

## ON GOD'S TEAM

“For we are fellow workers.” 1 Corinthians 3:9

Teamwork is supposed to be smart and effective. Just listen to these quotes about teamwork:

“Teamwork divides the task and multiplies the success.” “Alone we can do so little together we can do so much.” “A boat doesn’t go forward if each one is rowing their own way.” “The Key to teamwork is to learn a role, accept a role, and strive to become excellent at playing it.” “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Think of what that means in sports. Dennis Rodman became a hall of fame player in the NBA, not by scoring, but by playing good defense and getting so many rebounds. John Stockton did it by all his assists. In 1973 everyone was amazed as the first round pick made by the then Oakland Raiders. Instead of picking a quarterback or running back or defense end, they chose a punter—Ray Guy. But it turned out to be a great choice. Not only was he the greatest punter of all time, he came when the rules changed so that instead of going for a field goal which would be returned back like a punt, teams missing field goals had the ball returned to the other team at the line of scrimmage. Guy became an expert not only at long punts, but the “coffin corners” punt that made other teams start at offense near their own end zone. Specialists like Guy become so important to football teams.

So when Paul tells us that we are “fellow workers,” he seems to be emphasizing teamwork. The Church, the body of Christ, is a team. If we do things as a team, we should succeed.

We can see videos of school teams that place a handicapped player on the field or court and both teams allow the player to score. It can be very heart-warming to see that. By extension we see ourselves as people who help the less fortunate, giving to those who need it.

But is that what Paul is talking about in the Church? He says, “We are fellow workers.” The idea is not that some have needs, some have talents, and those with those talents give. Then the idea is that it is really only some who are needed. The others are just those to be kind to.

We can feel like one of those. “What do I have to offer?” “I am on a limited income and have little to give in my offerings.” “I don’t speak well in public. Don’t ask me to share a message or teach children.” “I can barely take care of myself. I can’t greet or usher or do altar guild.” “I am so technologically challenged. Don’t ask me to run the sound system or PowerPoint.” “Between work and children, I just don’t have time for anything else.” “I need all the help I can get as a struggling student. What do I have to offer?”

I could give you then some kind of story about how even seemingly little things are important. Our office secretary's car was flashing its check engine light. The Toyota dealer couldn't figure out why and checked with other Toyota services. It remained a mystery until they found out that two wires under the passenger seat caused it. To fix those little things that had to replace the seat. On a more serious note it was a little bit of Teflon that came off the wires in a tank of oxygen that caused the tank to explode and almost cause the destruction of Apollo 13. So even "little" people are important in the Church.

Yet those are isolated incidents. Athletic teams have players who never play. Bands have musicians who actually play wrong notes and are in the band because the school thinks it is important to include them. We can feel like the last one picked on a sandlot team, the one who eventually has to be picked, but no one wants.

But in the Church everyone is needed. It has nothing to do with how wealthy, how talented, how healthy, how free of time any of us are. We are needed because God has chosen us. Really God doesn't need any of us. He is almighty. He can get along fine without us. But He has decided that He wants us to do things with Him, to be a part of His team, the Church.

Henri Nouwen lived in a special Christian home where some of the residents were severely handicapped. In our normal world view it would be easy to see them as a strain on the rest. That attitude is certainly part of what fuels people to think that it is okay to have an abortion or to ask someone to take your life because you are a medical strain on others. But in that Christian community Nouwen came to see that these special handicapped residents were just as needed as the rest. They helped the others by showing them how to give. And in return, even with their handicaps, God's love shown through them.

Our bodies' muscles work because they have "opposing" muscles. Muscles move in one direction by contracting. But what moves us in the opposite direction is the "opposing" muscle. That is why athletes who want to build up those muscles need to make sure they build up both the "opposing" muscles.

In a similar way all people are important in the church. All of us have been chosen by God to be important in His Church. Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 1:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him.

We see that apply to our friends like Kebede overseas. Kebede lives in Ethiopia, a third world country. We send funds over to him to support the work he does for our sister churches there. But that does not make it a one way street where we do all the giving and they the

receiving. They need our financial assistance. But we need their example of powerfully sharing their faith and praying for the spread of the Gospel. Paul says about this in 2 Corinthians 8:

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little.”

We are fellow workers with our Christian brothers and sisters all over the world. God has set things up so that we all need each other and all of us have something to offer.

God gives commands to His Church which begin with the word “You.” When we do that we have to remember that in many languages, like those of the Bible, there are both singular and plural forms for the word “you.” In the south they say, “y’all,” a plural form. That is the form God used for the Church. When He tells the Church to preach the Gospel, He doesn’t mean each one of us, but as a group. It isn’t just the preacher that is important. Equally important are the people who listen, those who pray for the preacher, those who support him, those who make it available online, and those who make a setting and location for the preaching. God has decided to use each of us as a group, as the body of Christ to do this.

That is why God calls us to worship together. Research shows that when people sing together, they grow closer to each other. We come together not so much to worship God, but to be blessed by Him not only directly, but through His people, the Church.