

LOVE TO GROW

NOTHING

ROMANS 8:37-39

There is nothing in this world that can separate you from God's love.

Let that truth soak deep into your heart.

There is nothing you can do to earn His love, and there is nothing you can do to push God's love away.

The mistakes of your past and the mistakes in your future: God sees them all, and over and over again, He chooses to love you.

God's love is secure. It is constant, like the setting of the sun or the rotation of the earth. It is dependable and eternal.

In our broken world filled with broken relationships, love is often more conditional than unconditional. That's not the case with God. God's love is immeasurable. It's beyond "to the moon and back." It's more like "to the moon and beyond." It is limitless. Nothing is more powerful than His love for His children. Others may have rejected you, but God never does. You are secure in His love.

In all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:37-39).

Even when we can't fathom it, His love is sure. Our belief does not hinder His love. Our circumstances do not change His affections for us. He demonstrated His love for us by dying in our place. We are loved by the One who set the earth in motion. Nothing we do will ever change that.

God sees you, knows everything about you, and loves you unconditionally.

The next time you feel unlovable and you doubt whether anyone can love you, read Romans 8:37-39 and let your heart soar. Your doubts can diminish in the light of His perfect love for you.

You are dearly and deeply loved. Nothing will ever change that. Nothing.

the adoption as sons, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the temple worship, and the promises.⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from them, by human descent, came the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever! Amen.

⁶It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all those who are descended from Israel are truly Israel,⁷ nor are all the children Abraham's true descendants; rather **"through Isaac will your descendants be counted."**⁸ This means it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God; rather, the children of promise are counted as descendants.⁹ For this is what the promise declared: **"About a year from now I will return and Sarah will have a son."**¹⁰ Not only that, but when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our ancestor Isaac—¹¹even before they were born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose in election would stand, not by works but by his calling)—¹²it was said to her, **"The older will serve the younger,"**¹³ just as it is written: **"Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."**

¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not!¹⁵ For he says to Moses: **"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."**¹⁶ So then, it does not depend on human desire or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.¹⁷ For the scripture says to Pharaoh: **"For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may demonstrate my power in you, and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth."**¹⁸ So then, God has mercy on whom he chooses to have mercy, and he hardens whom he chooses to harden.

¹⁹You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who has ever resisted his will?"²⁰ But who indeed are you—a mere human being—to talk back to God? **Does what is molded say to the molder, "Why have you made me like this?"**²¹ Has the potter no right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for special use and another for ordinary use?²² But what if God, willing to demonstrate his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath prepared for destruction?²³ And what if he is willing to make known the wealth of his glory on the objects of mercy that he has prepared beforehand for glory—²⁴even us, whom he has called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?²⁵ As he also says in Hosea:

**"I will call those who were not my people, 'My people,'
and I will call her who was unloved, 'My beloved.'"**

²⁶ **"And in the very place where it was said
to them, 'You are not my people,'
there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"**

²⁷And Isaiah cries out on behalf of Israel, **"Though the number of the children of Israel are as the sand of the sea, only the remnant will be saved,²⁸ for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth completely and quickly."**²⁹ Just as Isaiah predicted,

**"If the Lord of Heaven's Armies had
not left us descendants,
we would have become like Sodom,
and we would have resembled Gomorrah."**

REFLECT

Is God just in His actions? Should He have mercy on everyone?

ISRAEL'S REJECTION CULPABLE

³⁰What shall we say then?—that the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness obtained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith, ³¹but Israel even though pursuing a law of righteousness did not attain it. ³²Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but (as if it were possible) by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³just as it is written,

“Look, I am laying in Zion a stone that will cause people to stumble and a rock that will make them fall, yet the one who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

10 Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation. ²For I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not in line with the truth. ³For ignoring the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking instead to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law, with the result that there is righteousness for everyone who believes.

⁵For Moses writes about the righteousness that is by the law: *“The one who does these things will live by them.”* ⁶But the righteousness that is by faith says: *“Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’*” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷or *“Who will descend into the abyss?”* (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”* (that is, the word of faith that we preach), ⁹because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation. ¹¹For the scripture says, *“Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”* ¹²For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call on him. ¹³For *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

¹⁴How are they to call on one they have not believed in? And how are they to believe in one they have not heard of? And how are they to hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, *“How timely is the arrival of those who proclaim the good news.”* ¹⁶But not all have obeyed the good news, for Isaiah says, *“Lord, who has believed our report?”* ¹⁷Consequently faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ.

¹⁸But I ask, have they not heard? Yes, they have: *Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.* ¹⁹But again I ask, didn’t Israel understand? First Moses says, *“I will make you jealous by those who are not a nation; with a senseless nation I will provoke you to anger.”* ²⁰And Isaiah is even bold enough to say, *“I was found by those who did not seek me; I became well known to those who did not ask for me.”* ²¹But about Israel he says, *“All day long I held out my hands to this disobedient and stubborn people!”*

ISRAEL'S REJECTION NOT COMPLETE NOR FINAL

11 So I ask, God has not rejected his people, has he? Absolutely not! For I too am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew! Do you not know what the scripture says about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³“Lord, *they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars; I alone am left and they are seeking my life!*” ⁴But what was the divine response to him? “*I have kept for myself 7,000 people who have not bent the knee to Baal.*”

⁵So in the same way at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶And if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace. ⁷What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was diligently seeking, but the elect obtained it. The rest were hardened, ⁸as it is written,

*“God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear,
to this very day.”*

⁹And David says,

*“Let their table become a snare and trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them;*

¹⁰ *let their eyes be darkened so that they may not see,
and make their backs bend continually.”*

¹¹I ask then, they did not stumble into an irrevocable fall, did they? Absolutely not! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous. ¹²Now if their transgression means riches for the world and their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full restoration bring?

¹³Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Seeing that I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴if somehow I could provoke my people to jealousy and save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶If the first portion of the dough offered is holy, then the whole batch is holy, and if the root is holy, so too are the branches.

¹⁷Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among them and participated in the richness of the olive root, ¹⁸do not boast over the branches. But if you boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹Then you will say, “The branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.” ²⁰Granted! They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but fear! ²¹For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. ²²Notice therefore the kindness and harshness of God—harshness toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. ²³And even they—if they do not continue in their unbelief—will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree?

²⁵For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

*“The Deliverer will come out of Zion;
he will remove ungodliness from Jacob.*

²⁷*And this is my covenant with them,
when I take away their sins.”*

²⁸In regard to the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but in regard to election they are dearly loved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were formerly disobedient to God, but have now received mercy due to their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has consigned all people to disobedience so that he may show mercy to them all.

³³Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how unfathomable his ways!

³⁴*For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?*

³⁵*Or who has first given to God,
that God needs to repay him?*

³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever! Amen.

CONSECRATION OF THE BELIEVER'S LIFE

12 Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. ²Do not be conformed to this present world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may test and approve what is the will of God—what is good and well-pleasing and perfect.

CONDUCT IN HUMILITY

³For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think with sober discernment, as God has distributed to each of you a measure of faith. ⁴For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve the same function, ⁵so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another. ⁶And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If the gift is prophecy, that individual must use it in proportion to his faith. ⁷If it is service, he must serve; if it is teaching, he must teach; ⁸if it is exhortation, he must exhort; if it is contributing, he must do so with sincerity; if it is leadership, he must do so with diligence; if it is showing mercy, he must do so with cheerfulness.

REFLECT

What does it mean to make ourselves a living sacrifice? How do we renew our minds daily?

LOVE TO GROW

TAKING OFF THE MASK

ROMANS 12:4-21

Paul described the church as the body of Christ. Each of us is a part of the body, functioning together with believers all over the world (Rom 12:4). Each of us has a distinctive purpose and function. Our goal is to learn to work together as one.

It is through love that the body of Christ is connected.

We use the word *love* to express something we like very much or possess strong feelings toward. Christian love is more than that. It requires action and commitment. It's love that is genuine, not forced.

The idea of love “without hypocrisy” (Rom 12:9) comes from ancient Greek theater. The word *hypokrites* means “actor” or “stage player.” Many people are familiar with the smiling mask and sad mask symbolic of Greek comedy and tragedy. A hypocrite is someone acting under a mask. Thus, the English word describes someone whose behavior contradicts his or her beliefs.

Genuine love is a mark of a true Christian. Jesus told His disciples in John 13:35, “Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another.” Genuine love implies action. It's something we display every day. This means getting involved in the lives of other Christians and deepening our relationships with one another. It means removing our masks.

When our love is genuine, we share the seasons of joy and the seasons of grief with our brothers and sisters in the faith. We provide for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. We pray fervently for their lives.

Love connects the body of Christ. As we live out genuine love for one another, we show the world the genuine love of Christ. We bring hope to a broken world by making ourselves known as His disciples. Let's allow genuine love to shine through our actions and proclaim the name of Christ.

CONDUCT IN LOVE

⁹ Love must be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another with mutual love, showing eagerness in honoring one another. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be enthusiastic in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, endure in suffering, persist in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints, pursue hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil; consider what is good before all people. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all people. ¹⁹ Do not avenge yourselves, dear friends, but give place to God's wrath, for it is written, "*Vengeance is mine, I will repay*," says the Lord. ²⁰ Rather, *if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing this you will be heaping burning coals on his head.* ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

SUBMISSION TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT

13 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except by God's appointment, and the authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ² So the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will incur judgment ³ (for rulers cause no fear for good conduct but for bad). Do you desire not to fear authority? Do good and you will receive its commendation ⁴ because it is God's servant for your well-being. But be afraid if you do wrong because government does not bear the sword for nothing. It is God's servant to administer punishment on the person who does wrong. ⁵ Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath of the authorities but also because of your conscience. ⁶ For this reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants devoted to governing. ⁷ Pay everyone what is owed: taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

EXHORTATION TO LOVE NEIGHBORS

⁸ Owe no one anything, except to love one another, for the one who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. ⁹ For the commandments, "*Do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet*," (and if there is any other commandment) are summed up in this, "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*" ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

MOTIVATION TO GODLY CONDUCT

¹¹ And do this because we know the time, that it is already the hour for us to awake from sleep, for our salvation is now nearer than when we became believers. ¹² The night has advanced toward dawn; the day is near. So then we must lay aside the works of darkness, and put on the weapons of light. ¹³ Let us live decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in discord and jealousy. ¹⁴ Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to arouse its desires.

EXHORTATION TO MUTUAL FORBEARANCE

14 Now receive the one who is weak in the faith, and do not have disputes over differing opinions.² One person believes in eating everything, but the weak person eats only vegetables.³ The one who eats everything must not despise the one who does not, and the one who abstains must not judge the one who eats everything, for God has accepted him.⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on another's servant? Before his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵ One person regards one day holier than other days, and another regards them all alike. Each must be fully convinced in his own mind.⁶ The one who observes the day does it for the Lord. The one who eats, eats for the Lord because he gives thanks to God, and the one who abstains from eating abstains for the Lord, and he gives thanks to God.⁷ For none of us lives for himself and none dies for himself.⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.⁹ For this reason Christ died and returned to life, so that he may be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ But you who eat vegetables only—why do you judge your brother or sister? And you who eat everything—why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.¹¹ For it is written, "*As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God.*"¹² Therefore, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

EXHORTATION FOR THE STRONG NOT TO DESTROY THE WEAK

¹³ Therefore we must not pass judgment on one another, but rather determine never to place an obstacle or a trap before a brother or sister.¹⁴ I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean in itself; still, it is unclean to the one who considers it unclean.¹⁵ For if your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy by your food someone for whom Christ died.¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you consider good be spoken of as evil.¹⁷ For the kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ For the one who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by people.

¹⁹ So then, let us pursue what makes for peace and for building up one another.²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. For although all things are clean, it is wrong to cause anyone to stumble by what you eat.²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything that causes your brother to stumble.²² The faith you have, keep to yourself before God. Blessed is the one who does not judge himself by what he approves.²³ But the man who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not do so from faith, and whatever is not from faith is sin.

EXHORTATION FOR THE STRONG TO HELP THE WEAK

15 But we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak, and not just please ourselves.² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good to build him up.³ For even Christ did

GOD'S HEART
FOR THE NATIONS*Romans 15:11**And again, "Praise the Lord
all you Gentiles, and let all
the peoples praise him."*

not please himself, but just as it is written, ***"The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."*** ⁴For everything that was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope. ⁵Now may the God of endurance and comfort give you unity with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, ⁶so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

EXHORTATION TO MUTUAL ACCEPTANCE

⁷Receive one another, then, just as Christ also received you, to God's glory. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of God's truth to confirm the promises made to the fathers, ⁹and thus the Gentiles glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ***"Because of this I will confess you among the Gentiles, and I will sing praises to your name."*** ¹⁰And again it says: ***"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."*** ¹¹And again, ***"Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him."*** ¹²And again Isaiah says, ***"The root of Jesse will come, and the one who rises to rule over the Gentiles, in him will the Gentiles hope."*** ¹³Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in him, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

PAUL'S MOTIVATION FOR WRITING THE LETTER

¹⁴But I myself am fully convinced about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another. ¹⁵But I have written more boldly to you on some points so as to remind you, because of the grace given to me by God ¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. I serve the gospel of God like a priest, so that the Gentiles may become an acceptable offering, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷So I boast in Christ Jesus about the things that pertain to God. ¹⁸For I will not dare to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in order to bring about the obedience of the Gentiles, by word and deed, ¹⁹in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem even as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. ²⁰And in this way I desire to preach where Christ has not been named, so as not to build on another person's foundation, ²¹but as it is written: ***"Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand."***

PAUL'S INTENTION OF VISITING THE ROMANS

²²This is the reason I was often hindered from coming to you. ²³But now there is nothing more to keep me in these regions, and I have for many years desired to come to you ²⁴when I go to Spain. For I hope to visit you when I pass through and that you will help me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

²⁵But now I go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. ²⁶For Macedonia and Achaia are pleased to make some contribution

for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. ²⁷For they were pleased to do this, and indeed they are indebted to the Jerusalem saints. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are obligated also to minister to them in material things. ²⁸Therefore after I have completed this and have safely delivered this bounty to them, I will set out for Spain by way of you, ²⁹and I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of Christ's blessing.

³⁰Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to join fervently with me in prayer to God on my behalf. ³¹Pray that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea and that my ministry in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, ³²so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. ³³Now may the God of peace be with all of you. Amen.

PERSONAL GREETINGS

16 Now I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, ²so that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and provide her with whatever help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many, including me.

³Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, ⁴who risked their own necks for my life. Not only I, but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. ⁵Also greet the church in their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia. ⁶Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. ⁷Greet Andronicus and Junia, my compatriots and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. ⁸Greet Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord. ⁹Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my good friend Stachys. ¹⁰Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus. ¹¹Greet Herodion, my compatriot. Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. ¹²Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, laborers in the Lord. Greet my dear friend Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother who was also a mother to me. ¹⁴Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters with them. ¹⁵Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the believers who are with them. ¹⁶Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

¹⁷Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who create dissensions and obstacles contrary to the teaching that you learned. Avoid them! ¹⁸For these are the kind who do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By their smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of the naive. ¹⁹Your obedience is known to all and thus I rejoice over you. But I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil. ²⁰The God of peace will quickly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

LOVE TO GROW

DIFFERENCES SET ASIDE

ROMANS 16

In the Roman Empire, status was everything. People were valued based on their rank in society, their position in their family, and their wealth. Few people in this culture were legally considered “persons”—a specific title that indicated someone had full rights in the public square to buy or sell property, live protected from bodily harm, and generally make their own decisions. Women and children were the property of the heads of their households, and slaves were the property of their masters. Different social standings either limited or expanded one’s rights. Differences were vitally important.

Those born into slavery were given names that signified their complete lack of social standing. If there was no chance a slave would ever ascend to the status of full “person,” why bother giving them a name? A slave’s name might have simply reflected his or her birth order: First, Second, Third.

It was into this remarkably segregated and hierarchical culture that the early church exploded and immediately started breaking all the rules. The rich and the poor ate together, the powerful and the weak shared their resources, and men and women worked together to spread the gospel. Upending these social rules was important for maintaining the unity of the church. Many of the epistles deal with churches that caused division by maintaining discrimination or favoritism.

Paul ended his letter to the Romans with a long list of greetings that appear random and unimportant, but bear a remarkable witness to the diversity of the early church. His list includes women, men, Greeks, Jews, slaves, and those of high social standing. Their names are important because they tell us how different these people were. Some names indicate great power or wealth, some are distinctly Greek or Jewish, and some names—like Tertius and Quartus, “Third” and “Fourth”—belonged to slaves.

One of God’s greatest gifts for believers is to make us into one people.


In the early church, people with wildly different social positions shared the same value and significance—they were brothers and sisters. Their differences were not abolished or ignored but subsumed under their greater identity as fellow believers. In today’s church, let’s make sure “status” doesn’t matter. Let’s be followers of Christ who build communities that witness to the power of the gospel in unity and respect for all.

²¹Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my compatriots. ²²I, Tertius, who am writing this letter, greet you in the Lord. ²³Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus the city treasurer and our brother Quartus greet you.[¶]

²⁵Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages, ²⁶but now is disclosed, and through the prophetic scriptures has been made known to all the nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory forever! Amen.

REFLECT

How do we give glory to God in all we do? What can you do today to give God the glory for all He has done in your life?



SO WHETHER YOU
eat OR drink,
OR WHATEVER YOU DO,
do everything
FOR THE
GLORY OF GOD

MEMORY VERSE

So whether you eat or drink, or
whatever you do, do everything for the
glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

1 Corinthians

INTRODUCTION

Living for Christ

The church at Corinth was troubled. Though true believers, the Corinthians had much to gain in the area of spiritual maturity. Paul's first letter to this group displays his heart for this church as well as his disappointment in their immoral behavior. The apostle exhorted them to live lives that honored Christ instead of following the habits of the notoriously corrupt people among whom they lived.

Paul opened his letter by responding to the report he had received on the health and behavior of the church. He dealt with divisions, immorality, and lawsuits taking place within the body (1:10—6:20). He responded to their questions about marital obligations, Christian liberties, proper worship, and spiritual gifts (7:1—14:40). Finally, he addressed the necessity of Christ's resurrection to the life of a believer and how to practically live in light of this reality (15:1—16:24).

Paul is the almost unanimously accepted author of the letter of 1 Corinthians, as he is twice named as its writer (1:1; 16:21). Paul most likely wrote this letter while he was in Ephesus during his third missionary journey. This dates the letter of 1 Corinthians to around A.D. 56, in the last year of his three-year stay in Ephesus.

While 1 Corinthians contains specific instructions and commands for the church in Corinth to turn from immorality, it also includes practical application for the Christian life. First Corinthians identifies spiritual gifts and presents how believers are to use these gifts for the edification of the body. Paul offered hope to the Corinthians of Christ's victory over sin, and the victory they would receive through faith in Him. Though at times we are troubled by our own spiritual immaturity, like the Corinthians, we can be encouraged to love God greatly knowing that even though we may fail, His grace abounds. We have hope in eternal life with Him through the life of Christ.

Canada

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

English

POPULATION

37,315,000

UNREACHED POPULATION

1,954,000

PROFESSING CHRISTIANS

73.0%

Ann's Home

Say a Prayer Today

Pray for Ann and her work as a missionary. Pray she would be an encouragement to everyone she meets and that the light of the gospel would radiate through her life.

HISTORY BIT

The first Catholic missionary to travel to Canada was a French secular clergyman who arrived in 1608. He worked among the Micmac Indians.*

Source Information:

<https://joshuaproject.net/countries/CA>

*David B. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, "Canada" (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982), 212.

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Her Journey

ANN'S STORY

“So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God”
(1 Cor 10:31).

I discovered the truth of this verse while watching the life of a fellow missionary who was an amazingly talented cook. She always credited God for her gifting and freely expressed her thanks for how God used her. She was always full of joy and pleasure as she worked to create and share meals and goodies with others.

Since seeing her life, I've been challenged to commit everything I do to the Lord. This verse became my mantra as I struggled to keep house for a family of males. Discouraged with the menial tasks, which seemed to be endless and thankless, I was initially resentful and cross in my attitude. It was hard for everyone.

I printed this verse on a card and hung it above the sink. Daily I prayed as I worked. Even dishwashing became a thing of beauty and joy for me rather than a drudgery. I've used this verse often. I ask myself how what I am doing (however unpleasant, hard, or upsetting) can be used to glorify God. If it doesn't glorify God then it's not likely something I should be doing. Instead of complaining, I can glorify God as I serve those around me.

Daily tasks are elevated from being difficult and menial, to becoming something holy. I call it the holiness of the ordinary. God's Word influences minds and attitudes in a ripple effect, changing our lives for the better. I have felt this in my home and in my workplace. As I have worked to change my attitude and perspective, I've seen God change the hearts and attitudes of those around me. I know that in practice it can affect an entire community and even a country.

4 WEEK READING PLAN

LOVE HIS WORD

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
1	1 Corinthians 1:1-17	1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5	1 Corinthians 2:6-16	1 Corinthians 3	1 Corinthians 4
	SOAP 1 Corinthians 1:4-7	SOAP 1 Corinthians 1:30	SOAP 1 Corinthians 2:9-10	SOAP 1 Corinthians 3:16-17	SOAP 1 Corinthians 4:12-13
2	1 Corinthians 5	1 Corinthians 6	1 Corinthians 7:1-16	1 Corinthians 7:17-40	1 Corinthians 8
	SOAP 1 Corinthians 5:6-7	SOAP 1 Corinthians 6:18-20	SOAP 1 Corinthians 7:16	SOAP 1 Corinthians 7:32-35	SOAP 1 Corinthians 8:12-13
3	1 Corinthians 9	1 Corinthians 10:1-13	1 Corinthians 10:14-11:1	1 Corinthians 11:2-34	1 Corinthians 12
	SOAP 1 Corinthians 9:24-25	SOAP 1 Corinthians 10:13	SOAP 1 Corinthians 10:31	SOAP 1 Corinthians 11:25-26	SOAP 1 Corinthians 12:4-6
4	1 Corinthians 13	1 Corinthians 14	1 Corinthians 15:1-34	1 Corinthians 15:35-58	1 Corinthians 16
	SOAP 1 Corinthians 13:12-13	SOAP 1 Corinthians 14:32-33	SOAP 1 Corinthians 15:20-22	SOAP 1 Corinthians 15:56-58	SOAP 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

SALUTATION

1 From Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Sosthenes, our brother, **2** to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours. **3** Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

THANKSGIVING

4 I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus. **5** For you were made rich in every way in him, in all your speech and in every kind of knowledge—**6** just as the testimony about Christ has been confirmed among you—**7** so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. **8** He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** God is faithful, by whom you were called into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH

10 I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree together, to end your divisions, and to be united by the same mind and purpose. **11** For members of Chloe's household have made it clear to me, my brothers and sisters, that there are quarrels among you. **12** Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," or "I am with Cephas," or "I am with Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he? Or were you in fact baptized in the name of Paul? **14** I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, **15** so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name! **16** (I also baptized the household of Stephanus. Otherwise, I do not remember whether I baptized anyone else.) **17** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—and not with clever speech, so that the cross of Christ would not become useless.

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written, "***I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will thwart the cleverness of the intelligent.***" **20** Where is the wise man? Where is the expert in the Mosaic law? Where is the debater of this age? Has God not made the wisdom of the world foolish? **21** For since in the wisdom of God the world by its wisdom did not know God, God was pleased to save those who believe by the foolishness of preaching. **22** For Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks ask for wisdom, **23** but we preach about a crucified Christ, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. **24** But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

REFLECT

What does it mean to boast in the Lord? How is this different than boasting in ourselves?

²⁶Think about the circumstances of your call, brothers and sisters. Not many were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were born to a privileged position. ²⁷But God chose what the world thinks foolish to shame the wise, and God chose what the world thinks weak to shame the strong. ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, what is regarded as nothing, to set aside what is regarded as something, ²⁹so that no one can boast in his presence. ³⁰He is the reason you have a relationship with Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹so that, as it is written, ***“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”***

2 When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come with superior eloquence or wisdom as I proclaimed the testimony of God. ²For I decided to be concerned about nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and with much trembling. ⁴My conversation and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith would not be based on human wisdom but on the power of God.

WISDOM FROM GOD

⁶Now we do speak wisdom among the mature, but not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are perishing. ⁷Instead we speak the wisdom of God, hidden in a mystery, that God determined before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood it. If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But just as it is written, ***“Things that no eye has seen, or ear heard, or mind imagined, are the things God has prepared for those who love him.”*** ¹⁰God has revealed these to us by the Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹For who among men knows the things of a man except the man’s spirit within him? So too, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things that are freely given to us by God. ¹³And we speak about these things, not with words taught us by human wisdom, but with those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people. ¹⁴The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵The one who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is understood by no one. ¹⁶***For who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to advise him?*** But we have the mind of Christ.

IMMATURITY AND SELF-DECEPTION

3 So, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready. In fact, you are still not ready, ³for you are still influenced by the flesh. For since there is still jealousy and dissension among you, are you not influenced by the flesh and behaving like unregenerate people? ⁴For whenever someone says, “I am with Paul,” or “I am with Apollos,” are you not merely human?

LOVE TO GROW

BOAST IN THE LORD

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31

My family and I got up a little too late. We sped through six showers in record time. I broke up sibling quarrels and refereed which poor child had to sit in the loathed back seat of the minivan. Finally, we slipped into the back pew of our church as the music began to play.

I desperately wanted to prepare my heart for worship. I wanted to have it all together and give my best to Jesus. All I could think about was the impatience, anger, and harsh words that had hijacked our morning. It left me feeling like an imposter.

I wanted our family to walk through those church doors with our act together. I wanted to be strong instead of weak. I wanted to look put together instead of falling apart. I wanted to settle in and feel good about myself and all that I had accomplished. Then I was reminded of this verse:

“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:31).

The church isn't a perfect place full of perfect people. It's a place for the sinful to come and find hope in the person and work of Jesus. It's where the truth of who He is trumps our flaws and failures and where we worship Him for the depth of His forgiveness and the newness of His mercy. It's where the broken are welcomed, the weary can find rest, and His wisdom reigns over the hardness of our hearts and the loud voices of the world. It's where, once again, we are humbled by His sacrifice and amazed by His transforming power.

Instead of trying to impress the people around me by my own efforts, I want to boast in the work of Christ. Especially on a Sunday morning when I am late and harried, it is because of Him that I am able to join a body of believers and offer praise to Him. He holds all the power, all the ability. Let us boast in Him and Him alone.