

## 09-14-14 – Corinthians - The Dysfunctional Church

### 1 Cor. 1:10-17

Romans to Corinthians...

First and second Corinthians are powerful letters to the church in Corinth and to us as well. There may be up to four letters and three visits by Paul to this body of believers. We only have two letters preserved for our Bible, but there is evidence within them of other correspondence by Paul.

Today, we will look at chapter 1, for the most part. Maybe we will just plow through this wonderful book together each Sunday for a while, but that will be up to PJ and John as they prepare. Let's look at our text before I go into a background history of the letter.

#### **READ: 1 Cor. 1:10-17 (NLT):**

*<sup>10</sup> I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. <sup>11</sup> For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>12</sup> Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul." Others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ."*

*<sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not! <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> for now no one can say they were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (Oh yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas, but I don't remember baptizing anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ didn't send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News—and not with clever speech, for fear that the cross of Christ would lose its power.*

#### **BACKGROUND:**

Paul established this church in Corinth and stayed there for 1.5 years building it up and teaching them. After being away for a while, the church regressed into all sorts of issues that needed Paul's corrective action. In all, he wrote four letters and made three visits to this church to get and keep them on track in Christ. Some of us need more TLC than others, but God is patient with us all.

Only two of Paul's letters have been preserved. This first letter addresses many of the problems that were brought to Paul's attention by members of Chloe's household. The second letter addresses them positively for correcting many of these initial problems. This letter serves as a source of information about such church problems that they exhibited, such as: divisions, incest, adultery, Christians taking other Christians to court, and the misuse of Christian liberty. We will only look at this first problem today – divisions in the church.

When we read the list of offenses, we usually think, how sad, or yes the enemy is really effective in causing all this sin in the lives of those in the world. The sad part is that Paul is addressing the church of Jesus Christ in Corinth. He is addressing the church of Jesus Christ in Patchogue or anywhere else in our modern world. The enemy is running rampant in our church as well as every church known. He doesn't have to work too hard to corrupt the minds and actions of those who don't believe, but to cause this kind of turmoil within the church is a real feat and part of his dedicated plan to undermine the work of God in our midst.

Pastor Jerry spoke last week about the attack of the enemy in our midst. Satan is alive and well. He wants nothing better than to destroy our church and every believing church out there. His mission is to destroy the work of God in the lives of believers and turn them away from God. He is very good at his job, and no one is exempt. In fact, the more you think you can withstand his attack, the more vulnerable you are. He is doing a great job within our church and its ministries, and he is doing the same thing across the globe.

***“Corinth was a corrupt city, and the people in the church came out of that corruption. Think about the trouble they were making, the sins they were indulging in. Imagine yourself in a position of responsibility over them. Would you feel like giving thanks? Yet Paul did.” [EP]***

Listen to how Paul begins his corrective letter to the church in Corinth. Listen to how he addresses this corrupt congregation that he is about to sternly correct...

After his opening greeting he addresses the church...

***<sup>3</sup> May all the gifts and benefits that come from God our Father, and the Master, Jesus Christ, be yours.***

***<sup>4-6</sup> Every time I think of you—and I think of you often!—I thank God for your lives of free and open access to God, given by Jesus. There's no end to what has happened in you—it's beyond speech, beyond knowledge. The evidence of Christ has been clearly verified in your lives. (The Message)***

Paul greets them with Thanksgiving and love – Would you be as caring? I wouldn't.

***“In essence, Paul was saying, ‘I’m not interested in your accomplishments, and I’m not interested in your sins. I don’t want to hear about your successes, nor do I want to hear about your failures. I’ll listen to all of that for as long as you want, but what I am interested in is the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus. That’s what is special and unique in you. That’s what I want to discover, to bring to light, to explore, to nurture, to develop, to mature.’” [EP]*** Then he addresses the first issue... ***“I have a serious concern to bring up....”***

What better way to destroy a church than to cause infighting, dissensions, factions, and turmoil within the body of Christ. We, as a church, are under attack. It is the responsibility of each of us individually and collectively as the church to keep this from destroying us.

Corinth was located on a narrow isthmus. It was accessed by ships from both sides as cargo was moved across this narrow stretch of land to the other shore and loaded for shipment. The sailors stayed there and shopped there and caroused there, etc. The city was known for its decadence. There were many shops and markets there. ***“The people of Corinth had a reputation in the ancient world as an unruly, hard-drinking, sexually promiscuous bunch of people. When Paul arrived with the Message and many of them became believers in Jesus, they brought their reputations with them right into the church.”*** (Eugene Peterson).

Even though we have become believers, we bring with us our reputations, personalities, and background with us into the church. This becomes the breeding ground for all sorts of problems between each other and the church in general. I wish I could be a representative of my mom, but more times I bring negative elements of my dad into situations. Corinne calls me “Jim,” and that cuts me to the quick and hurts me. I become angry and defensive, but the reality is, I carry my background with me into situations and discussions in the church. This can cause offense, disagreement, discord, and divisions. This was the situation in Corinth and one of the reasons for Paul’s letter.

Sometime after Paul left Corinth, he ***“received a report from one of the Corinthian families that in his absence things had more or less fallen apart. He also received a letter from Corinth asking for help. Factions had developed, morals were in disrepair, worship had degenerated into a selfish grabbing for the supernatural. It was the kind of thing that might have been expected from Corinthians!”*** (Eugene Peterson).

Paul wrote this letter to deal with the issues that were reported to him. This letter appears to be in 2 parts. The first part deals with correcting these issues and getting the church back on track. The second half seems to be in response to another letter sent to Paul by the church asking various questions.

## **If you want to join a church with no problems... don't – you'll ruin it!**

The most important issue to Paul was the divisions or factions in the church. Jesus even proclaimed, ***“Any kingdom divided by civil war is doomed. A town or family splintered by feuding will fall apart.”*** (Matt. 12:25 NLT). Paul was concerned most about these quarrels within the church, because this kind of thing could easily destroy the entire work in Corinth, in Patchogue, anywhere a church exists. So, this is the first issue he addresses in his correction letter to the Corinthian church.

So – what's the answer? How do we learn to solve this issue of divisions in the church? Did you ever just want to smell like Jesus? I mean give off the fragrance of what He was like? There is actually a perfume called – Virtue – that is supposed to smell like Jesus. It is made from apricot, frankincense, and myrrh. These were the spices and scents used in Jesus time, so you can actually smell like Jesus if you want to 😊 This is the answer...

Max Lucado said this in one of his books... ***“God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus!”*** Paul encourages us to live in harmony with one another. We are to be a servant to others as He became a servant.

Ronald Nickelson commented how many major cities have a renowned landmark like the Eiffel Tower, etc. Even cities and towns may have well-known unique features. ***“So what is it that identifies the Christian community (the church) as such? What is the landmark that makes us recognizable to the world? It is our loyalty to Christ, of course, but that is not all. Jesus Himself said, ‘By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’ (Jn. 13:35). Therefore [the] identifying landmark in the church is love.”***

A healthy church is one where people look out for one another. Back in my day... Simon and Garfunkel had a song called, Bridge Over Troubled Water. It was a classic. I still get goose bumps when I hear it. Some of the words were:

*When you're weary/ Feeling small/ When tears are in your eyes/ I will dry them all/ I'm on your side/ When times get rough/ And friends just can't be found/ Like a bridge over troubled water/ I will lay me down...*

That's how it should be in the church. We have each other's back. We are willing to sacrifice ourselves for each other. I have your back, means: I'll be there for you – whatever. Can you say that to someone in the congregation and mean it? I'll be there for you, look out for you, and help you out if you're in trouble. Wow. Would that be a comfort to someone struggling right now?

The testimony in Scripture is that God always has our back, but we are to have one another's back too. We can be an extraordinary church if we will be there for one another, look out for one another, and help out one another when anyone is in trouble.

I know PJ has used this illustration in the past, but it seemed appropriate for today, so ...

Geese fly South in the winter and North in the summer, but they fly in a V formation. This is not an accident. They have learned – or God has instilled it in them – to do this. You see, the flapping of the wings causes an air current that the next goose can use to fly easier and stay up with the pack. The burden is on the front geese, since their job is hardest. So, when they get tired, they fall back in formation, and another goose moves up into its position to keep formation and relieve the tired goose. This procedure continues until they rest for the night, covering a lot of ground. In fact, the V formation adds 71% extra flying range to their journey. If one goose falls ill, two others stay with it and fly together to safety. They are truly amazing, but they are also an example of what the church should be like toward one another.

To live like Jesus is to love and serve one another and to lay down our life for the church. Years ago Chuck Swindoll told about a very disturbing case that came before the courts in the state of Massachusetts back in the 1920's... A man was walking along a pier when he tripped over a rope and fell into the cold, deep waters of the ocean bay. He came up screaming for help, and then sank beneath the surface. For some reason he was unable to swim or stay afloat. His friends could hear him cry in the distance, but they were too far away to get there in time. But within only a few yards was a young man lounging on a deck chair, sunbathing. He heard the drowning man plead, "Help, I can't swim." He was also an excellent swimmer.

The tragedy is that he did nothing. He only turned his head to watch indifferently as the man finally sank and drowned. The family of the victim sued the sunbather who did nothing to help. The result? They lost the case. This by-stander had no legal responsibility whatsoever to try to save the drowning man's life.

There's a world of need outside the doors of this church. Nobody's going to sue us if we look away, or ignore their need. Only God will know. But think what that means, **God will know!**

There's a world of need and hurt going on inside our church. You may not realize it. It may not be publicized in the Good Morning email or our announcements or even our pastoral prayer, but people are hurting in our church. There may be factions or divisions among each other. It's time to put all that aside and bring the love of God into the situation. We are to put ourselves behind us in order to minister to our own brothers and sisters in love.

Paul was addressing four major divisions in the church at Corinth. They may seem foolish to us now, but there were some who claimed to follow Paul, and some who followed Apollos, some who followed Peter, and a group who followed Christ. The church became divided into cliques. Paul put this all into perspective, using himself as an example. He said, ***“<sup>13</sup> Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not! <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> for now no one can say they were baptized in my name.. <sup>17</sup> For Christ didn’t send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News...”***

I am so thankful we don’t have major issues of divisions in our church. But beware – it can happen and very easily too. The enemy is waiting for any incident that he can use to get under your skin and cause you to rise up against another in the church. If you ever feel that starting to happen inside yourself, pray and saturate yourself in the Word of God. Always remember that LOVE must be the motivator of all your actions. We’re all in this together. Seek counsel of others that are mature in the faith – not that they are above being vulnerable themselves, but that hopefully they will see where your feelings are coming from and steer you away from those feelings, disarming the enemy from using that situation to cause division in our body.

Remember Max Lucado’s words...

***“God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus!”***

Max Lucado

God’s goal in each of our lives is that we would be Just Like Jesus – motivated by love.