

# **TO SERVE IN HUMANITY WITH DIVINITY**

**By Titus Chu**

## **MESSAGE SIX: THE APOSTLE PAUL'S UPLIFTED HUMANITY WITH DIVINITY IN FIRST CORINTHIANS (3)**

### **PAUL'S ADMONITION IN AN UPLIFTED HUMANITY**

The church in Corinth needed to be rebuked, scolded, even seriously judged, because as a local church they had become divided out of their self-life. Yet Paul's exercise was so gracious in his uplifted humanity issuing out of the constituted divine attributes. He became such a person filled with the wrath of righteousness, yet he expressed only loving-kindness. He presented to them himself, the marvelous work of Christ, the riches of his ministry, and the healthy existence of a local church. He also presented to them his life-giving labor in faithfulness and in loving-kindness. All of these points are explained in the following paragraphs. We should especially pay attention to the sentence, "He became such a person filled with the wrath of righteousness, yet he expressed only loving-kindness." In this epistle Paul was upset, and many times he made hard statements. Yet he expressed only loving-kindness. Sometimes he was hard on the saints, but quickly there was a humanity behind it so that the saints had the ability to take it.

### **By Beseeching**

He begins with “I beseech you, brothers... that you all speak the same thing.” What a beginning, a beginning of love and gentleness in an uplifted humanity. His word indicated that he partook of their growing pains. Paul, with his maturity, partook of their agonizing mistakes. How sweet is this: no scolding, no rebuking, no judging, but a beseeching with full understanding. How sweet and how Christ-like is such a serving life. When the saints are caught in their self, we become part of it and grow with them, accompanying them as they go through the growing pains. This is the secret of serving. This is the secret of producing anything that has eternal value.

For Paul to beseech the Corinthians means that he was part of them. Paul could say, “I know that as you grow, it is normal for you to have problems. But I am not above you. I partake of your growing pains. I partake of your mistakes.” Many times older ones are quick to correct young ones. On one hand we may need to tell younger saints when something is improper, but we must partake of their growing pains. Parents often experience this when their kids go through a hard period of growth. Sometimes they just need a shoulder which they can cry on. We might think what they are going through is not so difficult, but it is to them. We are tempted to say, “Why are you bothered by this? You aren’t even facing real life yet. The life that is ahead of you is much harder than this. Don’t be so bothered.” But we can’t say this. We just have to be with them, hug them, and let them cry until they feel they are relieved. In principle this is also true of raising up the saints in the church life.

We should consider, did the Corinthians really desire to be divided? No. They just desired to be secure. They were trying to find their place and their importance. They were seeking something to boast in. To them it was not a small thing to say that they were of Paul or of Apollos, and it was not a small thing for others to say they were of Christ. It meant something to them.

So Paul said to them, “I beseech you.” This means, “I know how you feel. I beseech you that you all speak the same thing. I partake of your growing pains.”

We need to realize that every brother is going to make a lot of mistakes, especially the young ones. The ones who are bright and talented are going to make the most mistakes. If we are serving them, we should always provide a shoulder for them to cry on. We have to grow up with them. Young ones should even be given the opportunity to make big mistakes, because that is how they learn. There is nothing wrong with making mistakes, but there is something wrong when the young ones make mistakes but have no shoulder to cry on. They are in distress, they are in disappointment, but there is no older one’s shoulder they can rely on. This is the reason many young ones in the church life don’t grow properly, because they can’t find an older one’s shoulder. We need to see Paul’s exercise with the Corinthians. He said, “I beseech you, brothers, that you all speak the same thing.” He had a lot more to say about the problems, but he began by entering into their situation and coming to where they were. He didn’t say, “I command you,” but “I beseech you.” He was saying, “I know where you are. I know how you feel. Please understand me. My shoulder is here with you.” If we don’t have this attitude, then those we serve can never be raised up properly.

### **By Presenting His Operation**

Paul reminded them that when he announced the gospel he did not use wisdom of speech, but rather the word of the cross, as it is the power of God. Paul didn’t go to Corinth as if he knew what to do. He preached only Christ crucified as He is the power of God and the wisdom of God. In other words Paul’s preaching was very focused. He didn’t come to the Corinthians with great speeches. He was not like a professor. His main burden was to minister Christ, the one crucified, to the Corinthians. Paul’s word to them became the word of the cross.

Out of the word of the cross came three things - righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He further reminded them that of God they are in Christ Jesus and that this very Christ has become to them from God righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Righteousness is for our past, sanctification is for our present, and the redemption of our body is for our future. -By Presenting his Ministry- Paul determined to know nothing among the Corinthians except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It seems that Paul was too spiritual. When he served, didn't he have any sort of plan? Paul said, "For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). How do we apply this? We may have a lot of plans in our serving life. Should we just give them up, so that we can only know Christ, and this One crucified? We might ask Paul, "If you only knew Christ, then how did you decide to go to Corinth? Who told you to go? If you didn't have a plan, then how did you decide your route?" There is nothing wrong with a plan if it is firmly attached to Christ. There is nothing wrong with a plan if its execution is in the principle of the cross. We should be able to say, "I have a plan. I have spent so much time in prayer. I have had so much consideration in the Lord's presence. I have been abiding in Christ. He has burdened me and charged me. I feel I have His leading to go in this direction." This is right. But if we say, "Let's do the work! Let's labor on the campus!" then that is a mistake. We do need a plan in our serving. However, a plan can be of Christ, and a plan can be of man. What we plan to labor, is it out of our bright mentality, or is it out of Christ? Do we have a burden and a leading from the Lord? That is what counts.

Many times we are too spiritual and theoretical. We think, "We shouldn't do a thing. We'll just wait for the Lord's leading." Then many times we are the opposite. We become so fleshly. "We are going to do it! Let's take over the campus!" We need Paul's realization: "When I came among you I knew nothing but Christ and Him crucified. I only knew Christ. I only knew the cross." Paul could say, "I operate according to Christ. I behave according to the principle of the cross."

We need Christ to generate the leading and operation in our serving life, and then we must carry out this operation in the principle of the cross. We should always ask ourselves, “Am I following Christ? And am I putting myself to death?” This takes us beyond the matter of encouragement or discouragement in our serving life. If someone asks us, “Are you encouraged or discouraged,” we should answer, “Neither.” A person on the cross does not live by such a feeling. We should not live by encouragement or discouragement, because that is the self-life. Instead we should ask the Lord, “Lord, do I know You? Lord, am I on the cross more than before? Am I still so concerned about counting fruit, or am I putting myself in the place of death?” That is where we have the real effectiveness in our serving. We don’t care if we are successful, and we don’t care if we are defeated. We don’t even care if we are fruitful or fruitless. We are thankful for everything that comes from God, because we know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. This is the secret of serving. Christ becomes the operating drive within us, and the cross becomes our practical application. Our responsibility is not the bearing of fruit. Our responsibility is to abide in the will of God. Paul was such a person. This is why he could be so strong: “I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified.”

He didn’t go to them as if the almighty God had sent him, neither did he go with all the riches in his education and biblical knowledge. Paul didn’t say, “Here I come!” If Paul wanted to subdue people he only needed to use a few Greek words to impress them. But he didn’t do this. He didn’t go to them with his glorious visions and revelations and neither did he go with all his heavenly, spiritual, and mysterious experiences. He had all these things. It is hard for us to believe that there is such a man as Paul. He is so rich. But even still, he didn’t go to them in such a way. Rather, he testified, “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” This verse shows us the cross. We might ask, “What was Paul in trembling? He had nothing to tremble about, because the Lord had sent him.”

Yet Paul was in weakness, fear, and much trembling because he was afraid that he could not be fully in the operation of God. He was a real God-man, a mature God-man. He had been equipped with all spiritual riches and experiences. He could have easily, in Christ, done a marvelous work. Why should he be in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling? Where did these sensations come from? Why should he even have these feelings? We can only say that this was an uplifted humanity produced out of the rich, divine attributes.

When the divine attributes are so rich in us, they don't give us the guarantee of success. Rather they cause us to become very much afraid. We become fearful and tell the Lord, "Lord, I'm afraid I might do things apart from you." The very strength of God as a divine attribute turned within him into weakness. When we enjoy God's strength, we realize, "Lord, if for one minute I depart from Your presence, I become nothing." This means we become weak. We no longer live according to our natural life, but according to the divine attributes. The very victory of Christ as a divine attribute turned within him into fear. Because the Lord is so victorious, we are in fear. We are afraid that we might shame the Lord's victory. We know and have experienced that Christ is the victorious one, yet we are so aware that we can shame the Lord's victory. So we tell the Lord, "Lord, have mercy on me that Your victory would not be frustrated by my self-life. The very resurrection as a divine attribute turned within him into much trembling. Eventually he declared, "my speech and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and in power." Because we are in fear, in weakness and in trembling we cannot use persuasive words of wisdom. If we can use our own persuasive words we don't need God. We can depart from Him and do it ourselves. But when we are so much one with Christ, to the point where we only know Christ, then this becomes our reality. This is the high and profound experience of the apostle Paul, but it should also be our experience. What an uplifted humanity! What a godly exercise!

The apostle's ministry does speak God's wisdom in a mystery to those who are full-grown. He declared that to him and other apostles God has revealed such things through the Spirit. In his ministry to them Paul didn't share with them as if they were full-grown. He testified that "the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." Here is a simple presentation, not even with exposition. In other words Paul never explained this phrase beyond simply stating it: "The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." By this he denied himself; he put all his labor underneath the work of the Spirit. When Paul was confronting a congregation with all kinds of people, he recognized that there were many things beyond man's understanding. Paul's attitude was, "The Spirit searches even the depths of God. What can I do?" How sweet is this - there are the depths of God, yet it is the Spirit who searches. Men, including the apostles, can only be receivers. Even Paul himself was a receiver.

We have to realize that when a brother is ministering, it is really the Spirit who is ministering. If a brother who is ministering thinks he can just use his own words, he is no longer in fear, in weakness, and in trembling. Consider the great variety of so many saints. Some are old, some are young, some are barely saved, some are educated, some are from different countries, some have peculiar dispositions. In ministering to such a variety of brothers and sisters, how can a ministering brother trust in his own words? It is only the Spirit that counts. It is the Spirit who searches all things, even the depths of God. What does God desire? What does He really want to do? What is in His heart? How does He want to operate? Only the Spirit knows. So when a brother ministers, he must realize, "I am on the cross. I am putting myself in the place of death." He shouldn't have the feeling, "Listen to me! I know the answer!" Instead, his speaking is dependent on the Lord's mercy.

Furthermore, not only those hearing receive something, but even the ministering brother receives something. If after a brother shares, he thinks, "Hallelujah! I got my burden released!" then there is something wrong. Who can meet the needs of all the saints? Only a fool would say, "I can." A spiritual man would

say, “Lord, I’m in fear and trembling. I know that the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. My place is only to die. Only You can meet all of these needs.” Then even the speaker becomes a receiver. How human is this spiritual man. How deep is this apostle in the depths of God.

Furthermore, he testified that his ministry concerned the things of God, which are only known by the Spirit of God. Without the Spirit, no one can know the things of God. He had them, he possessed them, he was rich in them, yet in the uplifted humanity, he also had full realization that they were given to him by God graciously. Paul could say, “I have all these riches, but they are not for me to boast. It is by God’s grace that I have received all of this.” How different is this from the fleshly declaration, “I am of Paul.” Eventually, Paul had to testify that the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no man and that he had the mind of Christ. What does the spiritual man discern? The mind of Christ. What is the mind of Christ? The economy of God. We know that our God is triune. He is one God, with three “supports.” We usually focus on the “supports,” but we don’t see God. There is God the Father as the source, there is God the Son as the course, and there is God the Spirit as the flow. Then who is Christ? Christ is the totality of the Triune God. We cannot separate the Trine God. When we begin to enjoy the Son, we enjoy the totality of the Triune God. That is why we say, “Enjoy Christ,” because there is only one God, and the totality of this one God is Christ.

Here Paul says that the spiritual man discerns all things but he himself is discerned by no man. We like this verse because it makes the spiritual person mysterious: “You can’t discern me, but I can discern you.” It doesn’t mean this. A spiritual man discerns all things because he has the mind of Christ.

This Christ is the totality of the Triune God in His economy. That is why the Bible refers to the “Savior God” (1 Tim. 2:3). We usually say that the Lord Jesus is our Savior, but the Bible tells us that God is our Savior. When we enjoy this very Christ, we receive the entire Triune God as the source, as the course,



and as the flow, with His economy. A spiritual man discerns all things because in the universe there is really only one thing: God's economy. A spiritual man only cares for God's economy. Because he looks at everything according to God's economy, he discerns all things. What a realm - the realm of being a spiritual man, the realm of having the mind of Christ. What an exercise - no mocking, no despising, no bragging, no boasting, but a simple presentation of a genuine constitution and of a deep truth.

### **By Presenting His Labor**

Paul was honest. He let the Corinthians know that he considered them as fleshly because there was jealousy and strife among them. "For you are still fleshly. For if there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and do you not walk according to the manner of man?" (1 Cor. 3:3). They were still babies and not yet spiritual men. He responded to their declaration, "I am of Paul and I of Apollos," by saying, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?" In other words, who are these men? Here we would answer, "They are the great servants, they are the establishers of the truth, they are pioneers of the Lord's work, they are THE apostles." Wouldn't we consider Paul and Apollos in such a great category? But what was Paul's response? He responded, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth." He was nothing, merely a minister, a planter. How gracious was Paul in his uplifted humanity. He could have easily pointed to Corinth and declared, "Look, this is the fruit of my labor. This is the church that came out of my labor." Even though he honored his labor before God, as he knew he would receive a reward according to his labor, yet he gave no credit to himself before men.

Paul didn't say to them, "Without me there is no church here." He honored his own labor, yet before men he did not give himself any credit.

He was privileged to be God's fellow worker, yet he knew the church was God's cultivated land, God's building. Paul would say to the Corinthians, "Your existence is for two reasons: you are a farm for your own growth, and you are a building for the Lord's abode. Your growth should cause you to become an abode, a dwelling place, for the Lord." Paul was so clear. "I am just a planter. I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth. And who are you? You are God's cultivated land, God's building." We should also have this realization: "I may be like Paul, a planter. I may be like Apollos, a waterer. But whatever growth there is with the ones I serve comes from God."

If we were to raise up a church we might think, "This church is mine!" No, the church is God's cultivated land, God's building. No matter how we serve, it is God who causes the growth. We should tell the Lord, "I want to invest all my life in serving the church, whether it is to plant or to water. But please, Lord, You must cause the growth." This is a very balanced view. The Corinthians were arguing that they belonged to Paul or Apollos, but Paul said that he was just a planter, and Apollos was just a waterer. It was God who caused the growth. On one hand we should appreciate the leading ones and serving brothers who labor among us. We cannot say, "God gave us the growth, so who are these serving brothers? Who do they think they are?" That is an ugly expression of the flesh. But at the same time it is not healthy for us to say, "I belong to a certain brother. He raised up the church in my locality." We should appreciate the serving ones who raise us up, but we do not belong to any man. We only belong to God. Again, Paul was privileged to be God's fellow worker, yet he knew the church was God's cultivated land, God's building. What a selfless life! How sweet it is to testify that some brother planted, other brothers watered, but God, and only God, caused the growth.

Paul further reminded them that he, as a wise master builder, laid a good foundation according to the grace of God. This foundation of Jesus Christ can only be built upon with gold, silver, and precious stones and not with wood, grass, or stubble. The wood, grass, and stubble represent things which come

quickly. We are always looking for a quick blessing or a quick work, but we should not trust in that. The principle in our serving is that God is very big. He can take as long as He wants. We should not expect things to happen so quickly in our serving. That is to build with wood, grass, and stubble. We should be very careful how we build. He knew that there will be fire and he was afraid, lest any work be consumed by it. For their sake he could not be wise or have the wisdom of the world. He did not boast in himself. When he looked at the fruit of his labor he could only tell them, “all things are yours.” Paul would say to the Corinthians, “Everything belongs to you. It is foolish to consider that you belong to someone else.” How marvelous that all things are ours! Paul is ours, Apollos is ours, Cephas is ours, Watchmen Nee is ours, Witness Lee is ours, and we are Christ’s and Christ is God’s. Praise the Lord, all of these great servants of the Lord are ours. And we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. Everything belongs to us, yet we belong to God.

### **By Presenting Himself as a Steward of the Mysteries of God**

Paul desired that he should be accounted as a servant of Christ and as a steward of the mystery of God. From his side he desired to be found faithful. He was not concerned about being examined by the saints in Corinth or even by man’s day - the present age. In other words, the church in Corinth did not welcome Paul, and some there even became critical of him. But Paul didn’t care if he was examined by them. If we were asked to go to a certain place to labor we would usually consider whether we would be welcomed. We would always prefer to go to the places that welcome us. We should learn from Paul even to go to a place that doesn’t welcome us.

When Paul was laboring in a place it was not his consideration whether he would be welcomed or not. Even if some were criticizing him, misunderstanding him, or rejecting him, he didn’t care. He wouldn’t even examine himself. This is surprising. People usually examine themselves a lot, but Paul would not do this. He was a man who lived before the Lord and waited for the Lord’s coming.

By using himself and Apollos as models, he expected the saints to also apply to themselves the comparison he made. Is there a sign of living in the self-life with this apostle? No! Is there a sign of self-celebrating or self-bragging? No! Rather, the apostle Paul placed himself as a close co-worker of Apollos, at the same level with the same commitment. We should realize how large Paul's heart was. He placed himself on the same level as Apollos and said they were co-workers. Yet Apollos was actually a professional "headache-giver" to Paul. It was largely because of Apollos that the church in Corinth was divided. Then later, when Paul tried to send Apollos to Corinth, he would not go. It would have been easy for Paul to say to Apollos, "Who do you think you are? You are my students' student. I was the one who raised up Priscilla and Aquila. When they met you, you were still teaching the baptism of John. It was the ones I raised up who helped you so much. So if I want to send you to Corinth, you must go!" It seems that Apollos was with Paul and his co-workers, but not in submission. Instead, all he did was give Paul headaches. Yet Paul placed himself as a close co-worker of Apollos, at the same level with the same commitment. Paul would still say, "I planted, Apollos watered." Is it really true that Paul and Apollos were at the same level, with the same commitment? Should Paul say such a thing as this? It seems more accurate for Paul to say to the Corinthians, "Between Apollos and myself, how can you not choose me? If you are going to make a selection, select me. Without me, there's no Priscilla and Aquila, and without them there is no Apollos. He was still preaching the repentance of John when they found him. And now he doesn't even listen to me." Paul didn't do this. He said, "I planted, Apollos watered."

Paul handled things so graciously. Even though Apollos caused problems and wouldn't listen to Paul, yet Paul would still say that they were close co-workers. The apostle Paul might have been much deeper, much richer, and much more operative compared to his co-worker; they surely were not on the same level. But Paul had such a high humanity. Even though Apollos caused problems, Paul was gracious to him. Paul placed himself at the same level as Apollos, with the same commitment.

A person who is in the flesh, especially the self-centered flesh, desires to choose and is puffed up on behalf of one, against the other. A desire to choose between co-workers is a sign of the flesh. A person short of Christ will be a person who is filled, has become rich, and may even have an imagined reign. What is an 'imagined reign'? It is when a person is so free in his exercise and yet is so confident that the Lord is with him. Sometimes a brother might propose something foolish, but he insists that he is so one with Christ. If such a brother came to us we would think, "You're so sure of yourself. Go ahead and try it. See what happens." But to this kind of person, Paul had no mockery, no rebuke. Rather, his statement to such a fleshly situation was simple, "I would have it indeed that you did reign, that we also might reign with you."

Yet, when Paul would testify of himself and the other apostles, they were only a spectacle to the world. Paul was saying, "If you can reign, if you can be kings, I would truly be happy. But let me tell you who we are as servants of the Lord." They were fools, they were weak, they were dishonored, they lived in hunger and thirst. They were naked, buffeted, and wandered without a home. They labored, working with their own hands. Can any of us live such a life? On one hand we should come to this conclusion about ourselves, that this will be our life. Yet to live this way seems almost impossible in the United States because we are so comfortable. Reviled they blessed, persecuted they endured, defamed they exhorted; they became as the offscouring of the world and the scum of all things, until now. This description would bring us to tears.

We should pray, "Lord, thank You for such a servant as Paul. Lord, when I hear this I realize that my life is too settled. I am so comfortable." When a full-timer moves to a new place, the first thing he does is take care of so many practical things. He makes sure that his new house is comfortable, and then settles in. How far this is from Paul's spirit.

What a humanity! Even what an uplifted humanity - “until now.” Paul would even use the words “until now.” Paul could say to the Corinthians, “All of these things I describe to you are not my experience occasionally, or yesterday, but today. I experience these things all the time, even until now. This is just my life.” Full-timers especially should realize that there are no “good days” waiting for them. If we want to serve the Lord, then in principle this should be our life. Yet he was honest to exhort them that in Christ Jesus he had begotten them through the gospel. To them he was not one of the ten thousand guides in Christ. We like to follow people. We like to say, “Oh, this conference was so good. I got so much help from this message.” We need conferences and messages, but we also must realize that there can be thousands of guides, but there is only one father. To the Corinthians, Paul was their father. He beseeched them to be imitators of him. Paul wanted the Corinthians to learn from him. “When I am going through all these things, when I am hungry and buffeted and reviled, dear ones in Corinth, please remember that I am your father. Don’t just appreciate someone’s marvelous preaching. Remember that someone begot you.” He even sent Timothy to them to be their help. He warned those who had become puffed up. His ministry brought the kingdom of God, not in speech but in power. Paul told them to remember that the kingdom of God was not in speech, but in power. He warned them in the righteousness and loving-kindness of God - “Should I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness?” Paul had the right to discipline them, but he wanted to come to them in love and in a spirit of meekness. This portrait of Paul, struggling in an uplifted humanity with commitment, should be who we are, our being, and this should be our service.

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