

*Passing the peace*

**Disciples of Jesus have a defining confidence in him.**

This last week as my small group discussed the church being a “creative minority” in our world, we were lamenting the changes over time in the morality of the culture. There are things that are better, for sure, but immorality is bold and widespread. Can you or can't you let the kids play in the neighborhood like we did growing up?!

Evil is called good and good evil.

Being the weird guy at the table, I was wondering if we should actually celebrate this reality - because it gets us closer to the experience of the first century. Is this our Corinthian moment?!

The church has revealed itself to be remarkably similar. “I am of Paul” says some, others “I am of Apollos,” and still others “I am of Christ!” We pick our camp and tribalism prevents the unity our Savior prayed for. There is division over things not worth dividing for and unease that is hard to describe... other than the desperation before revival!

The very ground we are supposed to stand on seems to be shifting constantly.

As a pastor, I have had a unique front-row seat to all of this in 2020.

"Prediction: In the next two years there will be a large exodus of pastors from the pastorate. Every pastor I talk with is exhausted and, to a degree, frustrated. Theological and ideological differences between pastor and parishioners is increasing. It's not sustainable." Nate Pyle on Twitter

According to the interaction with these ideas in response it seems he is on to something. There is constant comparison, picking sides, and no one can tell for sure who is part of their church or not! While I have tasted of this tension, I am hopeful, and I think there is a more sustainable way. And it's not just pastors, it's for all Christians.

Paul, under assault for the fruitfulness of his ministry, reveals with his letter the frustration and exhaustion he has experienced for the sake of the church. But he also reveals where he takes confidence, what his pastoral heart is made up of.

From it we too can take heart, he can get through, and see Christ glorified.

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## **2 Corinthians 10:7-18**

“Look at what is before your eyes.” Pay attention... Paul has transitioned to pleading with the unrepentant in Corinth. Those that have attempted to tarnish his reputation and honestly, hamper the expansion of the Kingdom in their midst by focusing on fleshly, or worldly things as priority over the gospel of Jesus. And all of this could have been written yesterday!

“Many Christian leaders have been so taken with the styles of leadership they see in politics and the entertainment industry that they unthinkingly have transferred these secular ways into the church. In Paul’s day, his enemies in Corinth had so effectively read their Greco-Roman culture back into their Christianity that they interpreted the gospel in terms of their values. They boasted in the preacher’s presence and bearing; they boasted in rhetorical eloquence; they flashed their resume and endorsements and letters of commendation; they bragged of their large honoraria; they boasted of their connectedness that inferred greatness by association; and they compared themselves with one another.” -Hughes

It might be getting old, all this talk of the challenge to Paul’s ministry. Has him pleading by the heart of Christ that they would repent. And now he moves onto the heart formed by Christ for the flourishing of the church.

While this is certainly about what to be rooted in as a pastor, or what to look for in one, it’s for all of us as disciples of Jesus.

Paul shows his heart for the church, over and against the false apostles stirring up division. He does so by recounting his calling, remaining consistent in the gospel, and finding his confidence in the one he proclaims.

## 1. Calling

Things had devolved so badly that some of these so-called teachers were insinuating that Paul wasn't a Christian.

But Paul won't back down, he is going to minister, lead and love this church because Jesus called him to it. While detractors have trouble with his claim of apostolic authority, Paul is rooted in his identity in Christ as a minister, not by his ability or skill but by Christ's call.

**2 Corinthians 3:4–6** “Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. [5] Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, [6] who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” (ESV)

These are the credentials that matter - not education, or title, or pedigree, but the authority that the Lord gave for “building you up and not for destroying you. Of this, he is not ashamed.

This then is the purpose that comes with the calling. To build up. To bring them to maturity in Christ. This is not to collect a fan base or become a celebrity among the church. This is not to fleece the people out of their hard-earned money. This is not to take advantage. But to strengthen, sharpen, and encourage this church.

It's the purpose of the ministry of the church.

**1 Thessalonians 5:11** “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” (ESV)

**Romans 14:19** “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” (ESV)

Calls to repentance can feel like it is bringing people down (if we have a wrong view of repentance.) But warning people you love away from the idolatry that is ruining them is protecting rather than destroying.

Corinthians wanted super status and some claim on self-righteousness fame, so their ears itched for whoever would appease them. Not Paul.

“Everyone wants to be clothed with power but no one wants to be stripped of self.” - Leonard Ravenhill

For building up, that the gospel would grow roots and spread in their hearts and beyond them. And this ministry is tied to an ancient promise.

“We must understand here that Paul’s boast was in the authority of the new covenant ministry that he had been expounding and celebrating from chapter 2 on. We know this because his words “for building you up” are from the introduction to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant where Jeremiah says, “I will watch over them to build and plant, declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 31:28b).” -Hughes

Jesus has established the new covenant by his blood shed on the cross, and Paul is a participant in its fulfillment as he calls the church to be formed in Christ.

So it is not about how great Paul and his apostolic band are, it is about the church being the area of influence Jesus has given them. His heart toward them is keeps him coming back, laboring for them because he is called to it.

The pastoral heart is also consistent.

## **2. Consistency**

We touched on this last week, how some were saying Paul was bold in his letters but meek in person. But he says that home or away the game plan is the same!

**2 Corinthians 10:10–11** “For they say, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.” [11] Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.” (ESV)

Consistency is vital for the pastor. Duplicity, telling everyone what they want to hear, is dangerous and can’t be sustained forever. Paul models steady sameness in ministry. It is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Not tricks, no lights or smoke, just Jesus.

**1 Corinthians 2:1–5** “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. [2] For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. [3] And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, [4] and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, [5] so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (ESV)

There is nothing to Paul but the good news of Jesus. That there is a separation between humanity and our Creator and he comes to set it right. Jesus lives a life of perfect obedience to the Father and gives himself for us on the cross. To solve sin, grant forgiveness and righteousness, and bring us to life through his resurrection and the empowerment of his Spirit.

This is Paul’s story. There were varying results. Lystra, the crowd thought he was a god. Others wanted to stone him. Preaching through the night, a young man would fall asleep and fall on his head. In Corinth, the church would be born. Each and every time the message was the same. Paul didn’t play to the crowd. He brought Jesus and nothing else. Imitating Christ, he invited others to join in.

His opponents recommend each other by comparing their abilities, spiritual gifts, and experiences, all of which are irrelevant for establishing apostolic authority in a church. “The false apostles had no desire to measure themselves by the objective criteria used by Paul - allegiance to the gospel, conformity to Christ’s character, and participation in Christ’s sufferings.” -Hughes

And his consistency develops into growth. And he hints at it here. **2 Corinthians 10:15–16** “We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, [16] so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence.” (ESV)

He didn’t want to swoop in and take credit for someone else’s work or calling. His pastoral heart desired to experience increased influence among those he is called to.

Oh man, I feel this. Years ago I was talking with another pastor lamenting how some students had become excited because they had become awakened to the truth of the gospel by someone else’s teaching! “I have been saying the same thing to them for years!” We determine to “preach it until they hear it and rejoice whenever they do!”

What you evangelize, you want to see catalyzed in others. And they become your letters of recommendation. You can imagine how it feels... it would be like telling everyone you knew what a great movie *The Greatest Showman* is, and then months later one of those people saying to you “you need to watch the *Greatest Showman*, it is amazing!”

When his influence increases though, when there is trust, and stubbornly committed relationships, then mission happens. The preaching of the gospel goes on even to lands beyond. Maturity develops and unity is experienced, everyone on the same page.

It begins, is gained, and continues with consistency - no other message than the grace of Christ.

But where the pastoral heart stands apart is where it finds its confidence.

### **3. Confidence**

The church is confused by the swirl of comparison, and the loudest voices, measuring themselves by one another (by how of a platform they have, etc), have no understanding. They end up against the knowledge of God.

Paul says that boasting, confident declaration, should not be in the person, in the one claiming ministry, but in Jesus.

Again it seems that Paul is taking his cues from Jeremiah... **Jeremiah 9:23–24** “Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, [24] but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (ESV)

God is known for what he does. Let’s those that boast, boast in the Lord.

It’s not about us. It’s all about Jesus. Our calling. Our consistent message. Our confidence. And it is from him that we find our approval, not the crowds or opposition.

**2 Corinthians 10:18** “For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.” (ESV)

This is what kills the frustration and exhaustion. This is what enthuses the pastoral heart, this is what brightens every believer. Jesus approves of you.

The games of comparison can be over. Because of the cross of Christ, you stand approved before the throne of heaven. You are claimed by Christ, kept by him, and empowered by his Spirit to go on. To keep trusting, to keep growing, to keep preaching his grace and goodness.

Followers of Jesus have a defining confidence in him and it is source in his approval of us. In Jesus, you stand approved.

This is why Paul can keep going. This is why he can call the church to something better. This is why he doesn't hold grudges against those that have criticized or abandoned him. He has Jesus. And he wants them to have him, unadulterated, too.

“The Lord commends his people by working in and through their lives.” And because we find our approval in him we are free to let him do his work, to yield more of our self to him for his glory.

From his calling, with consistency, the pastoral heart, really the heart of every believer, is meant to find its confidence in Jesus. This is the invitation today.

**Take heart**, find your confidence in Christ. Let his mercy and grace bring you humbly closer to him. That Jesus would be your center. That the comparison that whispers in your ear would be silenced by his commendation of you as you trust in him.

From this confidence, **build together**. Set aside self, get in on the calling of the church for its building up. Form stubborn relationships with one another to persevere, to proclaim Jesus to one another, and to take the gospel to lands beyond you.

Watching 100 Mile races and convinced the stories are illustrations of the Christian life... People, not all together normal, take on serious challenges. Don't always succeed but they pick it up and keep going.

This is how we beat the odds. This is how we get there. Embracing our calling, keeping the gospel consistently before us, and taking confidence in Jesus. This is where we hear the “well down my good and faithful servant” because of and in Christ.

## **Disciples of Jesus have a defining confidence in him.**

Another missionary pastor prayed for this kind of consistency and his prayer can be ours.

“Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit, Christ where I arise,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks to me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.  
Salvation is of the Lord.  
Salvation is of the Christ.  
May your salvation, Lord, be ever with us.” - St. Patrick

**Jude 24–25** “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, [25] to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (ESV)