

The Concerns of the Church

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[0 : 00] Since joining this church a few years ago with my family and then this past year as a staff member, it's really clear to me that lots of people here come from different denominations.

Not everyone's a sort of typical Anglican. And that's fine. We'll pray for you. That's okay. As I've gotten to know loads of people and as I talk to people, it seems to me the reason everyone's here from different backgrounds is because of this commitment to Bible teaching which Andrew Price has instilled.

It's a commitment that he inherited from Andrew Reid and a commitment he inherited from Paul Barker and so on and so forth. And it's a great thing to thank God for, isn't it? Just when your senior pastor takes the Word of God so seriously.

And look, when all is said and done, this really is the best church in Melbourne. It is. It's the best church in Melbourne. Look, I mean, we're just baptising families.

We're the best church in Melbourne. No? I mean, surely we are better than anything any other denomination could muster. Let's see them do that. Surely we are the largest and therefore the best church in the East.

[1 : 18] Now, I'm really glad you laughed at that. I really hope that I'm not serious. But in my heart, I worry that I am. Because thinking like that, that's exactly what the Corinthians and their huge egos thought.

So often in this series, we've said, we are already so spiritual. That's what they used to say. See, they thought they were the best church with the best preachers, the best worship and the best gifts. But behind their desire to be the best all the time was insecurity. Insecurity. It's competition like that and insecurity like that that makes you strive and worry about being the best.

And in this chapter, which seems like a boring list of jobs to do, in this chapter, Paul shows us how to deal, or Paul deals with the arrogant and insecure church.

And so we're going to go straight in. Please keep your hand out with you. That'll really help you.

And especially keep your Bibles open. So point one. This past two weeks, since we've been looking at chapter 15, this past two weeks, we focused on verse 58.

[2 : 30] 15, 58. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord. Because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

This work of the Lord, it gets repeated a few times. It's there in verse 9. Paul says in Ephesus, a great door for effective work has opened to me.

Over the page in verse 10, Timothy's carrying on the work of the Lord. It says in verse 16, it says, submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it.

And the work of the Lord, it can mean different things to different people. It can be a very general principle. So some people might say that every good deed in the world is God's work.

Or social justice is God's work. But here in 1 Corinthians, it's a much tighter definition. And so what I did was I looked at all this list of jobs to do, and I categorize them by the work.

[3 : 36] And I put it on your handout. So verse 1 to 4, that's work about financial giving. Verse 5 to 11 is about gospel partnership. Verse 15 to 18 is serving other Christians.

Verse 19 to 24, brotherly love and hospitality. And so the work of the Lord might mean different things to different people. But according to chapter 16 here in Corinth, the thing that links all of those things is church building.

All of these things build the church. And this is really interesting. Did you notice how practical and day-to-day those activities were? And as the Corinthians read that chapter or have it read to them, this is what they would do.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, I can't believe it. Where is the spiritual work, they would say. Where is the glamorous, mystical stuff? I'm not signing up for a 2019 of merely 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 : 46] Their insecurity would struggle finding peace with a list of jobs like this one. You see, they thought the more wise and powerful and mystical something was, the more spiritual it was.

No wonder they, remember they followed eloquent and wise sounding Apollos and rejected weak and stuttering Paul. Paul says to act like that is, chapter 3, to act like a mere infant rather than a spiritually mature Christian.

All this work here that we've looked at, that is about giving and partnership and serving and love. Very practical, but look what comes just before it in chapter 15.

Very spiritual as well. Can you see chapter 15, verse 51? 15, verse 51. Listen, I tell you a mystery. It's a mystery we're about to hear. 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.

[6 : 01] 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. You see, the Corinthians would love the fact, their egos would love the fact, that Paul is giving them a mystery. Something not given to other churches. They'd love that. It would feed their huge egos. The insecurity would love the spiritual feel of the sort of end times language. Final trumpets, imperishable bodies.

But chapter 16, that comes after it, isn't full of spiritual stuff, like speaking in tongues, or Lord's Supper, or preaching, or any of that stuff. It's full of very practical, day-to-day work instead.

And that's because spiritual truths motivate spiritual or practical activity. Spiritual truths motivate practical work of the Lord.

[7 : 02] And I put that as sort of an equation. You can see that on your handout. Mysterious spiritual truths lead to giving yourself fully to the practical work of the Lord.

See, I'm not sure what motivates you to serve here at church. Maybe there's a little bit from time to time. You see your name on the roster and you go, Oh my goodness.

But maybe there's a bit of that in all of us. Like the Corinthians. But here Paul says that spiritual truths motivate spiritual, sorry, practical everyday service.

And that strategy is actually genius. And this is why. See, imagine if your service at Holy Trinity was tied to how successful we are as a church.

How many people are in the pews. How many baptisms we perform. Of course that can be motivating. But if that's all, what if the numbers on Sunday are the main driver for your service and discipleship?

[8 : 02] What happens during seasons of low attendance? Maybe in summer when everyone's away on holidays. What happens if our service is motivated by how happy we are? Or how pleased and how much we agree with our minister?

What happens when the church makes decisions that we don't always fully agree with? What if our close friends move away to plant at St. John's? Would that discourage us here at the mothership from serving?

What would happen to the building of the church? See, how much better is it that practical work is fed by spiritual truths? We can give this life, not only because all of our friends are at Holy Trinity, but because we'll 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, your body will be raised imperishable.

And this is really important because Paul seems to be defining what spirituality is. Paul is defining what spirituality is.

[9 : 11] You see, Corinthian arrogance and insecurity says spirituality is about wisdom and power and mystical mumbo-jumbo. Our culture says if you want spirituality, get on a mountaintop and go hum like this and just start humming for a while.

Or go swim with some dolphins. Or have some weird existential experience. Or go on a three or four day silent retreat. But Paul says spiritual truths feed practical behaviour.

And therefore I think that is spiritual behaviour. Regardless of how practical the work is. So that means any work you do at Holy Trinity, serving tea and coffee, welcoming, finding out how someone is going, and following them up with a phone call or a prayer, catering, driving people to church, turning up each week, financial giving, all the service you do up front and behind the scenes.

That is true spirituality. No matter how practical it looks. Because it's motivated by spiritual truths. And it's given by the spirit for the building of the church.

It would be hard for a Christian, whose service is motivated by arrogance and insecurity, to accept that something so boring looking can actually be true spirituality.

[10:32] So point one, the work of the Lord is practical, but truly spiritual. Point two, the work of the Lord is other person-centred. The Corinthians, they love being rich and successful.

In verse two, can you go back to 16 verse two? In verse two, Paul wants them to set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income. Saving it up, he says, so that when he gets there, he can take it and give it to someone else.

The Corinthians love looking after themselves. But in verses 10 to 11, they're to look after Timothy instead when he comes to them. In verse 16, they're to serve the household of Cephanus and it says everyone else who's doing the work of the Lord.

In verse 20, they're to be told to greet one another with a holy kiss. This is a random list of jobs that builds the church and it's all other person-centred.

And the key to putting other people first is verse 13. Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong.

[11:37] You see, a Christian like that, a Christian like that would be secure enough to put others first on Sunday rather than compete for the limelight.

Verse 13, it's full of battle language. They're the commands that you would give a soldier on a mission. They're words that our culture might associate with being a real sort of manly, alpha male type.

You know, a guy who's physically huge and loud and angry, who eats like raw eggs and little animals for breakfast, that kind of guy. You know, that sort of, that's sort of one version of courage and strength.

Not looking at anyone. That's one version of courage and strength, but that doesn't have a lot to do with Jesus, does it? Jesus was verse 13.

Jesus was firm, even when they opposed him to his death. Jesus was courageous. He was so strong, in fact, he defeated death and the devil, no less.

[12:37] But as far as we know, Jesus wasn't a brute. He wasn't loud and angry and shouty. He 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. Just thinking back to this book, 1 Corinthians, remember when we said in chapter 8 that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

Remember we said that? In the passage. In chapter 13, Paul says, even if you can do the most extravagant spiritual gift, even if you have faith that could move Mount Dandenong into Port Phillip Bay, without love, that would be nothing.

See, arrogance is about loving yourself more. That's arrogance. But Jesus' way is being firm enough in your faith that you can love others first.

So insecure weakness says, look at me, look at me, let me tell you about me. Whereas courageous love says, I'm not going to speak in tongues if it would help you on a Sunday.

[13:49] Chapters 8 to 10 talked about some Corinthians were showing off. They were eating meat, sacrifice to idols. Paul warned that's a very dangerous thing to do.

And it's also a very selfish thing to do. We asked the question when we were looking at those chapters, who is your Christianity for? Is it for you? Is that all?

Or is it for other people as well? See, a love that builds up would, as Paul says, never eat meat again if it would cause a brother or sister to stumble.

Now, insecure Christians, like the Corinthians, they refuse to recognize a crowd of equals. They thought they were the best. But in chapter 16, that's exactly what Paul does.

He clips their wings. And so I just want to show you a few of those ways he does that. Have a look at 16 verse 1. Now about the collection for the Lord's people. Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

[14 : 51] You see, Corinth is no different to Galatia. Just do what I told the Galatians to do. In verse 5, he says, I'm going to go to Macedonia first. In verse 7, he wants to stay in Corinth.

But even then, they're not his only priority. In verse 9, he really wants to go to Ephesus. Because a door for ministry is opening up there. In verse 10 to 11, they're about looking after Timothy. Timothy is Paul's protege, remember? And Timothy's carrying on the work of the Lord. But many people at Corinth don't like Paul, let alone Timothy. And so Paul clips their wings. He says, make sure he's got nothing to fear. Make sure you don't treat him with contempt. And treat him with peace and kindness. In verse 12, the Corinthians love Apollos. But it says, he was quite unwilling to go to you now. He will go when he has the opportunity. He may be too busy to go to Corinth in the end. You're not that special. Verse 15, Paul mentions the household of Stephanas.

[15 : 53] They actually might be the best church in the world. Because they devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. They are secure enough spiritually to love other people more and first.

And in verse 18, the recognition that the Corinthians crave is given to the household of Stephanas instead. They're not as good as they think they are.

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

Our culture recognizes that we need them in every aspect of life. Where do they come from? Where do you get these values? From the love for the Lord Jesus.

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

[16 : 57] Verse 23, wouldn't that help an insecure church? A dose of grace from Jesus. Remembering that everything they have and need was a gift by Jesus anyway.

That's where those things come from. So 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 the Corinthians.

Arrogance has led to disconnection and total disorder in their churches. It stopped them serving others. It stopped them being humble. And it stopped them being all the things Jesus wants us to be.

And so for us, it is stand firm on your faith. Jesus died for you. You don't have to make up for how unimpressive or weak or unwise we feel.

Jesus loves us. He put his spirit into our hearts. Our bodies are a temple. We are as spiritual as we can be without all that other stuff.

[18 : 01] And so what I'd like to do is finish by looking at these. We talked about four works of the Lord. And what I'd like to do in each of these works, I want to see what does arrogance and insecurity say?

And what does love say to each of those works? So we'll finish there. So let's look at work one, which is point three in your handout. Work one is about financial giving.

And in verses one to four, Paul details how to give. He talks about collecting some each week. That's budgeting and planning. He says, in keeping with your income.

So not if it means you can't look after your family and your responsibilities. In keeping with your income. Arrogance says, I'm more important than you.

My money is too good and too precious to me to give to you and the ministry of the church.

Insecurity says, I need to know where and how this money is spent.

[19 : 02] I need to know where and how I'll get it back again. But love says, there are other Christians who really need this money. There are ministries which really need supporting.

I am secure enough in Jesus' provision to give it away. I'm secure enough, I'm mature enough to budget and plan so that the minister doesn't have to stand up and harangue the congregation once a year.

That is an act of love to allow the minister not to have to do that. It's a very strong and courageous thing to give money away knowing you won't get it back again.

Especially in a materialistic culture like this one. That's work one. Work number two is about gospel partnership with others. So arrogance and insecurity says, let's treat them with contempt because they're not from Holy Trinity.

Sure, yeah, they might love Jesus. They might want to see Jesus' name glorified. But their teaching isn't the Holy Trinity standard, whatever that is. Love says, make sure they feel comfortable.

[20 : 12] That's the language in verses 10 and 11. Make sure we look after and support them as brothers and sisters or as gospel organizations. Love says, deal with them in peace.

That's the language. Work number three is about serving other Christians. So arrogance and insecurity says, we will not submit to others or others at church.

We must be better than them. We're too important out there in the world to submit to anyone in here. That's arrogance and insecurity. Love is strong enough and firm enough in its faith to devote yourself, verse 15, to the service of the Lord's people.

It's striking how different it is. And finally, work four. Work four is about brotherly love and hospitality. So arrogance and insecurity says, I cannot possibly welcome that newcomer.

They're just a sweaty Ephesian. They're not a brilliant Corinthian. They're just not like me.

Arrogance and insecurity says, my coffee break is me time. Time for me to see only my friends, not for me to welcome strange faces.

[21 : 27] Besides, I'm too nervous to greet them. With a holy handshake or what is it these days? An appropriate Christian side hug these days. Love, love recognizes that Holy Trinity gets loads of newcomers and visitors all the time.

Love is courageous enough to go outside its comfort zone, to welcome people who look like they may not have a buddy, to bring them into your congregation, your little clique.

Love is strong enough to persist even with the most annoying person you can think of at this church. And keep your eyes down. Don't look this way. See, love allows you to come to church to serve others rather than arrogantly and insecurely getting what you can and then going home again.

See, Jesus died so we could be forgiven. Forgiven of all our failures. He rose again so we could have another life too.

And therefore, as long as you are in this life, Christian, verse 13, be on your guard. Stand firm in your faith. Be courageous enough.

[22 : 42] Be strong enough to do everything. Do the work of the Lord in love. Shall we pray that we do that? It's a big charge. Our Father God, we thank you for your word.

Thank you that you speak to us. Father, thank you that you are the God of love. Father, help us to be courageous enough and firm enough in our faith and strong enough to love other people.

To look after other people. Father, thank you that even the most menial jobs is actually spiritual work. Is actually true spirituality when it's motivated by a knowledge of you and the gospel.

Father, would you make this church more like Jesus? Help us to look like him. Help us to battle sin and to love one another.

Father, we thank you for this gem of a book. In Jesus' name. Amen.