

**“A Church Is A Team, Too”**  
**I Corinthians 12**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
Stone Mountain, Georgia  
February 23, 2003

Today, we have recognized the players and coaches on the teams in our basketball program at Smoke Rise. I am grateful for their attendance and participation in our service this morning, especially those that are visiting. I appreciate the good work that Tim Adcox does as our Minister of Recreation. He and his assistants come into contact with more people in our community on a weekly basis than any other church leaders. They are good ambassadors for our church and our Lord's Kingdom.

I believe that organized activities are good for children. I'm not only referring to sports, but all activities, such as band, drama, scouts, clubs and academic teams. Being a part of a group can help children discover their strengths and weaknesses. It can also teach them the value of discipline and the importance of teamwork. These are valuable life lessons that can serve them well for years to come.

In some ways, I think Paul saw the church as a team because he talked to them like a coach. A study of I Corinthians 12 certainly gives me that impression. In reading this chapter, I hear Paul saying several things to the Corinthian Christians about their involvement in God's work through the church.

**First of all, he said that every believer needed to be a player.** When you read this chapter, you cannot miss the fact that Paul encouraged all his readers to get involved in God's work of making the world better. He compared the church to the human body, which is made up of many parts that function in harmony to make life possible. He concluded that discussion with these words, *“Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it” I Corinthians 12:27.*

Wasn't Paul saying that everyone should be an active participant in God's work through the church? I think so and believe that no one should be content staying on the sidelines or sitting in the stands watching others play the game.

“Every member a minister” is our motto at Smoke Rise. I like this and believe that Paul would, too. It is right at the heart of his message to the Corinthian Christians.

**Why should every believer be involved in God's work and on the playing field?** I've given this a lot of thought and would like to give you four reasons. **First of all, the world needs us.** Our world is filled with people that are hurting and need someone to help them. All around us people are suffering from grief, oppression, depression, abuse, hunger, loneliness, illness or confusion and they need someone to reach out to them. We cannot be believers and ignore their plight and pleas for help.

**Secondly, God has given us not only the opportunity to help others, but the ability.** This chapter introduces us to the concept of spiritual gifts. These are talents, skills and abilities that God gives every believer so that he or she can be a player on the field making a difference in the lives of others. According to Paul, no one is exempt. Everyone has been given one or more gifts so that he or she can contribute.

Did you play sandlot baseball growing up? If you did, you recall how a group would meet at the park, school or barnyard and choose up teams. Were you ever chosen last or maybe not even picked to play on someone's team? Were you considered too

small or untalented? It hurt, didn't it? It was frustrating watching others play instead of being able to play, wasn't it?

In the Kingdom of God, this will never happen. No one will be ignored or shunned because he or she has no talent or ability. God has made sure of this by giving every believer skills he or she needs to be a contributing and significant member of the team.

This is why I am pleased with the work of Kathy Dobbins, our Minister of Education, in conjunction with Dr. Colin Harris and Doris Nelms. They have written and provided for others and us a resource that helps people discover their spiritual gifts and offers suggestions for utilizing them. If you have not taken this study course, "Klesis: Hearing God's Call in Your Life," I strongly encourage you to do so. A new class will begin in March and will meet on Wednesday nights from 6:30-8:30 p.m. What a difference this can make in your life and our church.

A third reason why every believer needs to be a player is personal. **The only way to find the meaning and purpose of life is to use the opportunities and gifts God has given you to make the world better.** For you see, reaching out and helping others in the name of Jesus is the purpose of life. This is why God so generously gives us opportunities to help others and the "grace-gifts" we need to do so.

You recall the words of Jesus when teaching his disciples the value of unselfishness and commitment, "*Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. For, whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*" Matthew 10:38-39. This challenge is for us, too.

Let me mention a final reason why it is important that every believer and church member be involved in God's work, especially through the church. **Those who refuse to discover and use their spiritual gifts cripple the body of Christ.** Look at the metaphor Paul used in this chapter for the church, the human body. All parts of the body must be working or it will limit what one can do. It is obvious what happens to a person when the eyes, ears, limbs or organs are not working.

The same is true in the church. When members refuse to discover and use the gifts they have been given, it cripples the church and limits it. It reduces the church's ability to impact the world.

**In this chapter, Paul not only talked about every believer being a player, but a team player.** He wrote to them about the importance of harmony and unity. He admonished them to care about each other and encourage one another. Like a good coach, he stressed the importance of being unselfish instead of being haughty, arrogant, jealous or competitive. As a matter of fact, he devoted the entire chapter that follows to this topic. We refer to I Corinthians 13 as the "Love Chapter" and certainly it is. Do you realize these poetic words were written to teach believers how to live and work together in the church?

I Corinthians 13 reinforced the idea that there was no hierarchy of gifts in the church. According to Raymond Brown, "The ministry of the church does not rest on status but service. No gift that serves others is little. God uses both stars and candles to light the world."

Every coach knows the value of team chemistry. It is the unseen quality that a team must possess in order to play on a championship level. Without it, even talented athletes will produce only a mediocre team. With it, championships can be won.

Again, the same is true in the church. When members are not only using their spiritual gifts to make the world better, but doing so in an atmosphere of love for one another, the impact upon the world is much greater. Great victories are won!

I was reminded of this on my recent trip to Washington, D.C. I attended the Presidential Prayer Breakfast but also got to attend a swearing-in of Civil Service employees at the State Department. Secretary of State Colin Powell presided over the swearing-in and spoke to the new employees. His message was simple yet profound. He told the candidates that they were becoming a part of a team that day that needed to excel. The country's future, especially in these perilous times, was riding upon their performance. He reminded them that every member of the team was important and had a vital role to play in the success of their mission. Then, he encouraged them to do three things as members of the State Department team. Always do what is right, always do your best and encourage one another.

His advice could have come straight out of the Bible, especially I Corinthians. Maybe it did. At least I think Paul would have cheered.

If Paul were looking down upon us, would he be pleased with what he sees and hears at Smoke Rise Baptist Church? Would he see a church playing on a championship level or one struggling to put a team on the field? The best way to answer this is to evaluate what kind of team member you are. Do you need to make some changes in your involvement, commitment and attitude? Are you doing your best to use the gifts God has given you in service to others and are you encouraging those around you to do the same? I hope so because there is much riding upon our level of commitment, too.