

# **TO SERVE IN HUMANITY WITH DIVINITY**

**By Titus Chu**

## **MESSAGE THREE: THE APOSTLE PAUL'S UPLIFTED HUMANITY WITH DIVINITY IN FIRST CORINTHIANS**

### **THE STRUGGLING OF OUR SERVING LIFE**

Many serving ones expect a prevailing church life - a church life filled with positive things. Few realize, however, that because the church is a gathering of the called out ones it includes all kinds of regenerated people. These regenerated ones are different in culture, education, and social status, and even different in the degree of their maturity of life and in their ability to apprehend the truth. All the members have Christ to a different degree. But in one way or another everyone still lives in their “differences,” that is, they live in their soul life with their “self,” their “flesh,” and their “natural man.”

Consider the church in Corinth, which was somewhat a troublesome church but not unlike every local church. The Apostle Paul, as the begetting father of this church<sup>1</sup>, was facing all the problems among the saints there. He became grieved and had no rest<sup>2</sup>. He was very troubled, yet he endeavored to help the church through the commitment he had according to the revelations he had received. He warned them<sup>3</sup>, he taught them<sup>4</sup>, and through a rich impartation of life he admonished them<sup>5</sup>. But the “backbone” to his operation was the humanity of Jesus. Paul presented himself and those with him to the Corinthians as servants of Christ<sup>6</sup>, as those who were one with Christ, living and walking according to Christ. At the same time, he presented himself to them as their begetting father<sup>7</sup>. His attitude in Corinth was in weakness and in fear and in much trembling<sup>8</sup>. His experiences in Christ were bountiful, as the dealing hand of Christ was upon him.

In his heart, he experienced various emotions according to the Corinthians' situation and need. He was in both grief and joy<sup>9</sup>. He was in despair and comfort<sup>10</sup>. Surely his heart was enlarged toward them<sup>11</sup>. The exercise of his apostleship did not come merely from the riches he had, or the maturity he possessed, or the power he demonstrated. Rather, through his uplifted humanity, he reconciled the misled and distracted believers back to God<sup>12</sup>.

Paul always honored the local churches. Though the church in Corinth was in a mess, even to the point of devastation, the apostle would address them as "the church of God which is in Corinth." He considered them as having been sanctified in Christ Jesus, and as such, regardless of their condition, these called saints were deserving of grace and peace.<sup>13</sup> Paul thanked God concerning them since they were enriched in Christ in all utterance and knowledge<sup>14</sup>. Even to such a degraded church Paul would testify that the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them and that they were not lacking in any gift.<sup>15</sup> Paul was assured that the Lord would confirm them until the end, unreprouvable in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>16</sup>. How marvelous and encouraging are these words to the church in Corinth! Paul had the spiritual insight to see the core of God's operation which goes beyond all the evidence of the Corinthians' feebleness, weakness and limitation.

In writing to the Corinthians, the first problem Paul addressed was their flesh, which was ruled by their self-life. Divisions in the church issue from the self-life<sup>17</sup>, yet Paul said they were fleshly. Paul was honest to mention the source of the news of their division - "the household of Chloe."<sup>18</sup> He was frank - "is Christ divided?"<sup>19</sup> Then he stressed the secret of oneness - knowing nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified<sup>20</sup>. As an apostle to the church, he was with the Corinthians in weakness, fear and much trembling. He did not use persuasive words of wisdom so that their faith would stand only in the power of God. Paul was a spiritual man. He spoke divine wisdom only to those who were full grown<sup>21</sup>. He discerned all things, but he himself was discerned by no one<sup>22</sup>.

Such a spiritual man did not exalt himself nor did he try to gain followers for himself. In fact, Paul mentioned Apollos in a very sweet way: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth."<sup>23</sup> Eventually he testified, "So then let no one boast in men, for all things are yours." In other words, all the ministers, possessing rich ministries, are for the local churches - whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, all are yours, but you are Christ's, and Christ is God's<sup>24</sup>. How sweet is this view. Paul is ours. Apollos is ours. Cephas is ours. Yet we belong only to Christ. The operation of all the ministries must produce local churches which exist and live only unto Christ.

Furthermore Paul presented himself as a servant of Christ and a steward of the mystery of God. He desired to be found faithful before God, caring little that he should be examined by the church in Corinth<sup>25</sup>. He beseeched the saints in Corinth to consider that he and Apollos were just ministers<sup>26</sup>. He was so desirous that the Corinthians would reign and that he would reign with them. Paul presented himself as last of all, as doomed to death. He was weak, dishonored, still in hunger and thirst, still in nakedness, still buffeted, and still wandering without a home. He labored, working with his own hands. Reviled, he blessed; persecuted, he endured. Defamed, he exhorted. He was the off-scouring of the world and the scum of all things<sup>27</sup>. An uplifted humanity leads to this kind of existence. And in this kind of existence there is no self-interest, no self-exalting, no competition and no work.

He presented himself in such a way as to admonish them that they should never say they were "of Paul."<sup>28</sup> This was the way in which Paul dealt with the Corinthians' self-life in their flesh. Yet at the same time he reminded them that he was not their guide in Christ - he was their father. He exhorted them to be imitators of him, imitating a selfless living in an uplifted humanity.<sup>29</sup>

Paul knew that the self life in the flesh can develop into the corrupted flesh. In Corinth we see fornication<sup>30</sup>, lawsuits against one another<sup>31</sup>, abuses in eating<sup>32</sup>, and even burning with physical desire<sup>33</sup>. But Paul's way to deal with these problems was through

an uplifted humanity. Consider how Paul dealt with the brother who married his stepmother. Paul mourned when he heard the news, but he knew he must deal with the situation. He said he was with them in the spirit when they assembled together, and he judged such a one, delivering him to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. This action was not merely for discipline. Rather, it was for the sinning brother's spirit to be saved in the day of the Lord<sup>34</sup>. He asked the Corinthians to remove the evil one from among themselves<sup>35</sup>. But when such a one repented, he testified, "If I cause you sorrow, who then is the one who makes me glad, except the one who is made sorrowful by me?"<sup>36</sup> He reminded them, "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with excessive sorrow."<sup>37</sup> How clearly we see Paul's uplifted humanity. How sweet is this exercise!

Throughout the book, Paul handled so many issues in such a human way. Concerning immoral conduct, Paul testified, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit."<sup>38</sup> Concerning marriage Paul said, "God has called us in peace,"<sup>39</sup> so that each one should walk according to what the Lord apportioned to him.<sup>40</sup> When Paul addressed the problem of eating food sacrificed to idols<sup>41</sup>, he dealt with it in a human way. He responded, "If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he has not yet come to know as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him."<sup>42</sup> To Paul, love is much more crucial than knowledge. To love God is much more crucial than diet. He also said, "All things are lawful to me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything."<sup>43</sup> Yet eventually he testified, "If food stumbles my brother, I shall by no means eat meat forever."<sup>44</sup>

We also see Paul's humanity in the way he addressed the matter of his status among them. Paul said, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? & for you [the church in Corinth] in the Lord are the seal of my apostleship."<sup>45</sup> But then he also added, in such a human way, "Yet we did not use this right, but we bear all things

that we may not cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ.”<sup>46</sup>  
What an apostle! What humanity!

He concluded his dealing with all their problems by testifying, “Though I am free from all, I have enslaved myself to all that I might gain the more& to the Jews I became as a Jew& to those under law, as under law& to those without law, as without law& to the weak I became weak. To all men I have become all things that I might by all means save some.” Paul did not focus on issues; rather he was desperate to live out the humanity of Jesus so that he might become a fellow partaker of the gospel.<sup>47</sup> Paul was so pure. His person and his way of living were one with his ministry.

Finally we see Paul’s uplifted humanity when he dealt with the natural life in the flesh related to God’s administration in matters like head covering<sup>48</sup> and spiritual gifts<sup>49</sup>. He besought the Corinthians to be imitators of him as he also was an imitator of Christ.<sup>50</sup> Paul became all things to all men, not seeking his own advantage<sup>51</sup>, and he taught the Corinthians the most excellent way of love<sup>52</sup>. Concerning the manifestation of spiritual gifts, even though he counted himself “to be inferior to the super apostles in nothing,”<sup>53</sup> he still testified about himself, “I am the least of the apostles.”<sup>54</sup>

Paul saw God’s administration according to his uplifted humanity. He saw the organic operation of gifts in the humanity of Jesus. Paul had no position in view. He did not struggle or strive to gain something for himself. He was not rebellious nor did he even show a sign of competition. In fact, he declared that he was not fit to be called an apostle: “who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”<sup>55</sup> But he also testified, “By the grace of God I am what I am.”<sup>56</sup> Paul did not serve according to his natural life, but in an uplifted humanity in the grace of God: “I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.”

**VERSE REFERENCES**

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