

## 5 Convictions of a Cross-Shaped Community

My senior year in college I had the joy of moving into a house with a few other college buddies, and one of the real treasures of this place, just outside Chapel Hill in Carrboro, was that our backyard backed up to these woods, and if you went down through the woods it led you to this really sweet opening where there is a creek, and you were kind of tucked in the woods, you honestly felt like you might as well been in the Appalachian mountains.

I'm a solitude type of guy, and love nature, so I took to this little area. I began to cultivate it, weeks of cultivation. I took rocks from the creek and made a stone floor, in the middle of the floor was a fire pit. With other rocks I made a damn that had a little water fall. I found some logs that had fallen down, and made benches out of them, and so you'd be down there and on one side was a rock face, and on the other side was the creek, even built a little garden. This was my spot. My getaway. For myself, and for our crew, it was an incredible hangout spot.

As life goes on we all moved out, I came back to Raleigh. Then, I don't know what it was that took me back to Chapel Hill, but it was a year or two after we had moved out, and I just thought I'd love to go back and visit that special place. So I did, and I got there I started a little bit down stream and made my way up, pretty excited to revisit.

But as soon as I got a visual my heart sank. This sanctuary of a place had become completely broken down. The dam was gone, trash in the fire pit, benches broken, no garden, it was completely overgrown. It was clear this place was not treasured, not kept up, and not cared for.

It became clear to me in that moment how important ongoing, continual cultivation is. That no matter blessed a place is or season of life you are in, if you do not cultivate it it will fall apart.

Natural order is not to a garden, it takes cultivation.

In 1 Corinthians the apostle Paul is writing to a church that he planted, that may have started healthy, but did not have ongoing cultivation and is now in shambles. Paul's letter is a means by which he is now reaching back into this wilderness of a church to cultivate it back to a garden.

And as we close down the book, chapter 16, we are going to pull out 5 convictions for the church to rally around. This is by no means all the convictions of the church, nor is necessarily the 5 most important.

I'm excited that I believe this message is for all of us. As individuals, and as a church. You may look at your life and see barrenness repent and return to, or you are bearing much fruit and in a real blessed season, and for you, these convictions that are simply for you to continue in.

Let's pray.

### 1. We must care for others (including other churches, one family)

**Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.**

What's going on here is that the church in Jerusalem is suffering. This may have been due to a famine, or maybe because they are just so poor, but regardless, there is suffering going on, which Paul is aware of, and

evidently other churches are aware of too, and there's this collaborative effort between churches to meet the needs of the saints in Jerusalem.

Paul is directing the fundraising effort, he's already spoken to the churches in Galatia, and He's got the same directives to the Corinthians. On the first day of every week, as you gather, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there may be no collecting when I come. Like he's saying, I am going to be taking money from you, we can do it the easy way or hard way, don't make me collect when I come. Already have it stored up for me.

Notice... EACH of you. Everyone is involved here. It's not, the rich among you, or some special class among you, it is each of you. The whole community.

notice... is to put "SOMETHING" aside. Something as opposed to nothing, how, as he may prosper. Giving was expected among all the believers, and there's a correspondence of that giving with your prosperity, but everyone is giving, something.

So that's what's happening here, and I want enlarge on an underlying conviction here, that the Corinthians are by the gospel, constrained to give, gift, freely, to the Jerusalem saints. Meaning, the conviction of gospel community is to care for others, even for other communities.

**Like Paul would tell the Galatians to do good to all, especially those of the household of faith.**

And notice that this care is for physical needs. We are to be eternity minded people, our church is based on eternally significant news. There's temptation to address only eternal needs or only social needs. You either only give the gospel message, with no physical service attached, or you only meet physical needs, with no spiritual service attached.

Paul's just made an argument for the image of God in our bodies our bodies are worth something our bodies are valuable and for us to not care about the body is for us to not care about the person, and our caring of the creation is a reflection of how we care about the creator.

A biblical portrayal of the gospel and it's application to our lives and how we love and serve others includes both. We are going to preach the gospel, absolutely, it's the hope of the world. But if you are hungry, we are also going to give you something to eat. And the bible actually paints the picture that if we do the first but fail to do the second, we may not truly have the gospel in our hearts.

***But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 1 John 3:17***

***If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. -James 2:15-16***

It's a faith that produces good works of meeting people's physical needs. This takes sacrifice. It takes opening our wallets (I'll be generous with other things, but don't ask me to be generous with my finances) and opening our homes, it takes rearranging schedules, allowing for interruptions, allowing for our budgeted goals for ourselves to take a little longer to reach because we want to bless others. And these were saints in Jerusalem, so this generosity and care was going to people they didn't know.

Remember Phillipians, consider others more significant than yourselves. What if we had a community that did that? Where everyone considered others more significant. I tell you what would happen, we would be caring for each other very well, and this community would be so strong, and the gospel would be on display.

## **2. We must meet together weekly**

**Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me.**

It is a small point, but I believe it's something we need to touch on. The assumed reality for the early church is meeting weekly on the first day of the week. They moved the traditional 7th day, sabbath, that the Jews observed to the 1st day of the week, for when Christ rose from the dead and is the new creation. This was their appointed time of worship. It was weekly, on the Lord's day, and it was corporate, they met together to celebrate, share in the Lord's Table, rejoice with one another, hear the Word and pray together. This is the pattern laid down for us.

Consider each other for love and good deeds. So much more than meeting together, that's not the point. The point is what you do when you meet together. It's not getting a star on your own nametag.

We are going to be resurrected TOGETHER. We are going to walk through Heaven's gates TOGETHER. We are going to live forever around the throne of the Lamb that was slain, TOGETHER.

"A great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Rev 7:9-10

What we do here on Sunday mornings is a foretaste of that reality, it's preparation for that reality.

As Mathis would point out, this is not only our eternal destiny, but this is how we get there... TOGETHER.

*"Corporate worship is the single most important means of grace and our greatest weapon in the fight for joy, because like no other means, corporate worship combines all three principles of God's ongoing grace: His word, prayer, and fellowship. It is corporate worship, with its preaching and sacraments and collective praises, confessions, petitions, and thanksgivings, which most acutely brings together the gift of God's voice, His ear, and His body."* -HOG

Donald Whitney, "There's an element of worship and Christianity that cannot be experienced in private worship or by watching worship. There are some graces and blessings that God gives only in 'meeting together' with other believers."

**Hebrews 10:24-25, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."**

You want to drift, stop going to corporate worship. It's like the proverbial frog, you will wake up a year down the road and your faith will be gone.

What if everybody had a word of encouragement for another person when we met, we have not arrived, have you looked outside lately, have you seen the sand in your heart lately, what do you need? Do you need a brother or sister to speak life into you. You need a brother or sister to speak the word of Christ to you, when we meet it is a war huddle we are in. And before we get to what we do when we come we have to address the assumed reality that you come what is Hebrews say, it says do not forsake the meeting together. Who of you or for sake in the meeting together? How easy is it for you to not come to corporate worship. How easy is it for you?

It's not attendance we are after. Corporate worship is a well of goodness for you to drink from. It's a call away from the desert of the world to taste and be satisfied with God's grace in Jesus.

### **3. We must pursue the work of the Lord**

**5-12, I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.**

**When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.**

**Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was not at all his will to come now. He will come when he has opportunity.**

Paul is writing to the Corinthians, who he loves, it's neat that he says he wants to spend time there, not just to blitz pass them. But he's writing telling them that he is on his way to where, to Macedonia, why? to spread the gospel.

But he's not going yet and he's choosing to stay in Ephesus, why? because he believes a wide door for effective work has been opened to him. And isn't it interesting, "and there are many adversaries". Gospel work comes with gospel adversaries. Don't think ministry is supposed to be easy.

An open door doesn't mean easy. How often do we allow "easy" to influence our discernment of the Lord's will?

Certainly there are those times when everything just falls into place, and you feel so strongly that it was the Lord's providence. Harvest Church was planted that way, it fell right into our laps, but I wouldn't say that's typical, or at the very least, to be expected. The measure of faithfulness has NOTHING to do with how easy or difficult your ministry may be. Some are called to labor in ready, fertile soil, and others are led to rocky, desert-like places. We are faithful, it's God's sovereign choice whether we labor in rocky or ready soil. Be concerned with faithfulness, and measure faithfulness according to the bible. Faithfulness often feels like a cross, probably more times than not.

Paul then brings up Timothy, when he comes put him at ease. There may have been some concern here because Timothy was Paul's guy, and Paul has been hard on the Corinthians, and there could be some concern on how the Corinthians will respond, or maybe it's because of Timothy's timidity. But Paul says, help him, put him at peace, treat him as you would me, I am expecting him back unharmed.

But it's interesting Paul's biggest appeal for this is not, Timothy is my disciple, or, I'll really get you if you harm him, it's simply an appeal to respect Timothy because he's doing what? "doing the work of the Lord, as Paul is."

**Paul goes on, and we are going to skip down to v.15.**

**15-18, Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer. I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have made up for your absence, for they refreshed my spirit as well as yours. Give recognition to such people.**

Paul is lifting up the work of the Lord here.

Refreshers! What if we were a community of refreshers. What if that was your own personal mission statement. "I want to refresh the saints." How good is that?

easiness is not an indicator of faithfulness. Paul was faithful and opposition met him.

The work of the Lord has two main streams... 1. outward to nonbelievers; 2. inward to the saints. Missional, Communal. Certainly there is overlap here, but I want us to see both at work and both valuable.

There are the missional camps that like to put mission so high up on a pedestal that it becomes the only measure of faithfulness to Christ, so that if you spend time loving on the saints you should feel guilty. And mission without community can't invite unbelievers into anything. There is no light on the hill. But there are also the community camps that never think about mission, and it's completely insular. That's also not gospel.

The Bible portrays both at work. Mission and community. You will work yourself to death trying to figure out which is more important or which comes first. I think the most simple way to see this is a both and, and here Paul, the apostle prioritizes the work of the Lord, but the work of the Lord is split between what we would call missional, and what we might call communal. Missional communities.

Stephanus and his household have devoted themselves to caring for the saints... Paul lifts them up, honors them, gives them recognition, and even says, with great sincerity, I rejoice at them coming to me, for they have REFRESHED my spirit... and they REFRESH your spirit too!

You ever been out on a hot summer day doing yard work, or maybe you've been exercising and just beyond exhaustion. Then someone hands you a big ole glass of ice water, or an ice cold gatorade? You know how refreshing that is. Oh my goodness. That like catapults you into worship!

Paul couldn't be more of a blazing missional. Yet he loves what Stephanus is doing. It's teamwork.

What are you devoted to? You need to be devoted to community and mission, using your gifts to the glory of God.

#### **4. We must be strong in the gospel (belief and behavior)**

**Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.**

Paul here ties to main aspects of the faith together, the doctrine that makes up the faith (the gospel), and the behavior that rightly flows from that faith.

The first four exhortations all carry the same theme, which could be summed up as Paul already said in 1 Cor. 15:58, be steadfast, immovable. When he's saying be watchful, he's not saying get a Netflix subscription and watch a lot of TV, be watchful as it pertains to the faith, on guard against others that may come in to dilute or pollute the gospel. That's what act like men means here, this is not, drink beer, eat nachos, and watch football, and be strong does not mean lift weights, this has a war-like connotation in which you are to be courageous. Stand firm in the faith, don't be moved by anything.

Don't let the pressures of the culture weigh down on you so much that you alter the gospel.

Listen to this true story relayed by Kent Hughes, "Dr. William Evans, who pastored College Church from 1906-1909, was an unusually accomplished man. He had the entire KJV of the Bible memorized as well as the NT of the American Standard Version. Dr. Evans also authored over fifty books. His son, Louis, became one of the best-known preachers in America and for many years pastored the eminent First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood. When Dr. William Evans retired, he moved to Hollywood to be near his son, and when Louis was away he would substitute for him.

*One unforgettable Sunday Dr. William, as he was affectionately called, spoke on the virgin birth. All were amazed when he raised his Bible and tore out the pages that narrate the birth of the Lord. As the tattered scraps floated down toward the congregation, he shouted, "If we can't believe in the virgin birth, let's tear it out of the Bible!" And then as he drove home his point, he tore out the resurrection chapters, then the miracle narratives, then anything conveying the supernatural. The floor was littered with mutilated pages.*

*Finally, with immense drama he held up the only remaining portion and said, "And this is all we have left—the Sermon on the Mount. And that has no authority for me if a divine Christ didn't preach it." After a few more words, he asked his listeners to bow for the benediction. But before he could pray, a man in a vast and sedate congregation stood and cried, "No, no! Go on! We want more!" Several others joined in. So Dr. Evans preached for another fifty minutes."*

But it could be more subtle, why don't we just change this word a little bit, why don't we start calling Father God Mother, or maybe we will go through our hymnals and scratch out every reference to blood. I mean, are you serious? If you don't have blood, what are you singing about?

There's no forgiveness or redemption without the shedding of blood.

Stand firm. It doesn't matter how strong the voice is, or who it's coming from, culture, government, a boss, your parents, a best friend, a girlfriend or spouse. Stand firm.

The Corinthians had anti-gospel diseases all inside of them, leading to divisions, and rampant wickedness of various types.

So Paul points them to have the correct doctrine, which is the primary exhortation of what they should know, they need to know the gospel... that Christ died for the forgiveness of sins and rose from the dead, right 1 Cor. 15:1.

Main exhortation of belief- know the gospel, and that's what I would plead with you this morning, stand firm in the gospel message.

Then there is a main exhortation of behavior- love one another.

Let all things be done in love. He has already spent an entire chapter 13 to love. Love one another well. Do that and you will fulfill the law. Essentially, love God and love others.

True gospel must include love and true love must include the gospel.

You don't know much about the gospel if you don't know how to love people. That's the kingdom economy, you are blessed to be a blessing, grace overwhelms your soul, you are forgiven a debt that you could never pay, and that so transforms your heart that now you love.

And on the other side, you don't know much about love if you imagine that love minus the gospel is somehow sufficient. That love empties itself of any real meaning.

##### **5. We must keep Christ Central (love to Christ, grace of Christ, love from Christ through Paul)**

**The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord. All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.**

**I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

“It's essence was in their common Christ, and their common life-or-death mission together in his summons to take the faith worldwide in the face of impending persecution.” - Habits of grace

1. Christ is what matters, or you are cursed. He is the only way to escape the curse. He is central to life and life eternal.
2. Obedience to the Scriptures is obedience to Christ, “love the Lord” translates to obedience to Christ  
As St. Augustine said, love God and do what you please. He didn't mean, know the gospel, come to Sunday service, and live like a fool the rest of the week. No, he meant that true love of God will lead to all other loves being rightly ordered.
3. The church is sustained and empowered by Jesus
4. Our love for each other is founded upon Christ

Paul was harsh with the Corinthians, but here again he reaffirms his deep and earnest love for them.

Keeping Christ central means that there is grace for us, and that we have grace for others.

My prayer is that when the Lord returns to this garden called Harvest Church, He would find it not in disrepair or in ruins, but cultivated, bearing abundant fruit for His glory.