ in building His Church
 - i. It is God who rescues and sanctifies the chosen ones in His Son, and these are from all kinds of places, histories, and social positions.
 1. *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.* (Gal. 3:27 ESV)
 - ii. The unity of the saints, viewing and treating one another as equal heirs, is expressed through extending a form of greeting, or honorable *reception* of one another as mutual receivers of grace [all are included in redemption only because of God's grace]
 1. The word is, literally, embrace – a hug...
 2. Such greetings were common when family or intimate friends saw each other on the road (Luke 10:4), in receiving one into the home (Luke 1:44), in the markets (Luke 11:43), etc.
 3. Such embraces were a sign of receiving the person as an honored fellow
 - a. This is why the Pharisees loved being greeting in the marketplace (Luke 11:43) – they loved to be honored and respected
 4. Therefore, to greet one another through letter like this is to extend the reception of one another 'in Christ' as fellow heirs of the promises and all the promises that all receive 'in Christ'
 - b. Such verbal and active reception of other believers confirms and builds unity, intimacy, participation, and the acknowledgement of mutual belonging
 - i. This is true of all believers
 - ii. Note the reception given from church to church
 1. "the churches in Asia greet you"
 2. "the church in Aquila and Prisca's house sends you hearty receptions" (plural demonstrative!!)

- iii. There is also the reception from individuals
 - 1. ‘the brothers’ greet you
 - 2. ‘Aquila and Prisca greet you’
- c. Personal greetings, even written, express such belonging, affection, and joy
 - i. “I greet you with my own hand” – You are precious to me and I receive you with joy!
- d. We are to express such mutual belonging to one another whenever we see each other
 - i. The holy kiss is not a command in form, but in function (like head coverings)
 - 1. What cultural symbol of reception in these ways is a contextual similarity as a kiss of greeting?
 - 2. Do it, then!!
 - ii. This greeting is to be “holy” – distinct, unique, set apart for receiving believers in a way that is different from receiving unbelievers
 - 1. While a kiss of greeting or leaving was a common social greeting in the days of the early church, such a reception was to be different in the church
 - 2. If the society used it to show friendship and goodwill, Christians use such receptions in a deeper way:
 - a. To show peace, reconciliation, oneness, and mutual honor and belonging in Christ Jesus
 - iii. This type of greeting is a concrete reminder and expression of such deep unity and mutual receivers of grace
 - 1. This is particularly necessary in areas where there has been conflict
 - 2. In fact, of the three times that Paul issues a command regarding the holy kiss, and the one time that Peter does, it is always in the context of conflict (1 Thessalonians, Romans, 1 Peter)
 - a. There are similar contexts of mutual edification, peace, love, and greetings, too.
 - iv. This shows us that this common theme of mutual reception of one another in the grace of the Lord is an essential aspect of what it means to belong to the Lord
- e. In what ways do we show that we receive one another in Christ?

Conclusion:

Our conversion from death to life, by God’s grace alone, leads us to a life of devotion to Christ and to His beloved Bride, the Church. As we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus, ascertaining and appreciating the expansive grace of God who chose us apart from any righteousness or strength or wisdom of our own, who gathered us up when we were sinners and rebels and fools, and declared us His children with the appropriation of a new heart of faith by His own Holy Spirit, let us lay aside our craving for power and seek to serve one another, entrusting our reputation, our comforts, and our life to the One who loves us so greatly that He laid down His power and gave His life for us. In genetic reflection of His grace, let us humbly labor together in devotion to the saints, and walk in submission to one another as we strive hard for the edification of one another in Christ Jesus. Let us greet one another as holy heirs of God, mutually belonging to the community of the redeemed in Christ Jesus who love the Lord. And in all of this, let us seek not the fame of the Church alone, but supremely the **Glorification** of the King’s Name: It’s All About Jesus. In fact, those who do not love the Lord, and by extension are power-hungry and proud and devoted to self-seeking, do not belong to the community. They are to be recognized and declared to be outside the covenant of faith, cursed. The Lord will come soon and set things right. Maranatha!

May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all. You are loved in Christ Jesus. Amen.