

# The Messed Up Church: Paul's Letters to Corinth

This book consists of 45 sermons that move sequentially through 1 and 2 Corinthians. These messages were originally written by Pastor Russell Roberts. He delivered them to the saints at Calvary Baptist Church and Red Spring Baptist Church in and just outside of Seymour, Texas. This year-long series began in the Spring of 2023 and ended in the Spring of 2024.

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# The Church at Corinth: Background and Introduction

Originally Preached on 4/16/2023

*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. - Ephesians 3:20-21*

Today we are beginning a new sermon series which I anticipate will take a full-year to complete. Over the course of the next several months we are going to read and study Paul's letters to the Christian church at Corinth - both 1st and 2nd Corinthians. As always, we will consider how God's Word applied to its original audience (back when it was written) and how it applies to our church today.

I have titled this series, "The Messed Up Church: Paul's Letters to Corinth". I am borrowing this name from a popular podcast that my son listens to called "The Messed Up Church". This podcast seeks to call out some of the many errors and false teachings present in the modern Christian church. As we will discover, the church at Corinth fits this description quite well. It was fraught with all sorts of problems. Paul addresses many of these issues in his letters.

In truth, every church - including our own - is a "messed up church" to some extent. This is because we who make up the church are flawed human beings with an inclination to sin and to wander away from God. Each of us - even your pastor - is imperfect, frail, and broken. Our weaknesses and deficiencies invariably crop up within the church, often leading to strife and discord among us. While no church is ever perfect, my prayer is that the lessons we learn in this series will make us better.

## I. THE FOUNDING OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (Acts 18:1-18)

Paul's first visit to Corinth occurred near the end of his 2nd missionary journey (50-52 AD). After checking in on his churches in Galatia and Asia Minor, Paul crossed over into the European region of Macedonia. From there he journeyed southward to Achaia, which was a Roman province in modern-day Greece. After a short stay in Athens, Paul made his way to Corinth. There he met a Jewish couple named Aquila and Priscilla. They were relatively new residents of Corinth, as they had recently been expelled from Rome by the Emperor Claudius who'd decreed that no Jews could live in the capital city. Paul stayed and worked with them making tents during the week and preaching in the synagogue every Sabbath.

Sometime later, Silas and Timothy caught up with Paul in Corinth. Paul had left them behind in Thessalonica earlier during his journey. Their arrival freed Paul to focus on preaching full-time. However, the Jews, for the most part, rejected Paul's message about Jesus. Frustrated, he turned to the Gentiles. Paul began preaching in the home of Titius Justus, a Roman proselyte, which was located next to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, and his entire household became believers and were baptized as well as many other Corinthians - some

Jews, but mostly Gentiles. The LORD encouraged Paul to continue preaching and teaching, so he remained in the city for 1½ years winning many converts to Christ.

Eventually some Jewish opposition rose up against Paul and brought him before the Roman governor Gallio. They accused Paul of persuading people to worship God in a manner contrary to Jewish law. Gallio didn't care about their religious law, so he dismissed the case and drove them out of his court. Before departing, the infuriated Jews seized Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him as Gallio watched indifferently. Some scholars believe that Sosthenes and Crispus were the same person while others believe that they were distinct. Some time later, Paul left Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla. However, the community of new believers he left behind made up the original congregation of the Corinthian church.

## II. PAUL'S EARLY LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

From Corinth, Paul made his way home to Antioch making a few brief stops along the way. He left Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus, to serve in the church there. Paul remained in Antioch at his home church for about a year before embarking on a 3rd missionary journey (54-58 AD). Once again, he made his way through Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the churches in this region, before coming to Ephesus. On this occasion, Paul settled in Ephesus for almost 3 years, teaching the word of God primarily in the school of Tyrannus. During this time, Paul wrote at least 2 letters to Corinth.

It appears that Paul sent a letter to the church at Corinth prior to 1 Corinthians. This earlier letter, which has been lost, warned them not to associate with immoral people (1 Corinthians 5:9). Apparently, they did not heed Paul's advice. While in Ephesus, Paul received a report from those in Chloe's household, who were likely members of the Corinthian church, that there were quarrels within the congregation there. Furthermore, Paul received a letter from the Corinthian church itself seeking answers to several questions. Paul wrote the epistle known as 1 Corinthians to address Chloe's concerns and respond to their questions.

## III. THE INTRODUCTION OF 1 CORINTHIANS (1 Corinthians 1:1-9)

Paul opens this letter with a greeting from himself and Sosthenes. It is uncertain whether this is the same man who was mentioned in Acts 18:17 (the leader of the synagogue who was beaten by the Jews). Paul then specifies the recipients of this letter as the church of God at Corinth, stating that they have been sanctified and called as saints by Jesus Christ. In this, they are part of the larger Christian church which shares this same calling. Following his usual pattern, Paul speaks a blessing of God's grace and peace upon them.

Next, Paul expresses thanksgiving for the Corinthian believers. He is thankful for the grace they have received in Christ Jesus. He delights that they have been enriched by the Lord in all speech and knowledge, and that their testimony of Jesus has been confirmed. He states that they, as a congregation, are not lacking in any spiritual gift and praises them for their eager anticipation of Christ's return. Paul declares that God will uphold them until the end and that

they will, by His grace, be blameless on the Day of the Lord. Lastly, Paul exalts the faithfulness of God who called the Corinthians into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

## CONCLUSION

In this morning's message, we've discussed the historical background, approximate timing, and general setting of 1 Corinthians. We've identified the purpose for which it was written and the circumstances that led to its writing. We've also briefly discussed the letter's introduction. The Christian church at Corinth, which Paul had founded a few years earlier, was facing several problems that threatened to destroy it. Paul wrote this letter to lovingly address and correct these issues.

Corinth was the capital city of the Roman province of Achaia. It was a wealthy and influential port city. The temple of the goddess Aphrodite was located there, and her worship involved temple prostitution. As such, sexual immorality was a huge issue in Corinth as prostitution was prevalent. The bustling city also attracted a diverse population of citizens from many different cultures and backgrounds, which often contributed to divisions and animosity. These and other issues presented serious challenges to the Christians living there. Nevertheless, God had established a church in Corinth, through which He desired to shine the light of Jesus to the darkened city.

In the same way, God has placed us here to declare the good news of Jesus in our small town and surrounding area. In order to do this most effectively, we must first examine ourselves and make sure that our church is functioning in a pure and godly manner. If not, we need to make the necessary changes - both individually and collectively - so that we might become the church that God desires us to be.

# Division Among the Congregation

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*Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; - Philippians 1:27*

Last Sunday we began a brand new sermon series titled “The Messed Up Church: Paul’s Letters to Corinth”. During this series, we are going to study through the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians. I am so excited to see what God has in store for us as we dig into His Word and apply it to our lives and church.

In the opening verses of 1 Corinthians, Paul sends his greetings to the church at Corinth. He also expresses thanksgiving to God for them. He encourages them by stating that God is faithful and that, in Christ, they will stand blameless before Him in the Day of the Lord.

Following his warm salutation, Paul begins to address several issues that are having a detrimental impact on the Corinthian church. The first of these is division among the congregation. This is the topic of today’s message.

## I. OTHER PROMINENT PREACHERS (Acts 18:24-19:1)

As we learned last week, when Paul left Corinth after establishing the church there, Aquila and Priscilla went with him. The trio traveled to Ephesus where they made a brief stop. From there, Paul continued on to Antioch, but Aquila and Priscilla remained with the Ephesians. Not long after, an eloquent and gifted preacher arrived in Ephesus and began preaching about Jesus in the synagogue. His name was Apollos, a Jew from the city of Alexandria. Though he was passionate and persuasive, his understanding of Christ’s baptism was somewhat lacking. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him speak, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately.

Once he was ready, Aquila and Priscilla sent Apollos to Corinth - the city they had recently left. When he arrived, Apollos was welcomed by the congregation. He proved to be a great help and encouragement to the Corinthian believers. He publicly refuted the Jews and convincingly demonstrated through the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. As a result of Apollo’s ministry, the church at Corinth continued to grow.

Though the details of Peter’s missionary journeys are not detailed in the Bible, he also traveled from town to town evangelizing, proclaiming the kingdom of God, and planting new and/or strengthening existing churches. Most historians believe that Peter also visited the church in Corinth, perhaps around the same time that Apollos was there or shortly thereafter. Peter likely had a particular appeal to the Jewish Christians intermingled among the predominantly Gentile congregation. His preaching and teaching grew the church even more.

## II. MISGUIDED DIVISION (1 Corinthians 1:10-13a)

Within a span of about 3-4 years, the Corinthian church was blessed by the preaching of 3 great leaders - Paul, Apollos, and Peter. Each of these men contributed to its prosperous growth. Many people came to faith in Jesus Christ and joined the church as a result of their respective ministries. Unfortunately, the presence of these notable preachers led to division and the formation of differing factions within the congregation.

Apparently, many of the Corinthian believers were confused about the purpose and effect of water baptism. The Bible teaches that water baptism is purely symbolic. It is a visible depiction of regeneration - the new birth that occurs within the heart of a sinner when he or she accepts Christ. Baptism does not save anyone, but rather it is a public declaration that a person has already been saved. Unfortunately, it seems that many of the Christians in Corinth equated water baptism with salvation. As such, they attributed their salvation, at least in part, to the person who baptized them or led them to be baptized. Thus, some of the congregation aligned themselves rigidly with Paul, others with Apollos, and still others with Peter. Only a fraction of them properly understood that their baptism was wholly of Christ.

Paul urged the Corinthians to put aside their disputes and be in agreement with one another - to be of one mind and one judgment. He asked them, "Is Christ divided?" The obvious answer to this question is no. In another of his letters, Paul wrote, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:4-6) The church is united in Christ, and each believer is a member of His body. Jesus is not divided, and His church shouldn't be divided either.

## III. A PREACHER'S ANONYMITY (1 Corinthians 13b-17)

Paul went on to ask the Corinthians if it was he who had been crucified for them. Had they been baptized in his name? The same questions could have been asked for Apollos and Peter. And the answer? Of course not! It was Jesus who was crucified on the cross of Calvary to atone for their sins and they had all been baptized in His Name. Neither Paul, Apollos, nor Peter were responsible for their salvation. They were simply servants used by God.

Paul was upset because some were ascribing their allegiance to him rather than to the Lord. He wrote that he was thankful he'd only baptized a few people in Corinth, including Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas. Had he baptized more of them, he might have further perpetuated the problem. Paul explained that his calling was not to baptize people, but rather to preach the gospel in sincerity and truth so that those who came to Christ were not drawn by the charismatic tongue of a preacher, but rather by the appeal and power of the cross. Paul humbly rejected his celebrity status, desiring instead to remain as lowly and unassuming as possible.

I suspect that all of us have a certain pastor, Sunday School teacher, or someone that holds a special place in our hearts. Perhaps they were instrumental in teaching us about Jesus and our

desperate need for Him. That said, we should never attribute that which belongs completely to God to anyone else. The Lord alone is worthy of all glory, all praise, all worship, and all devotion. Those pastors and/or leaders who accept such acclaim and adoration from their congregations should be ashamed of themselves. The pastor's role is to make Christ famous, not themselves, and to teach believers to lean completely on Him.

## CONCLUSION

In this morning's message we've touched on 3 major issues. Let's take a moment to review each of them.

First, we as the Christian church should not be needlessly divided. We shouldn't quarrel or be contentious with one another. Such behavior misrepresents Jesus and disparages His holy name. Rather, we should be of one mind and one judgment. My friends, if we are ever to be the church God desires us to be, it must begin by coming together in agreement as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Second, we must understand that water baptism does not bring about salvation. It merely symbolizes that which Christ affects in the heart of a new believer. New Christians are baptized as a public expression and declaration of their salvation, thereby identifying themselves with the church. Water baptism is merely a physical illustration of a spiritual reality.

And third, we must learn to follow and rely on Christ alone. He is the One who saves us and sustains us in our darkest hour. There is no other. It doesn't matter how godly your pastor seems - he is a vile, wretched sinner saved by grace, just like everyone else who has trusted in Jesus for salvation. If your faith is dependent on your pastor, or anyone else for that matter, it is gravely misplaced. Don't place him on a pedestal because he is unworthy to be there, and if he's worth his salt, he doesn't want to be there either.



# The Wisdom of God

Originally Preached on 4/30/2023

*For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. - Proverbs 2:6*

There was division within the Corinthian church, caused in part by their misunderstanding of baptism. Regardless of the reason, division in the church often has devastating consequences. In my lifetime, I have seen several churches split or severely decline as a result of unresolved division. When Christians quarrel and contend with each other, they misrepresent Jesus and disparage His holy Name. They also damage their own witness and fruitfulness. For this reason, Paul urged the Corinthian congregation to be of one accord, sharing the same mind and judgment. Unity should be characteristic of all churches.

Another issue present among the Corinthian church was the tendency to follow worldly wisdom rather than godly wisdom. Worldly wisdom focuses on what is best for or pleasing to oneself. Worldly wisdom can lead to success in this life, but it makes no investment in eternity. In fact, worldly, or conventional, wisdom is usually in direct contrast with godly wisdom. Godly wisdom begins by fearing the LORD and abiding by His Word. It is selfless, placing the needs of others before oneself, and it looks forward to eternal life in Heaven.

The secular world around us operates with and by worldly wisdom. People and businesses strive to be successful, influential, and profitable in this present life. It can be very easy for the church to get caught up in this materialistic mindset. In this morning's message, we are going to read Paul's comparison of God's wisdom and the world's wisdom, and his advice about which we should follow.

## I. GOD'S WISDOM SEEMS FOOLISH TO THE WORLD (1 Corinthians 1:18-21)

Paul begins by stating that the word of the cross - that is, the gospel of Jesus Christ - seems foolish to those who are perishing. In other words, lost people who reject the good news perceive it as absurd. On the other hand, those who have accepted Christ and are being saved regard it as the power of God (Romans 1:16). Notice that believers "are being saved", pointing to the ongoing sanctification process of salvation that will ultimately end with glorification. Those who embrace worldly wisdom often look down on Christians as naive and even ignorant.

Paul cites the Old Testament prophet Isaiah and declares that God will ultimately destroy those who follow worldly wisdom (Isaiah 29:14). No man, scribe, or debater equipped solely with worldly wisdom can stand before God, because the LORD has made the world's wisdom foolishness. Do you see the irony here? Those who embrace worldly wisdom wrongly view godly wisdom as foolishness, when in fact it is worldly wisdom that is foolishness!

God, in His infinite wisdom, created a world that could not come to know Him using their own conventional wisdom. It is impossible to come to a saving knowledge of God solely by human intellect. Instead, those who come to know God must set aside worldly wisdom and accept that

which seems to be, by worldly standards, ridiculous and foolish. Godly wisdom requires faith to believe that Christ is risen, that He has paid the debt of man's sin, that He has secured man's pardon, and that in Him sinners can have forgiveness and salvation.

## II. GOD'S WISDOM IS GREATER THAN THE WORLD'S (1 Corinthians 1:22-25)

Paul's message of Christ's crucifixion was generally dismissed by both the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews were looking for signs and wonders which would visibly demonstrate the power of God (Matthew 12:38). The Gentiles were seeking philosophy, reason, and intellectual knowledge to demonstrate the wisdom of God. This explains why the gospel of Matthew, which was written primarily to Jews, focuses heavily on miracles and wonders while the gospel of Luke, which was written primarily to Gentiles, contains more teaching and parables.

The message of the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews and an absurdity to the Gentiles. However, to those who are called - those who've accepted the Lord's forgiveness and received His offer of salvation - Jesus Christ is both the power of God (sought by the Jews) and the wisdom of God (sought by the Gentiles). Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate display of God's power and the gospel is the supreme stroke of His wisdom.

The foolishness of God, as it is perceived by fallen mankind, is wiser than all of the world's so-called wisdom. The weakness of God, though such a thing does not exist, is greater than all of the world's strength. As the Old Testament prophet wrote, "God's thoughts and ways are higher than those of man" (Isaiah 55:9) and "His understanding is inscrutable" (Isaiah 40:28). We cannot even begin to grasp it.

## III. BOAST IN THE LORD (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Paul asked the Corinthians to consider who they were when Christ called them to salvation. There weren't many geniuses or university scholars among them. There weren't a lot of brave warriors or champions in the congregation, and few, if any, wealthy elites with privileged social status. Instead, they were mostly just common, ordinary people like everyone else. Yet, God had chosen them to be His church.

God chooses the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things of the world to shame the strong, the base and despised things to shame the exalted, and the things that "are not" to nullify the things that "are". This is the paradoxical nature of God. In accordance with His divine wisdom, God has chosen regular people - just like you and me - to be the recipients of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, there is nothing in this world and nothing of ourselves that we can boast about. Boasting means to "talk with excessive pride and self-satisfaction about one's achievements, possessions, or abilities." Paul cites the ancient prophet Jeremiah when he concludes, "Let he who boasts, boast in the LORD." (Jeremiah 9:23-24) Worldly wisdom is the road to death and judgment, but godly wisdom leads to light and life.

## CONCLUSION

In addition to their theological misunderstanding of baptism, the division that plagued the Corinthian church was also fueled by pride, arrogance, and worldly wisdom. Many people within the congregation were focused upon themselves and their own needs, rather than upon Christ and one another. Their misplaced confidence in the world's wisdom aggravated their situation even further.

Before we close, let's go over some major points we've touched on this morning. First, worldly wisdom views the gospel as foolishness and regards Christianity as nonsense. This deception is by God's design. Second, the truth is that godly wisdom is far greater than worldly wisdom and it is personified in the Person of Jesus Christ - the Savior who died to atone for the sins of mankind. Third, God has chosen the foolish and weak things of this world to shame the wise and strong so that He might reveal the futility of boasting in earthly things. Those who boast should boast in the LORD!

Perhaps there is someone hearing this message today who has been trusting in and living by worldly wisdom. Perhaps it has brought you to some temporal success and prosperity. Dear friend, the wisdom of this world can never satisfy the longing of your heart or fulfill the purpose for which you were created. Only godly wisdom can do that, and this begins by fearing the LORD. I invite you, right now, to forsake and forget what the world has taught you and to receive and embrace the foolishness of the cross.

# Rely on the Spirit

Originally Preached on 5/7/2023

*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. - John 14:26*

Good morning. Welcome to Calvary Baptist Church. I am so grateful you've come to worship the Lord with us today. The upcoming message is the 4th in our new sermon series, "The Messed Up Church: Paul's Letters to Corinth".

In the opening chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses the issue of division within the church - a concern that had been reported to him. This fracturing of the congregation seems to have been caused, in part, by a misunderstanding of water baptism and a misplaced trust in worldly wisdom. Some of the members were even boasting in and about themselves.

As we move into chapter 2, Paul continues discussing this problem. Using himself as an example, he begins to talk about how the Corinthian believers should reject conventional wisdom and start leaning on the Holy Spirit. Our message is titled, "Rely on the Spirit".

## I. IT WASN'T ME (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Paul asked the Corinthian Christians to remember what he was like a few years before when he'd first arrived in their city. At that time, their church did not exist. Paul had spent 18 months there preaching (Acts 18), yet he was not a highly skilled orator or a spiritual scholar. Rather, he simply and passionately declared the message of Christ's crucifixion - that's it, nothing else. He was nervous and anxious just like everyone else, and wasn't particularly persuasive or wise. Yet, in spite of Paul's ineptness, the Spirit of God moved powerfully in Corinth, several people were saved, and the church was established. Their faith had not been birthed by the words of a polished, well-spoken preacher, but rather by the power of God.

Beloved, we as a church need to get back to the purity and simplicity of the cross. We need to preach Christ and Him crucified as the central and repeated theme of our messages. We don't need clever gimmicks, dazzling theatrics, and/or elaborate special effects to enhance our presentations. There is no way to manufacture a genuine stirring of the Holy Spirit. Instead of trying to mimic it with emotion, we should focus on plainly and directly preaching the gospel, coupled with sincere, sustained prayer. Perhaps then we would see the Spirit move mightily.

## II. THEY DIDN'T GET IT (1 Corinthians 2:6-9)

Paul explained that those who were mature (that is, those who were saved) recognized and understood the wisdom of God manifest within his preaching, but the lost masses and their secular rulers missed it. God's wisdom is a mystery, hidden since time began from those who lack the faith to see it. Had the authorities who crucified Jesus known the wisdom of God, they

wouldn't have executed Him. Yet, as the Old Testament prophet stated, the unbelieving world can't perceive the marvelous wonders that God has prepared for His children (Isaiah 64:4).

Until a sinner surrenders to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit and responds to the Lord's calling by faith, they will never understand the wisdom of God or know His salvation. The rulers of this world just don't get it, and their leadership reflects their corruption. This is why it is so important that we as Christians pray for our leaders (and all lost people for that matter), because despite our best efforts, only God can truly change their hearts (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

### III. IT'S THE SPIRIT (1 Corinthians 2:10-13)

Paul continued by stating that the Holy Spirit had revealed all of the LORD's aforementioned wonders to both he and his fellow missionaries (and, by extension, to all who believe). The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. Just as the human spirit knows a man's thoughts, so also the Holy Spirit knows the thoughts of God. Therefore, when a born again believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the thoughts and wisdom of God become readily accessible to them. Paul and his colleagues didn't speak from human wisdom, but rather from things taught and revealed to them by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit interprets the spiritual mysteries of God so that Christians can understand and proclaim them.

This passage clearly describes the existence of 2 spirits. The natural spirit, which is present in every person, is tainted by sin. Notice that it doesn't depart when a person accepts Christ. Rather, the Holy Spirit takes up residence within the life of the believer alongside their human spirit. Thus, a Christian is indwelt by both. The question then becomes... will they listen to and trust in the Holy Spirit or will they lean upon their own human spirit?

### IV. WE HAVE IT (1 Corinthians 2:14-16)

Paul concludes that a natural man, who operates by his own spirit, does not accept the things of the Holy Spirit. In fact, he views them as foolishness. An unsaved person cannot genuinely grasp the truths of God apart from the Holy Spirit, while the saved person can. This disparity leaves worldly skeptics and critics in no position to rightly cast judgment against Christians. While no person is able to fully comprehend the mind of the LORD or give Him instruction (Isaiah 40:13), born again believers do have the mind of Christ. In short, the Holy Spirit enables them to comprehend God's purposes and His redemptive plan for creation.

Following Paul's example, Christians are called to rely on the Holy Spirit and to adopt the mind of Christ. We should forsake worldly wisdom and the inclinations of our own fallen nature, and instead lean upon and be led by the Spirit of God. The most certain way to do this is by reading and obeying the Bible, the living Word of God, which was and is inspired by the Holy Spirit. As we do so, the Spirit will guide and direct us.

### CONCLUSION

We as Baptists are often hesitant to talk about the Holy Spirit. Most of us are pretty conservative in our religious beliefs and practices. We know that the Holy Spirit has the power to heal and work mighty miracles. We know that when the Spirit moves hearts are changed, lives are transformed, and souls are saved. We have seen and experienced these things personally and hear reports of them often. Yet, we have also seen countless false teachers, hucksters, and charlatans make outrageous claims supposedly given to them by the Holy Spirit that proved to be patently false. We've seen "spiritual healers" who scam the vulnerable and desperate to fund their lavish lifestyles. We've watched as "prophetic revelations" are pulled off of social media to trick the naive. These, and many other acts falsely attributed to the Holy Spirit, make us leery.

Beloved, it is not the fundamental role of the Holy Spirit to validate Jesus or His would-be prophets through the working of miracles or the giving of new revelation. The empty grave proves who Jesus is and those who preach repentance of sin and salvation in Christ are His true messengers. The Bible is God's complete revelation to man, and we are expressly warned not to add to it.

No analogy is perfect, but some can be helpful for a simpleton like me. I sometimes think of the Holy Spirit as an antennae. He allows me to tune into, hear, and understand the voice of God. Without the Spirit, I would not be able to do any of these things. Beyond that, the Holy Spirit allows me to commune with God. Not only does the LORD speak to me, but I can speak to Him through the Spirit. Of course the Holy Spirit does much more than just this - such as affecting and securing my salvation for example - but, at a basic level, the Holy Spirit enables me to have fellowship with the LORD. Why wouldn't I take advantage of this privilege and rely on Him?

# The Works of Man

Originally Preached on 5/14/2023

*And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." - Luke 10:2*

Having received troubling news of quarrels and strife within the Corinthian church, Paul opens this epistle with a lengthy discussion about division. There are many possible causes for division within the Body of Christ. In the case of these believers at Corinth, Paul begins by highlighting their theological misunderstanding of water baptism, their emphasis on worldly wisdom, and their failure to hear and rely on the Holy Spirit. Each of these issues is plaguing their congregation and causing real problems.

In today's message, Paul stresses the limitations and weaknesses of man. He continues to reinforce that notion that we, as fallen and corrupt people, have no basis for boasting. While we are certainly called to do good works, nevertheless our works will never save us. Our greatest accomplishments pale in comparison to the works of Almighty God. May we never trust in our works to earn God's favor or secure His grace.

The following sermon is titled, "The Works of Man". It is the 5th message in this series. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 3 and let's begin.

## I. YOU ARE STILL INFANTS (1 Corinthians 3:1-4)

Paul again reflected upon his initial visit to Corinth. At that time, there was no established church and those who were receptive to his preaching were becoming brand new Christians. As a result, Paul focused on the most basic and fundamental aspects of Christianity, rather than on more complex and challenging doctrinal truths. They were infants in Christ, being nurtured by milk rather than meat, as they were not yet ready to receive it.

Now a few years had passed by, and they had been blessed with the preaching and teaching of both Apollos and (possibly) Peter. It seems reasonable to expect that their faith and Christian understanding would have grown and developed somewhat. Yet, their behaviors continued to reflect an immaturity and fleshly childishness. Paul lovingly rebuked them for their jealousy and strife which resembled that of the lost world. Citing their foolish division, he asked them to honestly consider for themselves whether or not they were acting immaturely.

Beloved, we as Christians should grow up. We are called to maturity. Our faith should deepen, our knowledge of Scripture should expand, our peace, joy, and contentment in Christ should broaden and become less shakable, and our reliance on the Spirit should become strong. We should become increasingly mindful of and obedient to the LORD's will. In short, our beliefs should blossom into godly lifestyles. I am astounded by the number of people who profess to be Christians for many years and yet still act and speak like brand new believers. My friends, living

things grow... and if someone isn't growing in their walk with God over time could it be that they are not alive? Just saying...

## II. WE ARE LOWLY WORKERS (1 Corinthians 3:5-9)

Paul described himself and Apollos as mere servants who were used by the LORD to lead the Corinthian Christians to Christ. Though he is not directly mentioned, we can include Peter in this group as well. Paul planted the church and Apollos (and possibly Peter) watered it, but God alone was responsible for its growth. Paul stressed the fact that God alone was responsible for the life and growth of His children and His church. We as ministers, preachers, and teachers should always serve in humble recognition of this truth.

There is no distinction between the church planter who was used by God to establish the church and those preachers who were used by God to lead it thereafter. All of these are servants of the LORD. Nevertheless, God is good and has promised to reward those who labor for the sake of His kingdom. In this sense, Paul refers to himself, Apollos, and other Christian ministers as God's fellow workers. He describes the Corinthian church as God's field or God's building.

We as born-again believers are privileged to serve as God's co-workers. He includes us in the labor of His kingdom and the advancement of the gospel. Though God alone is ultimately responsible for its growth and success, He allows us to participate alongside Him. We are His "hands and feet". This work provides us with significance, purpose, and connection to both God and one another. Though it is often difficult and exhausting, we as Christians should always view our service to God as a blessing rather than a burden (Galatians 6:9). Though He doesn't need us, the LORD lovingly invites us to join Him.

## III. OUR WORK WILL BE TESTED (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

Having just described the church at Corinth as God's building, Paul continued to develop this beautiful metaphor. He stated that, by God's grace, he had laid the foundation for the church. Apollos, Peter, and others had and would continue to build upon it. He warned that each person should be careful as to how they build upon it. Most importantly, Paul identified the foundation of the church as Jesus Christ and declared that there is no other suitable foundation. In order for our building to stand, it must be built upon the Rock (Matthew 7:24-27).

Paul compared the works of man to various building materials including gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, and straw. Obviously, some of these things are more valuable and more durable than others. He concluded that on judgment day each man's work will be tested by the fire of Almighty God. Each person will be rewarded for that which remains and suffer loss for that which is burned up. Nevertheless, they themselves will be saved regardless of the enduring quality of their works.

Beloved, first and foremost we must build our lives on the firm foundation - Jesus Christ. Our works should be focused on eternal things - kingdom things, rather than temporal and material



things. We shouldn't serve God just to be rewarded, yet we can rest in knowing that He will reward those who diligently serve Him. Fortunately, our salvation is not based on our works, but rather on God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Though our works will someday be tested to determine rewards, if we've repented of our sin and trusted in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, our salvation can never be lost.

## CONCLUSION

Let's quickly go back and touch on the major points of today's message:

The Christian life is not always a straight line or a steady climb. All of us wander and get lost from time to time. The journey is filled with mountains and valleys - seasons of great joy and hopefulness, followed by deep doubt and despair. Nevertheless, over the years our faith should develop and mature. We should draw closer and more intimately connected to the LORD, just as we would to our dearest loved ones. If this isn't happening, something is wrong...

God is wholly responsible for the success and advancement of His kingdom. We as Christians are privileged and blessed to participate in His work. May we never conflate our lowly efforts with the glorious work of the LORD. We are mere servants and He is the Master!

That which we build must rest on the foundation of Jesus Christ. We must labor for His kingdom, not for our own, so that our work will withstand God's judgment. We should rejoice in knowing that our service for the Lord is not in vain, but will be rewarded on the Last Day. Finally, we should be thankful that our salvation is not contingent upon our works, but rather is secured by the finished work of Christ!

Christian, is your walk with God basically the same today as it was years ago when you were first saved? Christian, have you arrogantly boasted in your own feeble works? Lost person, have you been trying to earn God's favor by doing good works? Repent.

# Temples and Servants

Originally Preached on 5/21/2023

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. - Mark 10:45*

Paul opens the epistle of 1 Corinthians by confronting and addressing the quarreling and animosity that is present within their congregation. In the first 4 chapters of this book, he identifies several causes for the strife and prescribes solutions to remedy these issues. Theological misunderstandings, a reliance on worldly wisdom rather than the Holy Spirit, widespread spiritual immaturity, and boasting in human works have all contributed to the church's division. This morning's message picks up where we left off last week as we continue to focus on the discord rampant in Corinthian church.

## I. YOU ARE THE TEMPLE (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

Later in this letter Paul applies these teachings to the lives of individual Christians (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). We will elaborate on this perspective much more when we reach that passage. But for now, in this context, he is addressing the Corinthians as a church body - as a group. We should interpret these verses accordingly.

In the preceding passage, Paul referred to their congregation collectively as God's building. He explained that God used him to lay the church's foundation, which was none other than Jesus Christ, and used others - specifically Apollos - to build upon it. He warned them to be careful as to how they built their church and implored them to use quality materials that would endure God's testing. Of course, he was speaking metaphorically.

Now Paul goes a step further by stating that the church isn't just any building. It's not a store, a workshop, or a house. Paul declares that it is the temple of God. It is the place where God's Spirit dwells. Since the days of the exodus, God's manifest presence dwelt among His people Israel first in the tabernacle and then in the temple. But this all changed when the Jewish people rejected their Messiah and the old covenant was suspended. Under the new covenant, the local Christian church became and currently serves as the house of God. Whenever and wherever believers gather corporately, the Holy Spirit should dwell in their midst.

For this reason, Christians should be careful not to allow any individual or group of individuals damage or destroy the church. It is the temple of God. Those who do harm to it will be dealt with harshly by the LORD Himself. The church is a holy place - pure, set apart, and sanctified for God's purposes. It should be regarded as such by those who gather there.

Sadly, many of us have lost our reverence for the church. We lack a holy regard for it. We practice things in the church that have no place there. We allow unrepentant sinners to behave openly and shamefully there. We rarely, if ever, practice church discipline. Many churches have become unwelcoming and hostile environments for the Holy Spirit. I dare to say that the Spirit of

God has even vacated some churches completely, leaving them powerless and lifeless. We would be wise to remember that Jesus righteously cleansed the temple and, as necessary, perhaps we should do likewise...

## II. LET ME SAY THIS AGAIN (1 Corinthians 3:18-23)

In this passage, Paul revisits and summarizes some of the major themes he has mentioned in the preceding chapters. He tells those who trust in worldly wisdom that they are deceiving themselves, and says that they must accept the foolishness of God's wisdom in order to become truly wise. He repeats his earlier point that this world's wisdom is foolishness to God, citing a pair of verses from the Old Testament to reinforce his argument (Job 5:13, Psalm 94:11).

Again Paul commands them not to boast in men or the works of men - even those of godly men. Specifically, they should not perceive themselves as belonging to either Paul, Apollos, or Peter (originally stated in 1 Corinthians 1:12). In fact, the opposite is true - pastors belong to the church. The congregation has authority over the pastor, and his role is merely servant leadership. The pastor is not a president, king, dictator, or boss - he is an undershepherd who strives to edify the church and its members. Beyond their leaders, God has given all things to the church that they might serve and worship Him both now and forever. Finally, the church belongs to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

## III. JUDGING AND BEING JUDGED (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

Paul states that he, along with all other ministers, including Apollos and Peter, should be regarded as servants of Christ and stewards of God. A steward is responsible for managing the possessions of someone else. Jesus taught a parable comparing a just and unjust steward (Luke 12:42-48). In short, everything belongs to the LORD and church leaders are tasked with taking care of it. As such, they must be honest and trustworthy.

Though Paul conducts himself in this way and strives to maintain a godly reputation, he is not overly concerned with how the Corinthians or anyone else thinks of him. The truth is, people will find reasons to slander and condemn even the most righteous person if it fits their agenda. What's more, Paul is careful not to degrade, belittle, or malign himself. The only judgment that really matters comes from the LORD, because only He knows the truth. We must not take the judgmental remarks of others too seriously, nor should we be overly hard on ourselves.

Paul instructs the Corinthians to withhold their judgment of others until the LORD comes. At that time, God will bring to light the hidden things and disclose the true intentions of all men. Following this revelation, God will render praise to whom it is due. Praise from men is futile and meaningless compared to the approval of God. The content of these verses, and others to follow, indicate that some of the people in the Corinthian church were making slanderous comments about Paul's character.

## CONCLUSION

In this sermon, we have touched on several different topics that may seem to be a bit disjointed. Nevertheless, let's go over them quickly before we close.

First - the local church is the temple of God. When Christians gather there, the Holy Spirit should be manifestly present in their midst. To that end, the church and its members should conduct itself in a reverent and godly manner that encourages and fosters the corporate presence of the Holy Spirit. Our practices and preaching should be orderly and grounded in Biblical truth.

Second - the members of the church don't belong to the pastors, but rather the pastors belong to the members. Pastors and church leaders are servants and stewards of God who are called to shepherd a specific congregation. To go a step further, the entire church belongs to Jesus, who is the head of the body, and Jesus belongs to the Father.

Third - while it is imperative for pastors and leaders to conduct themselves with integrity and trustworthiness, honestly the opinions of other people don't mean much. God knows a person's heart - whether for good or bad - and His judgment is all that really matters. Don't let others puff you up or tear you down, and don't do this to yourself either.

Next week we will wrap up our discussion on division within the church as we finish chapter 4. Until then, may God richly bless you and yours. Amen.

## Living In Humility

Originally Preached on 5/28/2023

*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; - Philippians 2:3*

What a joy it is to be a child of the LORD! I am so grateful that you have joined us here this morning to study God's Word and learn from His teachings. What a blessing it is to open the Bible together!

This morning we will continue our reading in 1 Corinthians chapter 4. Last week we got through the first 5 verses, and today we will pick up where we left off. Remember, Paul is addressing division within the church at Corinth. The sermon is titled, "Living In Humility".

### I. DON'T ACT SUPERIOR (1 Corinthians 4:6-7)

In the preceding passage, Paul talked about the role of ministers and church leaders. Pastors are servants of the congregation, not dictators over it. They are stewards and servants of God. The church members do not belong to them as many were claiming - on the contrary, it would be more appropriate to say that they belong to the church members. This is the manner in which Paul referred to himself and Apollos (and also Peter). They should not be regarded by the church in any lofty manner beyond this, nor should the Corinthians pit themselves against each other as if anyone was superior.

Which of them was greater than any of the others? Everything they had was of God, not of themselves! So what did they have to boast about? God was the source of all they had received, so they should boast only in the Lord. Just as they shouldn't have compared Apollos with Paul, nor should they have compared themselves with others.

### II. THE LOT OF APOSTLES (1 Corinthians 4:8-13)

Many of the Corinthians were foolishly acting as though they were wealthy kings, having become rich and prosperous by their own doings. Paul sarcastically stated that he wished this were true, so that he might leave his meager circumstances behind and come reign with them in their extravagance. Of course, Paul was being satirical. He was sharply pointing out their misplaced love of earthly things.

In contrast to their relative luxury, Paul described the difficult life of an apostle. He reasoned that God had ordained apostles last of all - following the prophets, priests, and kings of old - as those condemned to death to be a spectacle to both men and angels. Though the Corinthians were prudent in Christ, the apostles were fools for Him; they were strong, but the apostles were weak; they were distinguished, but the apostles were a reproach. Paul and those like him were hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, and homeless. They labored tirelessly with their own hands. When they were scolded, they blessed; when persecuted, they endured; when

slandered, they made peace. The apostles were considered by society to be the lowest of the low. (Contrast this with the so-called modern-day “apostles”.)

It is important to point out that Paul was not complaining about his circumstances or bemoaning his calling as an apostle. Rather, he was simply giving the Corinthians an honest description of what it was like for him, Apollos, and others. They had given themselves fully to Christ and to the cause of the gospel. It wasn't easy, and the church needed to understand and appreciate that. When we approach life with the proper perspective, it changes the way we speak and act.

### III. I AM YOUR FATHER (1 Corinthians 4:14-21)

It was not Paul's intention to shame the Corinthians by describing how much easier and comfortable their lives were than his, but rather to admonish them for boasting in themselves and judging one another. The fact is, Christ had used Paul to establish their church and this would always be the case. They had already had and would continue to have many more pastors and teachers come in the future, yet Paul would always be their founder and first preacher. In this sense, he was the father of the church at Corinth. As such, he felt a special burden to nurture them and, as necessary, to lovingly discipline them so that they might excel and reach their fullest potential. He was not insinuating that the other pastors didn't care, but rather expressing his own responsibilities.

To that end, Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to imitate him by embracing the same humble, servant-like attitude that he had. Timothy, 1 of Paul's dearest followers, who had apparently brought them this letter, would also both model and remind them of the humility they needed. Despite what some were saying, Paul planned to come visit Corinth personally in the near future and see for himself what was going on. Would they pridefully and arrogantly resist him when he arrived, or humbly and gently receive him? Either way, Paul intended to set things right.

Before I surrendered to vocational ministry, I served as an educator in the public school system for 13½ years. During that time, I was blessed to teach hundreds of young children. Sadly, many came from broken and abusive homes. I quickly learned that, no matter how hard I tried, in the overwhelming majority of cases I had very little influence over the lives of these children. Usually, whether for good or bad, kids turn out like their parents. This is why parents (especially fathers) play such an important role in the life of their children - God designed it that way.

### CONCLUSION

In the opening pages of this letter to the Corinthian church, Paul addressed the issue of division. The church was divided into various factions, with each group rigidly aligning themselves with a former pastor. Some had sided with Paul, others with Apollos, and still others with Peter. Only a few rightly understood the gospel and aligned themselves with Christ. This separation had led to bitter quarreling and contention within the church.

In an attempt to correct this problem, Paul identified several factors that were contributing to the division in Corinth. He gave godly advice for how to address each of these individual issues. Some of the concerns he listed include:

A theological misunderstanding of water baptism (1:12-17)

A misplaced emphasis on worldly wisdom rather than godly wisdom (1:18-25)

Boasting in themselves rather than upon God (1:26-31, 3:18-23)

A failure to rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit (2:1-16)

Widespread spiritual immaturity (3:1-4)

A misunderstanding of the nature and value of human works (3:5-15)

A lack of regard for their church as the temple of God (3:16-17)

Having an elevated view of the apostles - notably Paul, Apollos, and Peter (4:1-5, 8-13)

Comparing themselves with others and acting superior (4:6-7)

The slanderous attitude of some toward Paul specifically (4:14-21)

As we can clearly see, the church at Corinth was "A Messed Up Church". It was immersed in all sorts of problems that were severely impeding its effectiveness and ability to reach lost people for Christ. May we, as a church, learn from their example and strive for peace, unity, and humility within our own congregation.

# Immorality and Indifference

Originally Preached on 6/4/2023

*I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. - Revelation 3:15-16*

As we have read over the past few weeks, Paul began his letter to the Corinthians by dealing broadly with the issue of division plaguing their church. He identified numerous factors that were contributing to their unrest and gave godly counsel for resolving them. Paul urged the Corinthians to be united in the name of Christ.

In today's message, we will move on to another point of concern. I have titled the sermon, "Immorality and Indifference". Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians, chapter 5...

## I. THE PROBLEM (1 Corinthians 5:1-2)

Paul had received news of a specific and quite troubling problem within the Corinthian church. There was a member of the congregation who was involved in an incestuous sexual relationship with his father's wife. It is widely held that he was either married to or having an affair with his step mother. This was a blatant act of sexual immorality and, though the old covenant had been fulfilled by Christ, it was a glaring violation of Jewish Law (Leviticus 20:11). This conduct was so reprehensible that even the non-believing Gentiles did not engage in such behavior.

Besides the brazen act of sexual immorality itself, the Corinthian church didn't seem overly concerned by it. Rather than mourning the damage being caused by this horrible sin to both the guilty persons and the church itself, instead they were arrogant and boasting about it. They had not taken any steps to deal with this man's immoral behavior or made any attempts to remove him from the church. On the contrary, they seemed quite content with the status quo. Their complacency was just as troubling as the individual's sexual immorality.

This situation provides us with a good opportunity to talk about the ongoing value of the Old Testament Law. We as Christians are not legalistically bound to the Law, but rather are under grace. We have salvation through the blood of Jesus. Nevertheless, though not constrained by it, we would be foolish to ignore or disregard the moral stipulations of the Law. They provide us with principles and guidelines which were given by God to help His people live more righteously. While the Jewish civil and ceremonial laws may be largely obsolete, the moral laws can serve as an essential aide to those who love the LORD and seek to keep His commandments.

## II. THE PRECEDENT (1 Corinthians 5:3-5)

Without reservation, Paul told the Corinthians plainly what he would do - in fact, what he had already done. Though he was not physically there, Paul told them that he had already judged the offender. He had decided, by the authority of the Lord Jesus, to turn the sexually immoral



man over to Satan. This euphemism simply meant that Paul had determined to expel this person from the church, leaving them to dwell again among the lost world.

This act of church discipline, and the sin for which it would be enacted, would certainly have an impact on the physical body. It would be a severe, but temporal punishment. The goal, however, would be restorative. Perhaps “the destruction of the flesh” might lead to repentance. If, in fact, this man was a believer, perhaps he would turn from his immoral ways back to God and his soul would be saved. The primary purpose of godly discipline is to bring about repentance and restoration. It is an act of love.

### III. THE PRINCIPLE (1 Corinthians 5:6-8)

Paul rebuked the Corinthians for accepting and even boasting about this immoral church member. He reminded them about the principle of leaven. Leaven is a substance used to make bread rise when baked - typically yeast. When just a small amount is kneaded into dough it will affect the entire lump. In the Bible, leaven is most often used figuratively to represent the powerful and pervasive influence of sinful behaviors and/or teachings.

This metaphor also has a historic connotation. At the beginning of the exodus, on the night of the Passover, the Children of Israel were instructed to make unleavened bread (without yeast) because their hasty departure from Egypt would not allow time for the bread to rise. In subsequent celebrations of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread which followed, the Jews would remove all leaven from their homes. This represented the cleansing of sin. The Christian application is that we, in the wake of Jesus’s crucifixion (our Passover Lamb), should purge ourselves of our old sinful practices, and instead live unleavened lives characterized by purity and righteousness.

Paul used this metaphor to describe the perilous consequences of permitting the sexually immoral man to remain as a part of the church. His singular presence was negatively impacting the entire congregation. This principle is demonstrated elsewhere throughout Scripture, notably in the story of Achin (Joshua 7:10-26).

### IV. THE PRESCRIPTION (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

Paul wrote that, in a previous letter, he had instructed them not to associate with immoral people. The earlier letter he mentioned here has never been found. Thus, the letter we are currently studying called 1 Corinthians is not actually Paul’s first letter to Corinth, rather it is the first of those included in the Bible. Nevertheless, it seems that the Corinthians had misunderstood Paul’s meaning.

The Corinthian Christians were not associating with the immoral people of the world, i.e. those outside of the church. However, Paul’s instruction was not to associate with any so-called believer who practiced immorality, i.e. those within the church. Paul explained that God would judge sinful outsiders. Christians should concern themselves with the church and those who are

members of it. It is no surprise for a lost person to act immorally, but when a professing Christian does so it is a disgrace. Paul commanded the Corinthians to dismiss the sexually immoral man from the church.

## CONCLUSION

Christians should not tolerate the presence of blatantly sinful teachings and practices within the church. Such wickedness damages the church by destroying its witness to the world, harming its members, and bringing shame to the name of Christ. When the church turns a blind eye to the sin in its midst, controversy and scandal soon follow. Just as a loving father disciplines his young children for their own good and for that of the family, so also we must lovingly employ church discipline as necessary for the edification of the wayward member and that of the congregation as a whole.

In closing, we should flee from sexual immorality. This includes any type of sexual expression outside the confines of Biblical marriage. All such behaviors are sin. Paul will elaborate on this more extensively in the coming chapter.

When the wickedness of the world is glaringly evident within the church itself, you have a "Messed Up Church". Beloved, have you read the news or been paying attention? This is us. May the LORD help us to get our house - that is, His house - in order.

# Lawsuits Discouraged

Originally Preached on 6/11/2023

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. - James 1:2-4*

Over the past several weeks, we've talked about the heated division that raged within the Corinthian church. We've also discussed their blind indifference to an egregious and immoral sin that was taking place openly in their midst. In today's sermon, we will focus on yet another issuing that hindered the believers at Corinth.

I have titled the message, "Lawsuits Discouraged". That's pretty straightforward. It is the 9th installment of our current sermon series, "The Messed Up Church: Paul's Letters to Corinth". It seems that the further we get into this letter, the more we discover how far the Corinthian church had gone off the rails...

## I. DON'T GO TO COURT (1 Corinthians 6:1-6)

It appears that some of the members of the Corinthian church were filing suit against one another in the civil courts. Their bitter disputes and quarrels, which had already been discussed earlier, prompted them to pursue litigation - even on rather small and petty matters. Paul questioned how Christians - the very saints of God - could be comfortable having their problems resolved by secular, unrighteous judges. Why would they trust the corrupt Roman legal system to settle their problems? Such a notion seemed preposterous.

Someday Christians will share in Christ's authority and judgment over the world (Revelation 2:26-27). In addition to this, they will also judge and hold a higher status than the angels. This being the case, it would seem reasonable that competent believers within the church could find a way to work out their own disagreements. Whatsmore, why would Christians be content with the appointment of unrighteous judges who do not even participate in the church?

Paul rebuked them for their litigious behavior which only aggravated and further amplified their division. It was woefully shameful. He asked if there was any saved member in the church - even just one wise person - who could be trusted to hear and mediate their disputes. As a general rule, Christians should not sue each other or look to unbelieving outsiders for resolutions to their problems.

## II. BECAUSE YOU CAN'T WIN (1 Corinthians 6:7-8)

Paul told those who were involved in lawsuits against their brethren that, regardless of the outcome of their cases, they had already been defeated. Even if the legal decision that was rendered went their way, they had effectively driven a wedge between themselves and fellow believers. In other words, it was a lose-lose situation.

Is it more important that we get earthly justice for ourselves or that we maintain unity and fellowship within the body of Christ? Would it not be better to suffer injustice in the name of Jesus than to alienate one another and possibly destroy our Christian witness? By the way, did our Savior cry foul when He was unjustly condemned and crucified? No, He didn't.

To go a step further, when we take another person to court we do wrong by them. The action itself publicly expresses doubt about their character. Whether justified or not, we are not to hurt or defame one another - especially fellow members of the church.

### III. WITH UNRIGHTEOUS JUDGES (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Having just described secular judges as unrighteous (v1), Paul then broadened his argument to include other categories of sinful behavior. He listed a sampling of the many different types of sin. He also warned the Corinthian Christians not to foolishly believe that such folks would inherit the kingdom of God.

Fornicators are single people who are having premarital or extra-marital sex. Idolaters are those who practice idolatry. Adulterers are married people who are having sex with someone other than their spouse. The effeminate may refer to any of a wide range of sins, as this word carries multiple meanings in Scripture depending on its context. Some suggest it refers to transgenderism, others to self-indulgent behavior, others to prostitution, and still others to an unwillingness to work. Homosexuals are men having sex with men or women having sex with women. Thieves are those who steal, the covetous are those who covet, and drunkards are those who get drunk. Revilers verbally abuse others and swindlers practice deceit.

Paul reminded the congregation that, before Christ came into their lives, many of them conducted themselves in these ways. But, by God's grace, through faith in Christ and by the power of the Spirit, they had been purified, sanctified, and justified. Having been delivered out of sin themselves, they should lovingly desire the same salvation for others still lost in it.

Everyone sins from time to time, even the most devout Christian. We are carnal, fallen, imperfect, and unholy human beings. It is important to note that this passage, and others like it, concern continuous behavior and/or practices that constitute a lifestyle. While a saved person may certainly be tempted by and struggle with these issues, out of faithful reverence and obedience to God they will strive to avoid them.

### CONCLUSION

Just because something is legal doesn't necessarily mean it's right. There are many things that are acceptable in the eyes of the law that are displeasing to God. In the same way, just because something is illegal doesn't necessarily make it wrong. There are many things that are forbidden by this world's law that are actually pleasing to and even commanded by God. Here is the

bottom line - man's legal system and God's moral system are not always in line with one another. When they diverge, we as Christians must prioritize God's will over man's.

Furthermore, many of our courts are presided over by corrupt judges. They can be easily bribed, influenced, and manipulated. They typically favor the wealthy and famous. They have a biased and fluctuating interpretation of the law. They are more inclined to serve an agenda rather than to pursue justice. They have an affinity for criminals rather than victims. They are cowardly, soft, and often unwilling to render decisions that would effectively deter unlawful behavior. In short - they are sinners who do not concern themselves with the things of God.

For these reasons, Christians are strongly discouraged from initiating legal action against other people - especially fellow believers. Unrighteous persons should not be determining outcomes for the righteous. Does this mean that suing someone is always wrong in every circumstance? No, but it should only be done after other measures have been exhausted. It should always be preceded by serious and thoughtful prayer. Even then, it might be better to suffer wrong and wait for God's justice rather than to move forward with legal action.

# How to Use Your Body

Originally Preached on 6/18/2023

*I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well. - Psalm 139:14*

Last week we began 1 Corinthians 6 with a discussion about verses 1-11. In these verses Paul strongly discouraged filing lawsuits against others, especially against fellow believers. He also broadly listed several examples of unfaithful behaviors and sinful lifestyles. It appears that the litigation Paul was referring to stemmed from the sharp division of the congregation that he'd elaborated on earlier in this letter. The topic of today's message seems to be yet another extension of a previously discussed matter.

Back in chapter 5 Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their willful inaction regarding a church member who was engaging in sexually immoral conduct. To be specific, he was sleeping with his father's wife. Paul urged them to put this man out of the church. Now, in verses 12-20 of chapter 6, he deals explicitly with the issue of sexual immorality. I have titled this sermon, "How to Use Your Body".

## I. MADE TO LAST (1 Corinthians 6:12-14)

Jesus lived a perfectly righteous life and was wholly without sin. By doing so, He fulfilled the demands of the Law and went on to establish a New Covenant through His shed blood. Christians no longer live under the Law, but rather are covered by God's grace. They are not saved on the basis of their works, but rather upon the completed work of Christ. In Him, they have been set free from the requirements of the Law. But does this freedom entitle believers to sin without impunity? How should Christians properly exercise their religious liberty?

Paul will delve much deeper into this subject later in this letter (chapters 8-9), but for now he states that just because you can do something doesn't necessarily mean that you should. Although Christians are not judged by their works, some behaviors are not beneficial to them and may even wield a negative influence in or over their lives. In context, some actions have damaging and harmful effects on the body. Such conduct should be avoided.

Food satisfies the hunger of the stomach and the stomach necessitates the eating of food. They go together, and both will pass away. Similarly, the physical body has its own desires. The carnal flesh longs for sexual indulgence and gratification. However, the body is not made for sexual immorality, but rather for the Lord. What's more, people's bodies are not disposable or dispensable - they will not simply pass away. On the contrary, they will be physically raised just as Jesus was. These bodies will be glorified and fashioned for eternity.

## II. MEMBERS OF CHRIST (1 Corinthians 6:15-17)

When a person accepts Jesus unto salvation, they become a member of His body. Paul will give a more thorough explanation of this issue later on in chapter 12. In this passage, he simply introduced the concept by stating that born-again believers are bound to Christ. They are wholly connected to Him - both body and spirit. The Bible also describes this union as a branch that has been grafted into the vine (Romans 11:11-24; John 15:1-6). Just as the Christian abides in Jesus, so also Jesus abides in the Christian. Heaven forbid that a saved person would defile their body by giving it over to a prostitute!

There is no such thing as casual or meaningless sex. There are emotional, psychological, spiritual, and other aspects of sexual expression that go far beyond the physical act itself. According to Scripture, when people have sex with each other, they become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). They are mysteriously bound in the eyes of God. This is why the LORD reserves sex exclusively for married couples. Christians should not be binding their bodies to prostitutes - or to anyone other than their spouse!

Believers should give their bodies to the Lord. They should be united in spirit with Him. They should be members of Christ, not members of a prostitute.

### III. NOT YOUR OWN (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

Paul instructed the Corinthians to flee from sexual immorality. They were to run from its charms and not be enticed by them. While the Romans glorified and practiced all sorts of sexual sin, Paul urged the Corinthian church to set itself apart. He explained that, unlike most other sins, sexual immorality is a sin against one's own body. It not only defiles the purity of the body, but also invites debilitating disease.

He then recalled and repeated a metaphor that he'd used earlier in this letter (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). He reminded the Corinthians that their bodies were the temple of God. Beloved, the Holy Spirit resides within the body of each Christian. Therefore, believers should strive to keep their bodies clean, pure, and holy. They should not dirty themselves with sexual immorality.

Finally, Paul explained that Jesus died on the cross not only to save the souls of sinners, but also to redeem their bodies. He paid the price at Calvary to forgive and restore all of mankind - both spiritually and physically. As such, these bodies belong to Him. They have been bought with a price. It is only fitting and proper that they be used for His purposes. Thus, Christians should utilize their bodies (which actually belong to the LORD) to glorify God.

### CONCLUSION

Some Christians mistakenly believe that their bodies are not very important. Aren't they just earthen vessels or tents to be discarded? No, my friends, they are much more! In today's message, we have highlighted several important truths about our physical bodies. Let's summarize the major points that we've touched on:

Our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made. All of us have been lovingly crafted by the Creator of the universe. Each person is beautifully unique. We should not treat ourselves like cheap garbage.

As Christians, our bodies will be raised, glorified, and united with our souls so that we may live with Jesus physically and spiritually forever. They are not merely temporary or expendable.

As Christians, our bodies are members of Christ. We are one with Him and He with us. When we defile our bodies by joining them with a prostitute, we defile His body as well.

Sexual immorality is a sin against one's own body. In other words, it is self-destructive. We should not inflict harm upon ourselves by engaging in sexual immoral behavior.

Christians are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He abides in us. Our bodies are His temple. We should strive to keep them pure and holy.

In truth, our bodies do not belong to us. They belong to Jesus. As such, they should be used in accordance with His will and purposes.

For all of these reasons - we as Christians should flee from sexual immorality. In all of its forms, and there are several, sexual immorality is a sin against God. Instead, we should use our bodies to glorify the LORD!



# Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (Part 1)

Originally Preached on 6/25/2023

*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. - Ephesians 5:31-32*

Good morning. Last Sunday we talked about the sin of sexual immorality and the proper use of our bodies to glorify God. In that sermon, Paul briefly pointed out the broad implications of “two people becoming one flesh”. In this week’s passage he logically transitions into a much fuller discussion about marriage, divorce, and remarriage. All of chapter 7 is devoted to these topics. However, we will not be able to complete the entire chapter today. Therefore, this morning’s message will be “Part 1” and next Sunday’s will be “Part 2”.

## I. SEX WITHIN MARRIAGE (1 Corinthians 7:1-7)

Apparently the Corinthians had sent a letter to Paul that included several questions about marital issues. As he began to address these questions, he began by stating that it is good for a man not to touch a woman. In other words, it is a wonderful thing for a person to master their physical desires, remain unmarried, and live a life of celibacy. It is not a sin and should not be considered a stigma for a person to be single. However, this is simply not the case for most people. In order to avoid sexual immorality, a man and woman should marry and maintain an exclusive sexual relationship with each other.

Within the context of the marriage, both husband and wife should recognize that their bodies belong to one another. Remember, they are “one flesh”, and therefore neither has the absolute right to demand or deny sex from the other. Spouses should openly, honestly communicate and lovingly compromise with each other in order to develop and maintain a mutually satisfying sexual relationship. The particulars of this arrangement will vary from marriage to marriage.

Husbands and wives should not use sex as a weapon against one another. They should not deprive each other of physical intimacy, except as mutually agreed upon for a brief season of prayer. If the physical relationship in a marriage is unhealthy or unsatisfying, the husband, wife, or possibly both partners will be tempted to look elsewhere. Marital infidelity has resulted in an untold number of divorces and broken homes. A fulfilling sexual relationship is a critical component of every godly marriage.

Again Paul wished that all people had the ability and self-control to remain single or unmarried. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that not everyone does. Paul described marriage as a gift from God given to those for whom it was intended. He did not disparage the institution of marriage. Some Bible scholars even believe that Paul himself was a widower.

## II. CANDIDATES FOR MARRIAGE (1 Corinthians 7:8-11, 39-40)

Yet again, Paul stated his deeply held conviction that it was good for those who were unmarried or who were widowed (that is, their spouse had died) to remain single. If you read this entire section of verses as well as other similar passages, it becomes clear that “unmarried” in this instance refers only to those who have never been married. He then conceded that it would be better for them to marry or remarry than to burn with passion. Thus, Paul clearly indicated that those who have never married are free to marry and those who are widowed are free to remarry.

At the end of this chapter, Paul addressed widows and widowers specifically. He stated that a wife is bound to her husband as long as he is alive. She may only remarry after he dies, and even then only to a Christian man. This same standard also applies to husbands. In other words, divorce does not negate a marriage in God’s eyes. What God has joined together cannot truly be separated or undone by man. The Bible teaches that marriage is for life, and it only ends when a spouse dies. Paul added that, in his godly and respected opinion, a widowed person would be happier if they chose to remain unmarried.

Paul taught that, in accordance with God’s instruction, husbands and wives should make every attempt to stay married. The Bible clearly states that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) and Scripture strongly discourages it. That said, God did give provisions that allowed for divorce in certain circumstances - not because He endorsed it, but rather because of the hardness of the human heart. Thus, it is not necessarily a sin to get a divorce, especially in serious instances such as marital infidelity or an abusive relationship. Nevertheless, Paul explained that if a person does get divorced they must either remain unmarried or be reconciled to their spouse.

The overwhelming majority of passages on this issue echo exactly what Paul taught here - that remarriage, under any circumstances other than the death of the husband or wife, is an act of adultery for both parties involved. This is clearly and unambiguously confirmed in Matthew 5:32b, Mark 10:11-12, Luke 16:18, and Romans 7:2-3.

It must be noted that there is a single verse of Scripture, Matthew 19:9, that seems to suggest an exception to this rule. This verse is an outlier. It states that, “whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” Many interpret this to mean that if either spouse is unfaithful, the faithful spouse is free to divorce them and remarry someone else without committing sin. However, if this is true, then all of the other previously mentioned passages on this topic are misleading and incomplete. In my opinion, based upon much study, the correct interpretation of Matthew 19:9 is that if a person is in an immoral marriage - such as a polygamous, incestuous, homosexual, or otherwise biblically illegitimate marriage - they are free to divorce and remarry. This interpretation completely reconciles with all of the other passages on this topic, it follows the sound rules of hermeneutics, and it allows for a person to free themselves from a sinful relationship and try again without committing additional sin themselves. I will be the first to acknowledge that not everyone agrees with me on this issue.

### III. UNBELIEVING SPOUSES (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

Unlike the verses that immediately preceded these, which were directions given by the LORD, Paul introduced this paragraph by indicating that this section reflected his opinion. He urged any Christians who were married to non-Christian spouses to remain with them as long as they consented to stay together. He explained that the non-believing spouse is sanctified (at least to a degree) by the believing spouse. This is especially important if the couple has children. Perhaps the presence and witness of the Christian will lead their unsaved spouse and/or children to the LORD.

That said, Paul reasoned that if the non-believing spouse was to leave the relationship, the Christian spouse was under no obligation to seek reconciliation. In such a case, divorce would be acceptable. Even still, this does not give either divorcee the grounds to remarry. No such statement is made or implied in this passage at all.

## CONCLUSION

Though we've touched on several topics today, such as the importance of a healthy sex life within a marriage and the positive effects of a believing spouse on a non-believing spouse and their children in a marriage, I suspect that our discussion of divorce and remarriage is what stands out in your mind. This topic can be quite controversial. So as we close, I want to be clear on my interpretation of Scripture. Let me state that my stance is not mine alone, but is shared by many other Christians - albeit probably not the majority.

To be frank, I am uncomfortable with any person who has been divorced remarrying another person while their first spouse is still living. While I wouldn't publicly condemn someone for doing so, nevertheless I can't completely dismiss the possibility that such a marriage is sinful. Because of my uncertainty, I have made the personal choice as a pastor not to conduct wedding ceremonies so as to avoid this scenario. It is not my intention to alienate divorced people, especially fellow Christians, yet I will not deny my sincerely held convictions.

If you are listening to the message today and you have divorced and remarried, please don't hate me. I don't hate you. We can agree to disagree on this issue. Unlike most other issues, which are plainly black or white, there is some level of ambiguity here. We can still be friends, hang out, maintain fellowship, and worship together. All I ask is that we appreciate and respect one another's perspective. Who knows, I could be wrong? Wouldn't be the first time...

## Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage (Part 2)

Originally Preached on 7/2/2023

*Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge. - Hebrews 13:4*

This morning we will finish the discussion we began last Sunday on Paul's teachings about marriage. Apparently, the congregation at Corinth had several questions on this particular topic. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 7 and let's begin...

### I. WALK IN THE MANNER YOU WERE CALLED (1 Corinthians 7:17-27)

Paul urged the Corinthians to walk in the manner in which they were called. In other words, if the LORD had called them to marriage, let them be married and if He had called them to be unmarried, let them be unmarried. This was Paul's teaching in every church he visited - to abide by God's will and not resist it. Though his main emphasis in this passage was on marriage, Paul provided a few other examples to validate this principle.

He explained that some who had come to faith in Christ were circumcised. These were Jews who had converted to Christianity. Others who had become Christians were uncircumcised. These were Gentile believers. Paul stated that the uncircumcised didn't need to be circumcised nor the circumcised need to be uncircumcised. It didn't matter - what God desired was obedience!

Some of the new believers were free while others were slaves. Certainly, if those who were slaves were afforded the opportunity to become free they should take it. Nevertheless, whether free or slave was not the issue. In fact, spiritually speaking those who were slaves had been set free in Christ and those who were free had become slaves of Christ. Either way - as born-again children of God, they had been bought with a price and belonged to the LORD.

The point Paul was making is that someone can be a faithful, obedient Christian whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised, whether you are slave or free, and whether they are married or unmarried. Following this principle, Paul addressed "virgins" - those who had never married and never had sex. He stated that, in his informed opinion, if they were presently betrothed (or engaged), they should go ahead and get married. If not, they shouldn't be in a rush to get married. Bottom line... be content with and walk in God's will for your life.

### II. BENEFITS OF BEING UNMARRIED (1 Corinthians 7:28-35)

In accordance with the parameters Paul taught previously in this chapter, Paul again wrote that it is not a sin to be married. That said, Paul argued that there were benefits to remaining single. He spoke from personal experience, as he was unmarried (some believe he was never married and others think he was a widower). Paul stated that marriage brings with it certain troubles that being unmarried spares you from. He reasoned that time is short and Christians should make

the most of it by focusing on their relationship with and service to God. As such, they must be careful not to become overly distracted or burdened by the passing things of this world like grief, joy, material possessions, and/or even their spouses.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to be free from concern. He suggested that the unmarried men were concerned about the things of God and how to please Him, while the married men had divided interests which included a concern about earthly things and how to please their wife. Furthermore, the unmarried women and virgins were concerned about the things of the LORD and how to remain holy in body and spirit, while the married women were concerned about earthly things and how to please their husbands. Paul declared that he was not opposed to or counseling against marriage, but simply saying that a major benefit of being unmarried is an undistracted and/or undivided devotion to God.

### III. FATHERS GIVING DAUGHTERS IN MARRIAGE (1 Corinthians 7:36-38)

In Biblical times, especially within the Jewish culture, marriages were typically arranged by the fathers of the prospective bride and groom. The father of the bride had to give consent before his daughter could be given in marriage and the groom typically paid some sort of dowry for her. There are differing interpretations of this passage, but perhaps the most common associates it with fathers who had daughters.

If a father feels that he is not doing right by his daughter because he is not arranged for her to be married, especially if she is past her youth, he should go ahead and let her marry. This would not be a sin. On the contrary, if he feels otherwise, he may choose to let her remain unmarried. It seems reasonable to believe that the father's opinion on this issue would be informed to some extent by the feelings of the daughter in question. Thus, the father does well either way, but as stated previously, there are potential benefits to remaining single.

If this is the proper rendering of these verses, they are largely obsolete in modern Western culture. However, at the time they were quite relevant and remain so in certain regions of the world where arranged marriage is still common practice today.

### CONCLUSION

I want to conclude this morning with a recap of the major teachings given in this chapter on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and so forth. This will include content from both this week's and last week's messages. For starters, let's remember that Biblical marriage is a covenant relationship between 1 man and 1 woman in which God supernaturally makes the 2 spouses into 1 flesh. This unison, and thus the marriage itself, remains intact until the physical death of either the husband or the wife.

To those who are married - stay married if possible. Develop and maintain a healthy and mutually satisfying sexual relationship within your marriage so that you will not be tempted to

cheat on your spouse. Even if your spouse is not a Christian, don't just leave them - especially if you have children! Divorce should only be considered in the most serious of circumstances.

To those who have never been married - if you can control your sexual desires and can remain single without committing sexual immorality, then stay single. There are benefits to remaining unmarried, as it frees you from certain troubles and concerns and allows you to be more wholly devoted to the LORD. However, if you can't control these desires, then by all means get married.

To widows and widowers - you are free to remarry if you want to, so long as you marry a Christian. However, it might be better to remain unmarried, if you can do so without committing sexual immorality. Again, there are advantages to being unmarried.

To those who are divorced - if your spouse is still living, you are still bound to them. Therefore, either remain unmarried or be reconciled to them. Otherwise, you and the person you wed in a subsequent marriage may be committing adultery - this teaching is disputed by some.

To those who are engaged - unless there is a compelling reason to call it off, go through with your marriage. Don't walk away from someone you've already made a commitment to just because you now recognize the benefits of being single.

And I would add, though not taught explicitly in this chapter, to those in an unbiblical marriage - you are free to divorce and, if desired, seek out a biblical marriage. In this specific instance, remarriage to another person while your original spouse or spouses are still living is not an act of adultery - because your "first marriage" was no marriage at all; it was illegitimate and not sanctioned by God.

Whichever of these scenarios describes you, be content with God's will for your life and follow His lead. Be faithful and obedient to Him. Walk in accordance with your calling, for this is the priority.

# Christian Liberty

Originally Preached on 7/9/2023

*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. - Galatians 5:13*

Approximately 20 years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and following Paul's first missionary journey, the apostles and early church leaders met to discuss whether or not the growing number of Gentiles who were coming to the faith needed to be circumcised. This gathering, which is detailed in Acts 15, became known as the Jerusalem Council. It was led by James, the half-brother of Jesus, and both Peter and Paul were present and spoke at this meeting. Ultimately, it was decided that circumcision was not necessary in order to be a Christian. However, a letter was drafted to be carried to and read by the Gentile churches that urged them to abstain from sexual immorality and from consuming certain things, including things sacrificed to idols.

It seems likely that either Paul, Peter, or perhaps both of them taught about and discussed these particular issues during their time in Corinth (as well as in the other cities and churches where they visited). Nevertheless, the Corinthians still had several questions. Paul already spoke about sexual immorality back in chapter 6, and now in chapters 8-10 he deals with eating and drinking things that have been sacrificed to idols. However, he will approach this narrow topic with a much broader explanation of Christian liberty.

## I. KNOWLEDGE VS. LOVE (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Paul began this portion of his letter by pointing out that everyone had already been made aware of the instruction not to eat or drink anything that had been sacrificed to idols. They all knew what the letter said about this issue. However, this knowledge alone was not sufficient. Paul explained that knowledge, apart from love, simply leads to arrogance. In other words, if our religious practices and doctrinal allegiance are not accompanied by God's love, mercy, and compassion, we will become pious, puffed up, and haughty like the Pharisees. Paul will revisit this same principle again in chapter 13 when he talks about the imperative nature of love. Here, he briefly said that love edifies, while knowledge does not.

As Christians, we are in a relationship with God. If we claim to know God intellectually, yet lack a genuine love for Him and our fellow man, then we don't really know Him to the extent that we should. It is only when we sincerely love God and abide in His love that we truly know Him and, more important, are known by Him. In other words, a person can know all sorts of facts about God and the Bible yet still be lost. Satan and the demons are perfect examples. Head knowledge alone will not save us... only heart knowledge will.

## II. THERE IS ONLY 1 GOD (1 Corinthians 8:4-6)

Idols are nothing more than lifeless pieces of carved wood, stone, or cast metals. They are powerless, futile images. They are not gods at all, nor do they actually represent real gods, as there are no other gods except for God alone. Over the centuries people have made up all sorts of “so-called” gods, with some residing in heaven and others on earth. They have foolishly worshiped these false gods as though they actually existed and wielded influence over the earth.

However, Christians know that there is only 1 God, the heavenly Father. He is the Creator of all things and we were made by and exist for Him. In addition, there is only 1 Lord, the Son Jesus Christ, through Whom all things were made and exist. Though not mentioned in this passage, we also know there is 1 Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who indwells the life of every believer. There is only 1 true, living, and triune God - Father, Son, And Holy Spirit. Idols are not gods at all.

### III. APPLYING THESE TRUTHS (1 Corinthians 8:7-13)

In this chapter, Paul started by laying out 2 foundational principles. First, knowledge apart from love is insufficient and can even be harmful. Second, idols have no real significance because there is only 1 true God. With this pair of truths in place, Paul will now address the question at hand concerning things that had been sacrificed to idols.

Paul explained that not every believer knew the principles he'd just given. There were some who believed that if a person consumed something that had been sacrificed to an idol they would be defiled in some way. Paul described those who held this view as having a weak conscience. Paul wrote that food will not commend us to God, regardless of whether we eat or don't eat. Food that has been sacrificed to idols is no different than food that hasn't been - it's still the same. This is similar to Jesus' teaching about unwashed hands and that it's not what goes into the man's mouth that defiles him, but rather what comes out of it (Matthew 15:11,15-20).

That said, Christians who have a stronger conscience and a fuller knowledge of the truth should still be careful as to how they use their liberty. Just because they may know intellectually that it doesn't actually defile a person to eat things sacrificed to idols, doesn't necessarily mean they should do so. If their actions would be seen by a Christian with a weaker conscience and become a stumbling block to them, then such behaviors would be sinful. The sin in this instance would not be defilement caused by the eating of food that had been sacrificed to idols, but rather the harming of another believer's conscience by a misuse of Christian liberty.

In the end, we should take into account how our actions will affect other, less mature Christians and choose not to do things that will hinder their faith or wound their conscience. Our actions should be motivated by love for one another, not merely a knowledge of what is and isn't permissible. Paul concluded that, though he was free to eat anything, he would voluntarily abstain from eating meat if doing so caused his brother to stumble.

### CONCLUSION



Earlier in this letter, Paul stated that just because you can do something doesn't necessarily mean that you should (1 Corinthians 6:12). In this chapter, he repeated and applied this same concept specifically to the issue of eating or drinking things that had been sacrificed to idols. The bottom line is that Jesus has set us free from the requirements of the Law, but this freedom is not a blank check to do whatever we want to. We must consider how our choices affect others and must demonstrate love for our fellow man in the things we say and do. We have not been set free to serve ourselves, but rather to serve God by serving others.

In next week's message, Paul will elaborate on how he has chosen to exercise his own Christian liberty. Until then, may each of us use our freedom to edify and encourage one another, to love and nurture one another, and to build up and strengthen the kingdom of God without compromising the truth of His Word.

## Paul Had the Same Liberty

Originally Preached on 7/16/2023

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. - Galatians 3:28*

In last week's message, Paul answered the Corinthians' question regarding whether or not to consume things that had been sacrificed to idols. However, his answer was not as straightforward as they might have expected it to be. He did not reply with either a simple "yes, you can" or "no, you can't". Instead, he addressed the question from the standpoint of Christian Liberty.

As born again believers, we have been set free from sin and the requirements of the Jewish Law. Consistent with Jesus' teachings, we are free to engage in whatever activities we choose. That said, we should consider how our behaviors affect others and our own witness. To that end, we should voluntarily abstain from certain activities that would cause offense or be a "stumbling block" to others. Our prevailing motivation should be sincere love for one another rather than insistence on personal freedoms or rights.

Paul reasoned that it does not physically or spiritually defile a person to eat or drink that which has been sacrificed to an idol. In this respect, the Corinthians were free to eat. However, if doing so would hinder or harm the faith of their brethren, they should choose to abstain. In this respect, they would not eat. Thus, the answer to the question was dependent upon certain variables. Such is the nature of Christian Liberty - it's not always a black or white decision.

We have already seen evidence in this letter that some of the leaders in Corinth were openly doubting and casting dispersion on Paul and his teachings (1 Corinthians 4:18-21). In today's message, Paul will defend himself against those who are questioning his liberty by asking several rhetorical questions. His main point - just as they have been set free in Christ, so has he.

### I. I AM AN APOSTLE (1 Corinthians 9:1-2)

Paul had just spoken about the freedom that the Corinthians had in Christ. He asked, "Am I not free also?" The answer - of course he was. As a born again believer, Paul had the same freedoms that they are every other Christian have. Apparently, there were some who questioned Paul about this. Perhaps they thought that, because he was a "preacher", there were certain limits placed on him that they themselves weren't bound by. Isn't it funny how Christians hold those in the ministry to a higher standard than they hold themselves to?

He asked, "Am I not an apostle?" and "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" The answers - yes, Paul was an apostle and yes, he had seen the Lord. Jesus called Paul to be an apostle during a personal encounter with him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). The apostles were those who were personally chosen and sent by Jesus during and immediately following His earthly ministry

in the first century to establish the church by proclaiming the gospel message to the world. While we still have missionaries and traveling evangelists today, there are no more apostles.

Shifting his focus to the Corinthians, Paul asked them, "Are you not my work in the Lord?" The answer - sure they were. God had used Paul to plant their church. The fact that they existed at all was strong evidence of his calling as an apostle. While there might be other Christian churches who questioned Paul's office because they had no connection to him, this was certainly not the case for the church at Corinth.

## II. APOSTLES HAVE RIGHTS (1 Corinthians 9:3-7)

Paul was an apostle, but his apostleship did not negate his Christian liberty. Paul asked, "Do we not have a right to eat and drink?" It would seem most reasonable that this question referred back to the subject of consuming things that had been sacrificed to idols which he'd just discussed in chapter 8. The answer - of course they had the same right. Paul and Barnabas enjoyed the same privileges as all of the other believers at Corinth.

He continued, "Do we not have the right to marry a Christian wife?" Again, this referred back to a topic he had covered previously in chapter 7 regarding marriage. Many of the other apostles, as well as the brothers of Jesus, and specifically Peter were married. Paul and Barnabas had the same freedom to marry as they did, should they be led to do so.

Next, Paul posed a series of questions pertaining to his service for the Lord. Apparently, there were those who did not consider his ministry to be real work. He asked, "Do only Barnabas and I not have to work?" The answer - no, they had to work just like everyone else, but their Christian service was their work! They were called into vocational ministry - it was their job.

To that end, he asked 3 followup questions: "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense?", "Who plants a vineyard and does not partake of it?", and "Who tends a flock and does not use its milk?" The answer to these questions - nobody does. Why? Because a worker is entitled to enjoy the fruits of his labor. Apostles were not an exception to this rule. Again, they had the same rights as every other Christian.

## III. THE RIGHT TO BE COMPENSATED (1 Corinthians 9:8-11, 13-14)

Following the same line of thought, Paul asked, "Am I speaking from my own judgment or from the Jewish Law?" He then answered himself by quoting Deuteronomy 25:4 which states that, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing." The most literal meaning of this command is that you shouldn't prevent an ox from eating some of the grain that it is threshing (trampling to separate). When applied to people, the principle means that workers should be compensated for their labor.

Paul questioned, "Does this command not apply to us?" and "Since we have labored spiritually on your behalf, is it unreasonable that we reap material benefits from you?" The answers - yes,

this same principle applies to Paul and Barnabas and yes, they are deserving of compensation from the Corinthians for their service to them. Just as a farmer works with a hopeful expectation to share the crops, so also a laborer for God has a hopeful expectation of sharing in the harvest.

Finally, Paul asked, "Do you not know that the priests in the temple were permitted to eat of the sacrifices they made?" The Law made provisions for the priests to partake of the old showbread and of certain portions of the offerings they gave. In this way, they received a degree of compensation for their service in the temple. In the same way, God's direction was that those whose work was to proclaim the gospel were to make their living from doing so. Stated simply, vocational ministers should be adequately paid for their work.

## CONCLUSION

Paul began this chapter by defending his office as an apostle. He had personally seen and been called to gospel work by Jesus Christ. Thus, he possessed the same credentials and authority as the other apostles. Even still, he enjoyed the same Christian liberty as every other born again believer. He explained that the freedoms given by Christ do not differ for ministers and laity. If you have been saved, you have the exact same freedoms as every other Christian regardless of your particular station or place in the Body of Christ.

Among other things, Paul had the right to eat whatever he wanted, to marry a Christian woman, and to expect and receive fair compensation for his work. It would not have been unreasonable or inappropriate for him to have done any or all of these things. We all have the same liberties, but we do not all use our liberties the same way. Next week, Paul will discuss how he exercised his liberty and explain why he chose to use it in that way.

# How Paul Used His Liberty

Originally Preached on 7/23/2023

*For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. - Mark 8:35*

In the first half of chapter 9, Paul defended his office as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He had personally seen and been called to be an apostle by the Lord Himself, just as the other apostles had been. As such, Paul had the same credentials, status, and authority as they did. That being the case, his role as an apostle did not take away from or limit his freedom in Christ. Paul enjoyed the same level of Christian liberty as every other born again believer.

Among other things, Paul had the right to eat food that had been sacrificed to idols, to marry a Christian wife if desired, and to expect and receive adequate compensation for his work. He explained that gospel ministry is legitimate work and that vocational ministers should be able to make their living from it. Paul had the same rights as the rest of the Corinthians.

We as God's children all have the same freedom, but we don't not all use it in the same way. In that later half of chapter 9, which we will discuss today, Paul describes how he chose to use his Christian liberty. He explains why he chose to use it this way and what attributes it took to keep his liberty in submission to and aligned with God's will.

## I. I DIDN'T EXERCISE MY RIGHT (1 Corinthians 9:12,15-18)

Paul had shown that he, like other vocational apostles and ministers, had the right to be compensated for his gospel service. Take it from me, Christian ministry can be very difficult work. However, he chose not to exercise this right (or the others he'd mentioned) and didn't insist on being paid. He wasn't writing this section of his letter to complain that he deserved to be paid. Nor did he request back pay for work he had previously done. He didn't want to give his critics any reason to chastise him.

Rather, Paul stated that he willingly preached the gospel without pay. God had set him apart for this purpose and Paul faithfully obeyed. He didn't preach from personal desire or ambition, but rather in submission to the LORD's calling. His primary motivation wasn't to make money, but to follow God's will for his life. Stubborn resistance would have been foolish. Paul wrote that he had been entrusted with a stewardship by the LORD to share the good news of salvation.

Paul said that it was his reward to offer the gospel without charge. He didn't want money or any other thing to become a hindrance to the gospel. To that end, Paul worked as a tentmaker to provide for himself and to fund his ministry. Of course he accepted monetary contributions and financial support from generous churches and individuals when it was given, but he didn't demand it in exchange for or as a requirement of his Christian service. He trusted the LORD to provide for his needs and didn't exert his right to be paid.

## II. FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Paul, like every other born again Christian, had been set free from the demands and expectations of men. As believers, we answer to God alone and are not constrained or condemned by the opinions of other people. They hold no jurisdiction over us to judge, nor do we hold such jurisdiction over them. In the light of God's grace, we are free to live as we choose. Should we even care what others think about us? Paul did.

Paul made it his aim to serve all people by identifying with them and their particular circumstances. He chose to engage with people where they were and tried to relate to them in their context. Rather than insisting that they come to him on his terms, Paul approached them on theirs. While remaining obedient to God, he associated with and was accepted by the Jews, the Gentiles, the religious, the nonreligious, the prestigious, the lowly, and so forth. He sought to understand their perspective and appreciate their beliefs while showing them compassion and empathy.

President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." There is Biblical truth in this statement. Paul knew that if he showed genuine love and care for others, they would be more inclined to listen to what He had to say. If he maintained a friendly rapport with them, perhaps they would accept Jesus, repent, and be saved. Paul freely surrendered certain personal liberties and opened himself up to new burdens and challenges all for the sake of the gospel.

## III. WITH DISCIPLINE AND PURPOSE (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

Paul compared life to running a race and urged Christians to run in such a way that they might win. He was not implying that life is a contest in which we race against each other, nor that only the winner will receive a prize. Rather, he is talking about the manner in which we run. We are called to strive for godly success, to live with purpose, and not to walk lazily or aimlessly through life. God has tasked each of us with a great work that we should aspire to.

Accomplishing the will of God for our lives takes self-control. We cannot be sidetracked by personal or worldly ambitions. We are striving for an eternal reward - an imperishable wreath (or victor's crown) - given to us by God Himself. Paul recognized this and approached life with a definite goal. He aimed to hit his target, not just to swing at nothing.

Living with purpose takes discipline. We must exhibit control over our flesh - both body and mind. We must be mindful of the choices we make and the things we do, so as to walk in God's will and not hinder our own race. If we aren't careful and lack personal restraint, we might destroy our own witness and effectively disqualify ourselves. Paul practiced godly discipline and lived with intentionality and purpose, and in so doing he freely sacrificed some of his Christian liberty.

## CONCLUSION

If you have been saved by the all-forgiving grace of God then you have been set free! You don't have to do anything in order to maintain your salvation. It is secure in Christ Jesus and no one or nothing can take it away from you. You can live with the confidence and certainty that you are eternally saved. There is nothing left to do, for Jesus has already done it all. It is finished!

The question isn't, "Can I do this or not?" Beloved, we have been set free! We can do whatever we choose and Jesus will love us just the same. His grace is not limited by our actions. Rather, the correct question is, "Should I do this or not?" Our freedoms should always be guided and tempered by love for the LORD and for one another. The manner in which we use our Christian liberty demonstrates how much we love God as opposed to how much we love ourselves.

Here is the main point... Christians do not serve God out of compulsion, but rather by choice. Will we use our freedom to gratify ourselves? Or, will we sacrifice certain freedoms in order to exalt and magnify the LORD while edifying and strengthening one another?

# Avoid Israel's Mistakes

Originally Preached on 7/30/2023

*They [Israel] did not keep the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law; They forgot His deeds and His miracles that He had shown them. - Psalm 78:10-11*

Everyone who accepts Jesus by faith and receives the salvation that He graciously offers is set free from the power and penalty of sin. Their salvation is securely anchored in the finished work of Christ, and is not dependent on their own works or efforts to earn and retain God's favor. Thus, all born again believers are blessed with Christian liberty and are not subject to the burdensome obligations of the Law.

Paul introduced this concept back in chapter 8 as he began to answer the Corinthians' question about whether or not it was okay to consume things that had been sacrificed to idols. He taught that idols were meaningless and echoed the sentiment of Jesus who said that it isn't what goes into a man's mouth, but what comes out of it that defiles him. However, though these things are true, Paul concluded that our love for one another must take precedence over our knowledge of what is and isn't allowable.

Then in chapter 9 Paul cited himself as an example of someone who voluntarily surrendered some of his own Christian liberties for the sake of the gospel. He chose to remain unmarried, though he certainly had the right to marry, as it freed him to focus more on God. He chose to preach and serve the LORD without demanding compensation for his work, so as not to hinder the effectiveness and spread of the message. He approached his ministry with purpose and discipline, lovingly engaging with various people groups, in hopes that many would turn to Christ.

In chapter 10, which we will begin studying this morning, Paul wraps up his emphasis on Christian liberty. Having offered himself as an example in chapter 9, Paul now gives a counterexample. He describes a group of people who didn't sacrifice their rights, but rather chose to continue sinning even after they'd been delivered by God.

## I. GOD'S GOODNESS (1 Corinthians 10:1-5)

Paul reminded his readers of the Israelites whom God had rescued from the oppressive hands of the Egyptians centuries earlier. During the exodus, the LORD was visibly present with them as He led them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22). God even parted the waters of the Red Sea, allowing them to pass through on dry ground, so that they could escape the pursuing army of Pharaoh (Exodus 14).

In a sense, the Red Sea crossing was an early picture of baptism, in that the Hebrew Children went into the waters as runaway slaves and came out as those who'd been liberated. This baptism of sorts most literally identified them with Moses who can be thought of as a type of



Christ. Notice how this allusion harkens back to Paul's earlier discussion about division and that all believers are baptized in the name of Jesus.

In addition, God provided manna for the Children of Israel to eat (Exodus 16; Numbers 11) and water for them to drink (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13). The rock from which the water flowed symbolized Jesus. He is our Rock, not to mention our daily bread and living water. Jesus is our provision and sustenance.

Yet even in the light of all of these amazing things - God's deliverance, His manifest presence, His direction, His protection, and His provision - most of the Israelites still chose to grumble and sin against God. Though some - a select few - remained faithful and obedient, the majority did not and were, in turn, very displeasing to the LORD. Their rebellion provoked God's judgment, and they were condemned to wander around and die in the wilderness.

## II. ISRAEL'S DISOBEDIENCE (1 Corinthians 10:6-11)

Paul used the Hebrew Children as an example for the Corinthians and for all believers in every generation since. He warned them (and us) not to crave evil as their fathers had done. Paul then listed 3 specific sins that Israel committed.

First, many of them descended into idolatry. The premiere example of this was when they crafted and worshiped a golden calf while Moses tarried on Mt. Sinai. The verse Paul cited here comes directly from that troubling account (Exodus 32:6). Second, they committed sexual immorality. An example of this was when they practiced harlotry with the daughters of Moab and Phinehas zealously intervened (Numbers 24). Third, they constantly tested and grumbled against God. On a particular occasion, God sent poisonous snakes into the camp to silence their doubts and complaints (Numbers 21:4-9).

Many of the Corinthians were choosing to practice these same behaviors. They were repeating the sins of their fathers and continuing to walk in the same types of disobedience. Though God had set them free through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, they kept lusting after evil. If they persisted in making bad choices, God would be justified in punishing them also.

## III. OUR CHOICE (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

Paul warned the Corinthians not to become overconfident or arrogant. Being professing Christians did not exempt them from the alluring dangers of sin. They needed to be careful and avoid the sinful ways of the past, lest they fall. The same can be said for all Christians.

Finally, Paul stated that no temptation had come upon them that was not common to man. In other words, they were not facing temptations that others didn't or hadn't faced. God promised not to tempt them beyond their ability to resist. Some people paraphrase this verse by saying, "God will not give you more than you can handle." While I understand their meaning, I prefer to say, "God will not give you more than He can handle when you submit yourself to Him".

God also promised to provide a way of escape in every temptation, so that the Christian being tempted would always have a choice. In other words, we are never so hopelessly overcome by temptation that sinning is our only option. Sometimes a person might find themselves in a “no-win” situation where they are forced to choose between “the lesser of 2 evils”. However, if they back track the decisions that led them there, they will find that God did afford them a chance to escape earlier and they failed to take it.

Finally, even when a believer submits themselves to the Lord and successfully overcomes temptation, they are not freed from its lingering presence. The promise is that God will enable us to endure the presence of temptation, not necessarily be removed from it. In this life, though we should certainly try to avoid it, we will always face temptation to some degree or another.

## CONCLUSION

As we close this morning, I want to bring us back to the main point of discussion. As the redeemed children of God, we have been blessed with Christian liberty. We are saved by His great grace and covered by the righteousness of our Lord Jesus. As Christians, we are free to make our own decisions. However, there are still consequences for our choices. The Children of Israel illustrate this quite well. Like them, if we use our freedom selfishly, stubbornly, and/or sinfully we will surely suffer the discipline of God.

# Eating Sacrifices to Idols

Originally Preached on 8/6/2023

*But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. - Revelation 2:20*

A few weeks ago, we introduced a new section of Paul's letter to Corinth. It began with the phrase, "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols..." (1 Corinthians 8:1). For the past 2 ½ chapters Paul has been dealing with this topic from the broader perspective of Christian liberty. He has already taught that, in Christ, all believers enjoy freedom from the Law made possible by God's amazing grace. We have been freed to walk in this liberty as we choose. Paul has provided examples detailing both the proper and improper use of this liberty. Now, as he wraps up his discussion of this issue, Paul returns back to the specific question at hand and gives his final answer.

## I. PERCEPTION IS REALITY (1 Corinthians 10:14-22)

In the preceding paragraphs, Paul recalled how the children of Israel sinned against God and died in the wilderness. Citing them as an example, Paul warned the Corinthians to flee from idolatry. He asked them to thoughtfully consider the symbolism of the Lord's Supper. When believers drink from the cup and eat of the bread, they are symbolically sharing in the blood and body of Christ. All Christians eat of the same bread and in so doing partake of the same body. In this sense, everyone who participates in the Lord's Supper identifies themselves with Christ and his Body - which is the Church.

In the Old Testament, the Israelites offered sacrifices to God on the altar in either the tabernacle or temple. Depending on the type of sacrifice, both the person who brought it and the priest who offered it shared portions of it. The principle was that those who partook of the sacrifice identified themselves with the One for whom it was given. Although idols were powerless and the gods that they represented didn't actually exist, the perception remained. Truth be told, the Gentiles' sacrifices to idols were actually being made to demons.

So, by consuming things that had been sacrificed to idols, the Corinthians were being perceived by some as sharing in demons. Whether actually true or not, this was what some people thought. Paul pointed out the obvious contradiction of partaking from both the Lord's Supper and the table of demons. Why would a believer provoke God in this way? Would you pick a fight with someone infinitely bigger and stronger than you are? Such behavior doesn't seem very smart.

## II. TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT (1 Corinthians 10:23-30)

Paul restated a point that he had made earlier in this letter: "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable." (1 Corinthians 6:12) Just because we can do something doesn't

necessarily mean that it is good for or edifying to the body. Rather than immediately seeking our own well-being, we should first consider how our choices will affect and be perceived by others.

With these considerations in mind, Paul instructed the Corinthians to eat anything sold in the meat market without asking questions. They didn't need to worry about whether it had been sacrificed to idols or not, because ultimately it had been created by God for the good of mankind (Psalm 24:1). Meat is just meat. Furthermore, if any of them accepted an invitation from an unbeliever to go and eat, they should do so without concerning themselves about whether the food had been sacrificed to idols or not.

However, if someone declared that the meat had been sacrificed to idols and was troubled that it had been, then Paul advised the Corinthians not to eat it. They were to abstain not because the meat was actually bad or defiling, but rather for the sake of the one who perceived it to be. Again, they were to show regard to the conscience of their brethren.

Paul asked, "Why should a Christian allow their freedom to be judged or limited by the thoughts of another person?" He continued, "Why should a Christian be slandered for eating anything that they gave thanks for?" The answer to these questions is... love. We should voluntarily sacrifice our rights in Christ as necessary for the sake of the gospel and for the good of our fellow man.

### III. GLORIFY GOD (1 Corinthians 10:31-33)

In the end, the question of whether or not a person should eat or drink things which have been sacrificed to an idol is not essential to salvation or the gospel. Therefore, Paul explained the pros and cons of both options. Whichever they chose, and in fact whatever they did, all things were to be done to the glory of God. This echoes his previous and related teaching that believers should glorify God with their bodies (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Paul urged the Corinthians not to give offense to others - whether Jew or Greek. Nor should they callously give offense to anyone in the church. People can be easily offended - especially in modern times - by the things that others do or say. While the gospel message itself is offensive to some, and rightly so, the messengers of the gospel should not be. Sometimes the truth hurts, but it should never be communicated hurtfully in either word or deed. In short, we must share and live the truth in love.

Thus, Paul strived to live a life that was pleasing (or non-offensive) to others. Rather than seeking his own profit, he prioritized that of others. His hope was that perhaps, by choosing to sacrifice some of his own liberties, he could better position himself to point others to Christ. This is the ultimate end game, that we as believers shine the light of Jesus in everything that we say and do so that the lost might be saved and that the saved might grow on their faith.

### CONCLUSION

On the shores of the Sea of Galilee, a few weeks after He had risen from the dead, Jesus told the apostle Peter 3 times, "If you love me, feed my sheep." Think about these words for a moment. The Lord was telling Peter to serve Him not out of obligation or duty, but rather out of sincere love. This concept is true for all born again Christians.

Jesus taught that all of the Old Testament Law and prophets could be summed up with 2 simple commandments. First, we are to love the LORD with all of our hearts, souls, and minds. Second, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. In keeping with this pair of commandments, everything we say and do should be motivated by love. Beloved, love should be the determining factor for all of the choices that we make. Ask yourselves - how well do my decisions and corresponding actions express love for God and for other people?

As chapter 10 comes to a close, Paul concludes his emphasis on Christian liberty. Having been saved by God's grace, we as believers are free to live as we choose. The question is... how will we exercise and practice this freedom?

Starting next week, we will move on to a new topic. Paul will address a few specific issues that were taking place in Corinth during their weekly church gatherings. In the meantime, may the Lord bless and keep you until we meet again.

# Christian Order

Originally Preached on 8/13/2023

*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, - Titus 1:5*

Over the past few weeks we have been discussing the subject of Christian liberty. This morning we will focus on a new topic. I have titled today's sermon, "Christian Order". Without further ado, let's go ahead and dive right in...

## I. THE PROPER ORDER (1 Cor. 11:1-3, 8-9)

Paul began this portion of his letter to the Corinthians with a compliment praising those who sought his counsel, respected his teachings, and held fast to the traditions that he had delivered to them. Though there were some at Corinth who were seeking to undermine Paul's authority and cast dispersion upon his name and reputation, obviously there were many others who still valued his wisdom and instruction. Otherwise they wouldn't have continued corresponding with him. Paul urged them to imitate him - not because he was anything special, but because he imitated Christ.

Next, Paul stated the guiding principle upon which his upcoming teachings would be based. He wanted the Corinthians to clearly understand this unchanging Christian order: God (the Father) is the head of Christ (the Son), Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. This order was established by God and is His intentional design.

Women originated from men in that Eve (the first woman) was created from Adam (the first man). According to the Biblical account of creation, God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, took a rib from his chest, and used it to create Eve. The LORD fashioned her for his sake, not the other way around, to be a suitable helper for him (Genesis 2:19-22). In other words, she was made to be his wife. Thus, the man or husband is to be the head of the woman or wife (Ephesians 5:22-23).

## II. HEAD COVERINGS (1 Cor. 11:4-7, 10)

It was a cultural and customary practice within the New Testament church for men to uncover their heads during church meetings, which Paul referred to in this passage as "prayer and prophesying". Men were to remove their headscarves, turbans, or other head coverings in church. Those who did not brought disgrace upon their heads. Men's' heads were to remain uncovered as a symbolic expression of their place in God's created order as "the image and glory of God".

On the other hand, women were to keep their heads covered during church gatherings. They were to leave their scarves on. Paul equated a woman in church without a head covering to a woman whose hair was cut off or shaved. It was considered disgraceful in that culture for a

woman not to cover her head during church. This custom symbolically expressed a woman's place in God's created order as "the glory of man". Christian wives were to submit to the authority of their husbands as an example to the angels who watch over humanity in submission to God.

Apparently there were some in Corinth, perhaps both men and women, who were thwarting these traditional norms. In so doing, they were misrepresenting or perhaps even overtly rebelling against God's order. The improper use of head coverings within the church subtly indicated a rejection of the established, God-given roles for men and women.

### III. MEN AND WOMEN (1 Cor. 11:11-12)

Paul stated that man cannot exist without woman, nor can woman exist without man. They are interdependent upon one another. Both are absolutely necessary to the continuance of the human race. Though the first man, Adam, was created before the first woman, Eve, since then every other man who has ever lived has been born of a woman. Though God has assigned them different roles and has fashioned them with different biological, physiological, and anatomical characteristics, both sexes are of equal worth to Him. The LORD created both male and female in His image (Genesis 1:26-27), and both are equally valuable in His sight.

Jesus Christ provides an insightful illustration. He is one with the Father, equal in nature, essence, and being (Philippians 2:6). Jesus is fully God. Yet, despite this equality, Jesus chooses to submit Himself to the Father's authority and will. Rather than rebelling against God's established order, Jesus humbly defers to it, and accepts His role in the triune Godhead. This in no way makes Him less than the Father, just as a submissive wife is in no way less than her husband. They simply serve different roles that are designed to compliment one another.

### IV. JUDGE FOR YOURSELVES (1 Cor. 11:13-16)

With these things in mind, Paul challenged the Corinthians to judge for themselves whether or not it was appropriate for a woman to participate in a church service with her head uncovered. The widely accepted tradition was that she should not, but this restriction was not found anywhere in the Law. So, was this man-made tradition valid? What did nature reveal or teach about this cultural practice?

Generally speaking, women tend to have more hair than men. They also tend to keep it longer as they age, because men are genetically more prone to balding. Women also tend to have a greater concern for their hair and spend more time and money on it than men do. In New Testament times long hair was considered dishonoring for a man, but "a glory" for a woman. Seeing that hair itself is a head covering, it is more likely that a man's head will naturally be uncovered or at least less covered than a woman's head. To some extent, this likelihood served as a basis for the tradition.

In the end, the custom of the time was for men to have their heads uncovered and women to have their heads covered during church gatherings. This was common practice in all of the Christian churches, not just in Corinth. Those who broke this tradition were commonly seen as contentious and controversial. Their unwillingness to consent to the widely accepted norm was viewed as offensive and provocative to the church.

## CONCLUSION

Notice that Paul never explicitly told the Corinthians whether or not to comply with the tradition. He simply explained how it was practiced, how those who rejected it were viewed by others, what it symbolized, and how it came to be. Ultimately, he took the same approach as he had previously taken when dealing with food sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 10:15) - he told the Corinthians to judge for themselves what they should do. They were capable of making this decision.

The real issue at play here was not so much about the covering of the head, but rather the condition of the heart. Those who, by their practice, intentionally rebelled against God's order for men and women were creating chaos in the church. They were resisting their Biblical roles, rather than submitting to them. As such, they were defiantly sinning against God.

In most modern societies, including the United States, it is now culturally acceptable for women to leave their heads uncovered during church. This is no longer considered offensive or contentious behavior. Most men still remove their hats in church, but this is usually done as an act of courtesy more than a religious expression. Though these customs have changed over time, the main idea has not - God the Father is the head of Christ the Son, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. No matter how much we may dislike or rage against it, this remains the God-given order or "chain of command".



# The Lord's Supper

Originally Preached on 8/20/2023

*They [the early church] were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. - Acts 2:42*

Good morning, beloved. The following message is the 19th in our current sermon series, "The Messed Up Church: Paul's Letters to Corinth". We have already addressed several issues that were impacting the church in Corinth. The later half of 1 Corinthians 11 deals with the Lord's Supper. In this passage, Paul provides helpful information for both churches who administer the ordinance and those individuals who partake of it.

## I. PAUL'S CONCERN (1 Cor. 11:17-22)

Before giving instruction on this issue, Paul first stated a serious concern. Based upon the reports he'd received, Paul was fairly convinced that divisions among the congregation were having a significant and detrimental effect on the Corinthian church. His hope was that those who were acting in an approved manner would become evident and serve as an example to those who were not. This was particularly true as it pertained to their observance of the Lord's Supper.

When the church met to observe the Lord's Supper, their behavior resembled something else altogether! Rather than conducting a dignified ordinance, many treated it like a regular meal or even a festive banquet. Some even brought additional food items to supplement the elements. They were selfishly indulging themselves in the lavish spread to the point that some were left out. Still others went so far as to get drunk on the wine. Paul strongly rebuked the Corinthians for acting so shamefully. Perhaps such behavior might be acceptable in their own homes, but it was quite disgraceful in the church and completely inconsiderate of the poor who had nothing to eat.

## II. THE LORD'S PRECEDENT (1 Cor. 11:23 -26)

To provide them some direction, Paul restated the historical account of the first observance of the Lord's Supper. On the night before His arrest, while sharing the Passover meal with the apostles, Jesus took some bread, gave thanks for it, broke it, and gave it to them to eat. He said, "This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Then He took the cup, blessed it, and gave each of them a drink, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." (Matthew 26:26-30, Luke 22:14-20, Mark 14:22-26)

Paul stated that the purpose of the Lord's supper was twofold. First, it was a memorial of Jesus' brutal and substitutionary death on the cross through which the new covenant of grace was established. Second, it was to proclaim and anticipate His coming again. The Corinthians were

not told often to observe the Lord's Supper, but they were instructed to conduct it with the proper reverence whenever they did administer it.

Various Christian denominations and churches differ slightly upon the procedure and/or frequency with which they observe the Lord's Supper. Some partake of it weekly, others monthly, and still others even less frequently. There are minor variations from church to church in the manner that the elements are distributed, the exact types of bread and wine (or juice) that are used, and the inclusion of other events during the observance. These details are not expressly prescribed in Scripture and are left to the church's discretion - so long as the main emphasis is maintained.

### III. THE PARTICIPANT'S OBLIGATION (1 Cor. 11:27-32)

Next Paul addressed the behavior of the people who participated in the Lord's Supper. He warned that whoever partook of the bread or cup in an unworthy manner was guilty of profaning the body and blood of Christ. To be clear, Paul was talking about the flippant and irreverent manner with which the Corinthians were observing the Lord's Supper - not the depravity of their condition due to sin. The truth is, all of us are unworthy of the Lord's love, grace, and forgiveness. Only in Christ are we made righteous. As such, our condition does not exclude us from partaking of the Lord's Supper, so long as we conduct ourselves with due honor and respect.

Each individual who participates in the Lord's Supper should take time before and during the observance to sincerely examine themselves. This is a special occasion for reflection and introspection. Those who participate in the Lord's Supper should carefully consider, identify, and repent of unconfessed sin in their lives so that they might partake of the elements in a holy and righteous manner. They should also solemnly consider what the meal represents and should behave accordingly.

Those who participate in the Lord's Supper without any regard for its significance or for their own sinfulness put themselves at risk. Paul stated that many were sick, weak, or had even died as a result of their callous and indifferent approach to the Lord's Supper. He stated that when we as Christians fail to rightly judge and discipline ourselves, the Lord disciplines us so that we will not be condemned with the rest of the world.

### IV. PAUL'S CORRECTIVE INSTRUCTIONS (1 Cor. 11:33-34)

Finally, Paul gave the Corinthians 2 specific directives. First, he told them to be courteous and patiently wait for one another whenever they observed the Lord's Supper. They were to ensure that no one who wished to participate was excluded. Second, they were not to misuse the Lord's Supper as a means to satisfy their appetites. Paul told them to eat at home if they were hungry, and to partake of the Lord's Supper as an act of reverent worship. He concluded that he'd give them additional instructions and arrange any remaining matters as necessary when he came.

## CONCLUSION

The Lord's Supper is 1 of the 2 ordinances of the church, with baptism being the other. Jesus instituted it and instructed His disciples to continue observing it after He had gone. As we have read this morning, Paul gave instructions to the church for the proper observance of the Lord's Supper. While baptism is for individual believers, the Lord's Supper is a corporate act of the entire congregation.

As we have discussed on several previous occasions, our church recognizes The Baptist Faith and Message 2000 as our denominational statement of faith. Concerning the Lord's Supper it states: "The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming."

This morning, we are going to conclude our service by conducting the Lord's Supper. This ordinance is for Christians only - for members of His church. As we prepare, I'd ask that each of us, myself included, approach this holy ordinance as an act of wholehearted worship. My prayer is that we would examine ourselves, repent of any unconfessed sin, and then partake of the elements in a sincere and reverent manner "in remembrance of" Jesus.

May the Lord bless you.

# Spiritual Gifts

Originally Preached on 8/27/2023

*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. - 1 Peter 4:10*

Welcome to Calvary Baptist Church! It is great to be with you in the Lord's house again this Sunday. Before we begin this morning's message, let's quickly review some of the main themes we've talked about in 1 Corinthians so far:

- A healthy church is not divided by various, competing factions within its congregation.
- A healthy church follows the wisdom of God rather than the wisdom of man.
- A healthy church relies on the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- A healthy church is not indifferent to blatant, open sinfulness within its congregation.
- A healthy church has a proper understanding of sexual immorality and the use of the body.
- A healthy church respects and promotes a Biblical understanding of marriage.
- A healthy church and its members practice Christian Liberty in a mutually edifying way.
- A healthy church respects and adheres to God's creative order.
- A healthy church observes the Lord's Supper in a reverent and courteous manner.

This morning, and for the next few weeks, we are going to be discussing spiritual gifts. This is the main topic of chapters 12-14. So open your Bibles and let's get started...

## I. THE NEED FOR SOUND TEACHING (1 Cor. 12:1-3)

Paul introduced the next major point of emphasis in his letter - namely, spiritual gifts. Apparently there was confusion, ignorance, and even misuse of spiritual gifts being promoted and practiced by some within the church at Corinth. Paul stated that he didn't want the Corinthians to be unaware of or lack a proper understanding of this critical topic.

Paul acknowledged that the Corinthians had come from a pagan background. They had grown up worshiping idols. Though their idols couldn't speak, still they were led astray by them. This being the case, it was all the more understandable how they could be easily led astray by the charismatic utterances of false prophets. This is why Paul needed to give them sound teaching.

Just because their leaders claimed to be speaking by the Spirit of God didn't necessarily mean that they were. Those who "cursed" Jesus by questioning His character, undermining His authority, and/or contradicting His commands were not speaking by the Holy Spirit. Those who truly speak by the Spirit submit themselves to the lordship of Christ in both word and deed.

## II. SOME BASIC INFORMATION (1 Cor. 12:4-7,11)

Paul explained that there are a variety of spiritual gifts, yet they all are given by the same Spirit. In the same way, there were a variety of Christian ministries, yet all in service of the same Lord.

The varied spiritual gifts enabled Christians to serve in differing ways, yet God empowered their work and results. All 3 Persons of the Trinity are present in this process - the Holy Spirit gifts Christians for ministry, Jesus calls Christians into and then leads them in ministry, and God the Father strengthens and sustains Christians for and during ministry.

When a person places their faith in Jesus Christ and receives salvation, the Holy Spirit of God takes up residence within them. Among other things, the Spirit gives them 1 or more spiritual gifts to be used for Christian service. Each believer is uniquely and individually gifted and equipped for their particular calling. The various manifestations of the Spirit are given for the common good. They are to be used in humble submission to Christ for the edification of His church and its ministry to the world.

### III. A PARTIAL LIST OF GIFTS (1 Cor. 12:8-10)

In this passage, Paul listed 9 distinct spiritual gifts. Just so you know, there are other spiritual gifts mentioned elsewhere in the Bible besides these. There is no single, all-inclusive list of the spiritual gifts found anywhere in Scripture. Thus, many different spiritual gift inventories have been developed and put forward over the years. Some include differing gifts and/or numbers of gifts than others. I have found several of them to be quite credible and useful. For the sake of this message, let's deal with only those gifts specifically named in this chapter.

Wisdom - A deep level of understanding and/or insight which enables a person to perceive and speak to situations from a godly perspective.

Knowledge - A heightened ability to comprehend and remember the revealed truths of God as recorded in the Bible.

Faith - A strong, unshakable confidence in God as it applies to everyday living. While all Christians have "saving faith", the gift of faith pertains to a freedom from worry and anxiety on earth.

Healing - A miraculous ability to physically heal another person instantaneously.

Miracles - A miraculous ability to perform supernatural feats.

Prophecy - An ability to declare God's truth, proclaim His will, and interpret His purposes in a compelling and influential manner.

Distinguishing of Spirits - An intuitive ability to rightly discern the truth (that is of God) from lies or deceptions (that are of Satan).

Speaking in Tongues - A miraculous ability to speak in a language that is previously unknown to the speaker.

Interpretation of Tongues - A miraculous ability to understand a language that is previously unknown to the listener.

## CONCLUSION

If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit has endowed you with at least 1 spiritual gift. Your gift or gifts uniquely enable you to fulfill the ministry or purpose that God has called you to. Have you ever taken the time to seriously pray about and identify your spiritual gifts? How has God individually equipped and designed you for His service? Are you using your gifts to reach the potential that God has for your life, or are they being wasted? Do you recognize and value the spiritual gifts of others who are different from you and understand the complementary nature of these gifts?

Beloved, we are all called to serve the Lord. To that end, each of us is gifted to serve Him by the generous bestowing of the Holy Spirit. When we discover and serve God in a manner that is consistent with our own unique giftedness, we often find greater contentment, satisfaction, and success. So, what are your spiritual gifts?

# The Body of Christ

Originally Preached on 9/3/2023

*For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. - Romans 12:4-5*

Last Sunday we began a discussion about spiritual gifts. We learned that every born again believer is given 1 or more spiritual gifts to be used in the ministry of the LORD. These gifts are bestowed by the Holy Spirit in accordance with God's will. There are a variety of spiritual gifts which include wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, healings, miracles, discernment, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, and more.

In today's sermon, Paul will use an analogy to help further explain the subject of spiritual gifts. He uses this same analogy in a few of his other epistles as well. I have titled this message, "The Body of Christ". It is the 21st installment of our current sermon series through the Corinthian letters.

## I. ONE BODY (1 Cor. 12:12-14)

Paul stated that all believers - whether they be Jew or Greek, slave or free - are baptized by 1 Spirit into 1 body. When a repentant sinner receives Jesus unto salvation they are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ. We recognize and understand this body to be the universal (worldwide) church. Every individual Christian is a member of this body, and thus there are many members, yet there is just 1 body or church. Jesus is the head of this magnificent body.

## II. MEMBERS OF THE BODY (1 Cor. 12:15-26)

Using this imagery, Paul made several distinct observations about the body and its members.

First, regardless of how an individual member might feel about itself, it is still part of the body. Paul wrote, for example, that a foot would still be a part of the body even though it wasn't a hand. An ear would still be a part of the body even though it wasn't an eye. The point is that every member is a part of the whole, without exception, whether or not they think they are or even want to be. We simply cannot function appropriately as individual appendages or organs detached from the body. We as Christians are intended to be part of the church - to be in fellowship with one another and to use our spiritual gifts in conjunction with each other.

Second, each member of the body needs the other members. There is an interdependency among the various members of the body. Paul explained that the eyes need the ears, just as the ears need the eyes. The hands need the feet, just as the feet need the hands. If every member was the same, the body could not function properly. The point is that every member of the

church is different by design, according to God's sovereign will, and is reliant on one another. We are a family - a community - that have been called and equipped to work together.

Third, each member of the body should be ascribed significance and worth. Paul stated that some members may seem weaker, less honorable, or less presentable than others - especially from an earthly perspective - but all are extremely important. God has esteemed each member so as not to create division within the body. The point is that the contribution and service of every member of the church is valuable. We as members of the Lord's church should not be comparing ourselves with other Christians and making judgments about who is greater and who is most needed. Instead, we should practice our spiritual gifts with humility by showing sincere care and concern for one another. It's not a competition!

Fourth, the condition of each member of the body affects all of the others. Paul observed that if 1 member suffers, all of the other members suffer with it. Likewise, if 1 member rejoices, all the other members rejoice with it. For example, when I have a headache, my whole body is pretty much out of commission. When I stub my toe, pain shoots all the way up through me. The point is that when we hurt one another as Christians, we hurt ourselves. When we nurture and strengthen one another as Christians, we nurture and strengthen ourselves. We tend to rise and fall together. Our participation and behavior in the church - whether for good or for bad - has a direct and meaningful impact on the body as a whole.

### III. INDIVIDUAL GIFTS (1 Cor. 12:27-31)

Again Paul repeated the analogy - just as our physical body is made up of many individual parts, so also the Body of Christ (ie, the church) is made up of many individual members (ie, Christians). Each of these Christians had been gifted differently to serve the LORD in a variety of ways. Paul asked a series of questions to point out this diversity.

Some were called to be apostles who led and firmly established the burgeoning Christian church. Some were called to be prophets who publicly declared the revelations and truth of God. Some were called to be teachers who carefully explained the LORD's word and helped disciple His followers. Some were gifted with supernatural abilities to heal, perform miracles, or speak in or interpret tongues (languages). Some were called to be helpers who performed the mundane, ongoing tasks of the church with humility and grace. Some were called to be administrators who worked to ensure that the church was organized and functioning properly. Everyone was gifted, but not in the same way.

Paul urged the Corinthians to earnestly desire the "greater gifts". Having just spoken at length about the importance of all spiritual gifts and how God ascribes value to each of them in order to eliminate division in the body, it seems odd that Paul would now describe some gifts as greater than others. This would undermine his previous teaching and exacerbate their competitive approach toward spiritual giftedness. Instead, Paul seemed to be urging the Corinthians to utilize their varied gifts in a "greater" or more effective manner. He stated that he would, in the verses to come, show them a more excellent way of utilizing their spiritual gifts.



## CONCLUSION

As Christians, we collectively make up the Body of Christ - the church of God. Each of us are individual members of the body who have been uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve the Lord in some capacity. We share a mutual responsibility to one another and all of us are necessary for the proper functioning of the whole. Every Christian matters to the church, and it cannot operate at its peak effectiveness unless every member participates and is engaged. My friends, this is a team sport. We need each other and should show due honor and appreciation for one another. We are all co-laborers in Christ, branches of the same Vine, and siblings in the family of God.

Last Sunday I closed the message by asking us to consider the question, "What are my spiritual gifts?" This morning, I want us to go a step farther and ask, "How am I using my gifts to serve the body of Christ?" Beloved, your contributions to the church are critically important - your prayers, your attendance, your service, your giving, your input, your encouragement - all of it. Don't withhold the gifts that God has blessed you with - use them to strengthen and edify the body!

# The Excellence of Love

Originally Preached on 9/17/2023

*By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. - 1 John 4:9-11*

Today's message is on 1 Corinthians 13, commonly referred to as "The Love Chapter". This is a relatively familiar passage of scripture among Christians and even some nonbelievers. Many people have heard it read or recited, in whole or in part, at weddings, anniversaries, or other ceremonies that celebrate the beauty of love.

Let's remember that Paul has been broadly discussing the topic of spiritual gifts. He has analogized that all believers are individual members of the body of Christ, each having been uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit and called to mutually edify the church as a whole. To that end, we should all desire to utilize our gifts as effectively as possible.

In today's message, we will discover the key element or virtue of Christian service. It is the fundamental motivation upon which our spiritual gifts should be practiced. What is this critical virtue? Love. But not just any love, God's love.

There are several types of love spoken about in the Bible. There is romantic, sensual love that is to be practiced between a husband and wife. There is familial love which is shared between members of a family, close friends, or companions. There is brotherly love which involves a general affection and common concern for others - both friends and strangers. But above these various types of human love, there is a higher love - God's love. It is unconditional, sacrificial, and selfless. This is the type of love that we must strive to embrace, and it is the type of love Paul describes in this chapter.

## I. THE NECESSITY OF LOVE (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

In the previous chapter Paul named several spiritual gifts, including the ability to speak in tongues, to prophesy, to possess knowledge, and to have unwavering faith. Referring to these, Paul explained the necessity of love. He reasoned that the remarkable ability to speak in the tongues of men and angels was worthless apart from love, and was no more than irritating and unpleasant babble. He stated that gifts of prophecy to proclaim God's revelations and knowledge to comprehend His mysteries and truth were of no value unless tempered with love. Even the gift of faith, so great that it might move mountains, was nothing without love.

In addition to these aforementioned spiritual gifts, Paul spoke of other acts of service. Generosity, so boundless that it willingly gave everything to feed the poor, was of no benefit apart from love. Sacrifice, that would give itself as a martyr to suffer and even die for something

or someone, was of no profit without love. All of our spiritual gifts and acts of Christian service are meaningless unless motivated by sincere, godly love.

## II. THE NATURE OF LOVE (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Paul wrote that God's love is patient - it doesn't give up, but rather waits. It is kind - gentle, caring, and courteous. It isn't jealous or envious - it doesn't desire what it doesn't have. God's love doesn't brag, boast, or vaunt itself - on the contrary, it is quiet and sober. Likewise, it is not arrogant or proud, inflated or puffed up, but rather is humble and unassuming.

Paul stated that God's love does not act unbecomingly or unseemly - it doesn't force itself on others. It does not seek its own or demand its own way, but rather is considerate, thoughtful, and submissive. It is not easily provoked or stirred to anger - it doesn't fly off the handle. God's love doesn't take into account a wrong suffered - rather it forgives and doesn't keep score. It doesn't take pleasure or delight in the sin or hurt of others.

Paul said that God's love rejoices in the truth - it believes and stands on the truth as opposed to lies or deception. It can carry or bear every weight and burden. It trusts in the LORD fully and wholeheartedly. God's love is hopeful - always looking forward to greater things to come and the fulfillment of His promises. It endures all things - persevering to the end.

## III. THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE (1 Cor. 13:8-13)

Paul declared that God's love never fails - it never dies. It always overcomes whatever obstacles it encounters and will triumph in the end. The gift of prophecy will someday be unnecessary, the gift of tongues will cease, and the gift of knowledge will be no more. For now our prophecies are partial and our knowledge is incomplete, but when the Lord comes these unknown mysteries will be made fully known.

Paul compared our present condition to childhood. Like a child, our speech, our thinking, and our reasoning is limited. Notice these childish behaviors are akin to the gifts of tongues, knowledge, and prophecy that Paul just spoke of. Children lack the experience, knowledge, and wisdom of adults. But when they grow older and more mature, they (in most cases) move beyond their childish ways. In a similar manner, someday our imperfect understanding and perception of God will be made perfect.

Paul then compared our present condition to someone beholding themselves in a mirror dimly. Our vision is somewhat obscured and unclear due to the lack of light. But when Christ comes, we will see Him clearly and personally, face-to-face, as His light will shine brilliantly. We will know Him fully, just as He knows us.

Paul urged the Corinthians, and for that matter all Christians, to abide in faith, hope, and love, but concluded that the greatest of these 3 virtues is love. Someday our faith will be replaced with fact. We will see Jesus personally. Someday our hopes will be fully realized and fulfilled.

His promises will be kept, His judgments rendered, and His blessings received. In that day, all that will remain is love and we will dwell in Christ's love for all of eternity.

## CONCLUSION

God's love gives our spiritual gifts meaning and value. Without it, our gifts and ministry become worthless. Again, as we've seen Paul emphasize throughout this letter, it's not so much what we do per se, but rather why we do it. Love should drive our speech, our thoughts, our choices, and our behaviors. Love for God and for one another is the most important factor.

When I think about the difference between God's love and man's love, 2 verses always come to mind. Originally, God taught that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. This can be likened to loving others with the same level of human love that we have for ourselves. But when Jesus gave His life at Calvary to forgive our sins, the Lord taught that we should love others as Christ loved us - sacrificially and selflessly. In other words, God's love extends beyond that of even oneself. It places others first.

Love is "the more excellent way" that Paul referenced at the end of chapter 12. In fact, my friends, it is the most excellent way. May all of us strive to love as God loves, to be motivated by and filled with His love in all we say and do, and to show it and share it unashamedly everyday.

# Prophecy and Tongues

Originally Preached on 9/24/2023

*And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. - Acts 19:6*

In today's message we will continue our discussion of spiritual gifts. Last Sunday we learned that spiritual gifts are of no personal or lasting benefit apart from love. God's selfless, sacrificial love should be the spring from which all of our Christian service flows. It is the source which gives our individual gifts significance and makes them more effective and productive. Even after our spiritual gifts are no longer necessary, God's unfailing love will endure.

I have titled this sermon "Prophecy and Tongues". It is the 23rd message of our series through the Corinthian letters. If you have unanswered questions about the practice of speaking in tongues, like some in Corinth did, then listen closely this morning to what the Bible says on this topic...

## I. EDIFY THE CHURCH (1 Cor. 14:1-5)

Having just completed a long discourse on the excellence of love, Paul urged the Corinthians to pursue love as the motivation of their spiritual gifts and service. Then he began an extended comparison of the gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues. Apparently, the Corinthian church had an excessive fascination with the gift and practice of tongues. It seemingly played a prominent role in their corporate gatherings. Paul stated that they should be more focused on and have an increased desire for the gift of prophecy instead.

Paul explained that the person who speaks in tongues is often communicating directly with God, and those who are listening often do not understand the mysterious things that are being said. On the other hand, those who prophesy speak to people who understand their words and are encouraged, challenged, and/or perhaps consoled by them. In other words, the person who speaks in tongues edifies himself while the person who prophesies edifies the church.

Paul was not trying to dismiss or minimize the gift of tongues. In fact, he wished that all of the Corinthians were able to speak in them. However, his greater desire was that they prophesy. Why? Because prophecy benefits the entire church while speaking in tongues generally doesn't - unless the tongues are interpreted and understood by everyone who hears them. The principle is that our spiritual gifts are best used to edify the entire body, not just the individual member.

## II. DELIVER UNDERSTANDABLE CONTENT (1 Cor. 14:6-12)

Paul stated that tongues were profitable to the church when used to communicate God's revelations, knowledge, prophetic utterances, and/or teaching. In other words, speaking in tongues is a means of communicating, while prophecy is a form of content. Proclaiming,

hearing, and heeding the message of God is more critical than fixating on the manner by which it is delivered.

For example, anyone can blow into a flute or pluck a harp to make noise. However, it takes skill to actually play melodies on a musical instrument. Anyone can blare the sound of a bugle, but only those who know the proper signal can warn people to prepare for battle. The point? The sound that is produced needs to be pleasant and understandable. In the same way, speech that is communicated through the gift of tongues should be clear and known. All of the world's many languages - and there are many - are of no use without meaning.

Paul wrote that those who speak in an unknown language are perceived as barbarians by their listeners. Audiences who don't understand the language being spoken are perceived as barbarians by the speaker. Without meaningful communication, neither party benefits. The content of the message cannot be properly relayed or received unless the speech is comprehensible. Such is necessary for the edification of the church.

### III. USE YOUR MIND (1 Cor. 14:13-19)

In light of everything he'd just taught, Paul instructed those who spoke in tongues to pray that they might also be able to interpret. This would enable them to make sense of their tongues so that others could understand and benefit from their speech. Again, this highlights the importance of corporate edification.

Paul explained that those who pray in indiscernible tongues are praying in the spirit, but not in the mind. He expressed his strong desire to pray and sing with both mind and spirit. The expressions of those who bless or give thanks to the Lord in spirit only, through unknown tongues, cannot be shared by those who do not possess the appropriate spiritual giftedness to interpret. Thus, their prayers may be edifying to themselves to some extent, but are not at all to others.

Paul revealed that he spoke in more tongues than any of the Corinthians. He personally experienced and greatly appreciated the gift of tongues. Nevertheless, he concluded that he'd rather speak 5 words of instruction that could be understood by others with the mind than 10,000 words in a tongue that no one understood with their mind. The point is that we should worship and serve the Lord with both mind and spirit. Mindless worship is unfruitful, and can even be dangerous.

Many practices of the New Age movement and other similar religions encourage "out of body" type experiences. They seek to achieve trance-like or ecstatic states as a means of communing with God. They minimize conscious, intellectual, and thoughtful worship while highlighting hyper-emotional and hypnotic worship. They emphasize worshipping in the spirit, but neglect worshipping with the mind. These practices and efforts are not Biblical.

### CONCLUSION

Most Baptists, myself included, are cessationists. We believe that the miraculous or sensational spiritual gifts - miracles, healings, speaking in tongues, and interpreting tongues - have ceased. They are no longer bestowed to individual Christians as they were during the apostolic age. While we certainly believe that God can and still does these types of miracles frequently in our world today, we hold that He no longer gifts individuals with the supernatural ability to perform these miraculous signs in a regular or ongoing way.

When a space shuttle or rocket takes off, boosters are necessary to lift it up and out of the atmosphere. Once it escapes earth's gravitational pull, these boosters are no longer needed so they are jettisoned. In the same way, the miraculous gifts - such as speaking in tongues - were necessary to authenticate and give credibility to the apostles during the infancy and establishment of the Christian church. Once the church was firmly planted and had taken root these gifts ceased, as did the office of apostleship. Their cessation is consistent with Paul's previous teaching that all spiritual gifts will cease at some point (1 Corinthians 13:8).

In closing, what God actually says deserves more attention than the manner by which it is communicated. It is misguided to place more emphasis on the performing of signs and wonders than on thoughtful obedience to the clearly understood truths of God. Jesus chastised the people in his day for this same type of misplaced fascination (Matthew 12:38-39). Beyond the obvious and surface-level contrasting of prophecy and tongues, this passage teaches a deeper lesson on the proper use of all spiritual gifts. They should engage the mind, be comprehensible, and, above all, edify the church as a whole.

## Orderly Church Services

Originally Preached on 10/1/2023

*Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. - Hebrews 12:28-29*

The regular church services in Corinth were clearly disorganized and chaotic. Apparently any and everybody was permitted to speak whenever and however they wanted to. There were no guidelines or limitations on what people could say or how long they could speak. Numerous people talked at the same time and many spoke in tongues that no one could understand. In short, it was a confusing and jumbled mess.

Remember how screwed up their observance of the Lord's Supper was (1 Corinthians 11:23-34)? Everyone treated it like some type of free for all banquet or drinking party? Well... here we go again. In today's message, Paul instructs the church in Corinth on how to conduct an orderly and reverent church service that honors God.

### I. FOSTER BELIEF (1 Cor. 14:20-25)

Paul urged the Corinthians not to think childishly, because infantile thinking is evil. Rather, they were to think maturely. He cited a passage in the Old Testament written by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 28:11-12). In those days, Israel was about to be given over to the Assyrians because they had sinned against the LORD and not listened to His calls to repent. During their coming captivity God would continue speaking to them through the strange tongues of the Assyrians, but they would still not listen. The point is that people - especially the immature - are unlikely to hear and follow a language that is difficult to understand (ie, unknown tongues).

Paul stated that speaking in tongues was a sign for unbelievers, while prophecy was a sign for believers. Mature believers who firmly trust in Christ do not seek or need further evidence or miraculous signs of His identity. Rather they long to abide in His clearly revealed word, that they may grow closer to Him. It is the immature believers with little faith and nonbelievers who continuously seek signs of assurance and affirmation.

If an unbeliever or someone who cannot interpret enters into a church gathering where everyone is speaking in unintelligible tongues or languages, they might conclude that the people of the church are crazy. But if that same person enters a church service where everyone is prophesying clearly, they might hear the word of God and come under conviction. They might realize their own accountability for sin as the secrets of their hearts are disclosed. In turn, they might repent, believe, acknowledge the Lord's presence, and begin worshiping Him.

The main idea here is that church practices should foster belief. If an unsaved person is present, they should be able to understand the message being proclaimed so that they might believe and come to salvation. If immature Christians are present, they need to understand what



is being said that they might grow in their faith. Such clarity is important for mature believers as well.

## II. MINIMIZE CONFUSION (1 Cor. 14:26-33)

Paul set forth some basic guidelines for the Corinthians to follow whenever they met for church. He acknowledged that many who attended had various things they wished to share, including songs, teachings, prophetic revelations, and tongues. This desire to participate was good. All of these contributions would be appropriate if delivered in a manner that edified the church as a whole.

Concerning tongues, Paul stated that those who wished to speak in a tongue during church should take turns or go 1 at a time. There should be a limit of no more than 2 or 3 people speaking in tongues per gathering. Also, the tongues spoken must be interpreted for everyone present so that the message could be understood. If no interpretation was available or possible, the person who wished to speak in tongues should not be permitted to do so in a corporate setting. Instead, they should speak their uninterpreted tongues privately between themselves and God.

Concerning prophecy, again there should be a limit of 2 or 3 prophetic speakers per meeting. The prophecies spoken should be evaluated and judged for truthfulness by the listeners. If someone received a revelation while listening, they should be permitted to speak and be heard also. Those who spoke were to do so 1 at a time so that everyone present could hear and benefit from what was said.

Paul told the prophets to exercise self-control over their prophetic gift. Likewise, those who spoke in tongues were to exercise self control over their spiritual gift. They were to utilize it only as fitting for the church and act with discipline and restraint. The Holy Spirit does not overcome people and cause them to act uncontrollably. Such a concept is unbiblical. God is not a God of confusion, chaos, and disorder, nor should these be characteristics of His church.

## III. BEHAVE PROPERLY (1 Cor. 14:34-40)

Paul wrote that women were to keep silent and not speak in church. However, earlier in this letter he said that when women prayed or prophesied in church they should keep their heads covered (1 Corinthians 11:5). By reconciling these 2 statements, it becomes clear that his instruction for women to remain silent doesn't apply to all speech, as their prayers and prophecies were permissible. Women were allowed to speak in some instances. What then does it mean?

When read in the context of this entire passage, some Bible scholars understand this rule to mean that women were not to publicly interpret tongues or critique prophecies in a corporate worship service. To do either would be an inappropriate exercise of authority over or teaching of a man (1 Timothy 2:11-12). Other scholars apply this exclusion specifically to husbands and

wives, and insist that Paul was instructing married women to remain silent in church in submission to and out of respect for their husbands. This harkens back to his earlier teaching on Christian order.

The word of God did not originate from Corinth nor was it delivered exclusively to them. They were but a single local congregation within the entirety of Christianity. These rules for proper worship services applied to all the churches and Corinth was no exception. As such, Paul advised the Corinthians to recognize and abide by these instructions. Those who refused to do so should not be allowed to participate in their meetings.

In the end, the Corinthians' needed to decrease their inflated obsession with tongues and increase their desire for prophecy. When in balance, both had an appropriate place in their corporate worship services. That said, the prophecies and tongues which were spoken, as well as all of the other aspects of their church gatherings, need to be exercised in a proper and orderly manner.

## CONCLUSION

While most church services today look somewhat different than those held during the New Testament era, they should still be conducted in an orderly manner. Structure promotes clarity, which in turn fosters belief and understanding, while diminishing chaos and confusion. True... we don't want our services to be so rigid that they become stifling, yet they cannot be so loose that there is no edification. The way we organize and conduct our church services matters.

# The Fact of Christ's Resurrection

Originally Preached on 10/8/2023

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" - John 11:25-26*

Paul followed a rather standard format in most of his letters. He usually began them with a brief introduction, followed by a section on theological issues, then a section on practical issues, and finally a brief benediction. By "theological issues" I mean things that we as Christians are to believe and by "practical issues" I mean ways that we as Christians are to behave. However, in this particular letter, Paul addressed several questions and concerns about the Corinthians' behavior (or perhaps I should say misbehavior) first. He dealt with theology second.

As we learned in the opening sermon of this series, 1 Corinthians was written approximately 25 years after Jesus' ascension into Heaven. By this point, many repentant sinners who had believed in Him and come to salvation had already died. However, unlike Jesus, these deceased Christians had not physically risen from the dead or been visibly carried away into Heaven. This concerned many believers, including those at Corinth, who wondered if and when their dearly departed loved ones would be resurrected. They asked Paul about it...

In order to ease their anxiety, Paul answered the Corinthians' questions about the doctrine of resurrection. His theological explanation (found in chapter 15) can be broken down into 3 parts. In today's message we will focus on the fact of Christ's resurrection. Next week we will discuss the order of resurrection and in 2 weeks we will talk about the mystery of resurrection.

## I. PREACHED (1 Cor. 15:1-4)

Paul began this chapter by stating that he was going to make the gospel known to them. Really? They didn't know it already? Obviously, he had preached it to them in person a few years earlier when he was in Corinth (likely on numerous occasions). Nevertheless, he was now going to share it with them again as there were apparently some misunderstandings and doubts. It never hurts to start with or repeat the gospel!

Those who had already heard and wholeheartedly received the gospel had been saved. They held fast to the good news of salvation and stood firmly on its solid foundation. However, those who had believed it in vain - whose faith wasn't genuine - were not truly saved. These inauthentic believers did not hold fast to the gospel and were standing on shifting sand. They needed to hear the life saving message again.

Paul stated that the gospel message was of first importance, taking precedence over all other teachings. Seeing that he was approaching the end of this letter, you might say that Paul saved the best for last. He recited the gospel just as he had received it from others. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according

to the Scriptures". Beloved, this is the premiere message of Christianity - the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ! May we never stop preaching the gospel.

## II. PROVEN (1 Cor. 15:5-11)

The account of Jesus' brutal death, hasty burial, and glorious resurrection was not a myth, legend, or tall-tale. There were numerous eyewitnesses, most of whom were still living when this letter was written, who could give first hand testimony that all 3 of these events actually happened. They were verifiable facts. Paul provided a partial list of these witnesses.

On the same morning that He rose from the grave, Jesus appeared to the apostle Peter. Later that night in the Upper Room, and then on several subsequent occasions in various locations, Jesus appeared to some or all of the disciples. On another occasion, Jesus appeared to a crowd of more than 500 brethren at once - perhaps on a mountain in Galilee when delivering the Great Commission. He appeared to His half-brother James, who up to that point had not been a believer. He appeared to the apostles again, along with many others, at His ascension into heaven. Finally, He appeared to Paul personally and physically on the Damascus Road around 5 years later.

Paul described Himself as the least of the apostles and felt unfit to share their title because he had persecuted the church and tormented believers as a young man. He was a zealous Pharisee before his saving encounter with Jesus. As Saul, he had done everything he could to stamp out Christianity. But God had bestowed His amazing grace upon Paul - and not in vain. He now labored tirelessly, by God's strength, to spread the message of salvation and to grow the Christian church. So then, whether it had been preached by him or another of the apostles, the Corinthians had received the gospel and believed.

## III. PITIED (1 Cor. 15:12-19)

Paul asked why, if they truly believed that Jesus had physically risen from the dead, some were doubting the resurrection of deceased Christians. He stated that if bodily resurrection was not possible then Jesus Himself was not raised either. In other words, these 2 things go inseparably together. Either both Jesus and those who trust in Him for salvation are resurrected or neither of them are. It cannot be just 1 or the other.

Paul made 2 observations regarding the hypothetical scenario that Christ was not raised. First, his preaching would be in vain or useless. This would encompass all Christian preaching, including that of the previously mentioned apostles. In this instance, they would be false witnesses of God for preaching against Him something that wasn't true. Second, the Corinthians' faith would be in vain or worthless. They would still be in their sins and their deceased loved ones would be dead and gone forever - never to rise again. This dismal condition would apply to all Christians.

Without resurrection, Paul reasoned that the gospel wasn't that great. If our hope in Christ is limited to the few years we have on this earth and there is nothing else after we die, our religion is pretty pathetic. If this were the case, both those who foolishly preached the gospel and those who naively believed it should be the most pitied of all people.

## CONCLUSION

Paul clearly defined the gospel as the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In His death, Jesus paid the price for humanity's sin. He endured the penalty that we as sinners deserved, bearing our sin on the cross that we might be forgiven. In His resurrection, Jesus defeated death and conquered the grave. He rose victoriously so that we as redeemed believers would receive the gift of eternal life.

If Jesus did not rise from the grave, the gospel is incomplete and untrue. Fortunately, there is ample evidence that He did. There are numerous first hand accounts and all of them are extremely credible and reliable. Besides these, there are several other proofs that He arose, which despite rigorous efforts, have never been successfully debunked or refuted. Did you know that there is more evidence supporting the resurrection of Jesus Christ than the existence of many well-known historical figures?

My friends, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not fiction, fantasy, or fairy-tale. It is a fact. He is risen, alive, and seated at the right hand of the Father. And because He lives, all born-again believers will live also. Resurrection is real. Hallelujah!

# The Order of Resurrection

Originally Preached on 10/15/2023

*Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. - John 5:28-29*

Last Sunday we began a 3 part discussion of 1 Corinthians 15 on the topic of resurrection. In the first message, we learned that Jesus' resurrection is absolutely essential to the gospel and that numerous eyewitness reports confirm it to be a historical fact. In today's message, we will consider the order in which the resurrection of the dead will take place. Then next Sunday, we will study about the resurrected body and how it will be changed.

## I. THE SEQUENCE (1 Cor. 15:20-24a)

Having presented a hypothetical scenario in the previous verses (v12-19) in which Christ was not risen from the dead, Paul opened this next paragraph by emphatically assuring his readers that Jesus had been resurrected. He described the risen Lord as "the first fruits" of those who had died. According to Jewish Law, on the 2nd day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (which began the day after the Passover) the Israelites were to give a sheaf of the first fruits of their grain harvest as an offering in the temple prior to eating any of the season's new growth (Leviticus 23:9-14). Just as this sheaf was the first of the harvest, so also the resurrection of Jesus was the first of many to come. It is no coincidence that Jesus' resurrection occurred on the Day of First Fruits.

God created Adam, the first man, and placed him in the Garden of Eden. The genealogy of all mankind can be traced back to him. Likewise, the curse that God placed upon Adam as the result of his sin was applied to all of his descendants. In short, through Adam death has come to all humanity. On the other hand, Jesus, the divine Son of God, took on flesh and became a man in order to conquer sin and death. Through His glorious resurrection, life is given to the children of God (His descendants). Therefore, all who have trusted in Christ for salvation will be spiritually and physically raised from the dead, just as Jesus was.

Paul taught the general order of this resurrection. Jesus, who has already risen, was the first fruits. The resurrection of believers, sometimes referred to as the resurrection of the righteous or the first resurrection, will take place next when Christ returns. The particular timing of this resurrection is dependent upon one's views of the end times. Personally, I believe that the resurrection of the righteous will occur in multiple phases - Christians at the Rapture; Tribulation and Old Testament Saints at the Second Coming, and Millennial Saints following Christ's 1,000 year reign. The resurrection of nonbelievers, also called the resurrection of the unrighteous or the second resurrection, will occur at the end of the age immediately prior to the coming of the new heaven and earth at the beginning of the eternal state. Thus, all people will be resurrected - some to eternal life (present with God) and others to eternal death (separated from God).

To be clear, Jesus was the first fruits of those who had fallen “asleep” (that is, who had physically died). He was the first human being to be physically raised from the dead and then physically present in heaven. In the Old Testament, both Enoch and Elijah were carried alive by God into heaven before experiencing natural death. As such, neither were bodily resurrected. This same thing will happen to living Christians at the moment of the Rapture. Therefore, the amazing experiences of Enoch and Elijah do not contradict or negate the truthfulness of Jesus as the first fruits of the resurrection.

## II. THE SUBMISSION (1 Cor. 15:24b-28)

Paul elaborated on the transfer of God’s kingdom that will take place at the end of the age. After abolishing all earthly rule, power, and authority, Jesus will turn the kingdom over to God the Father. Make no mistake, Jesus has already conquered sin and death. All authority has been given to Him on heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). Jesus is, right now, seated in heaven as King of kings and Lord of Lords. That said, there is still rebellion against Him. Though the enemy has been defeated, he has not yet been brought into submission. Jesus will reign until all of His enemies are put under His feet in complete and total subjection to Him (Philippians 2:10-11) .

The last enemy to be abolished is death. This will take place following the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). At this time, death and hell will be cast into gehenna - the lake of fire - never again to resist or war against the just rule of King Jesus. Immediately following this glorious abolition, God will restore the heavens and earth to its original splendor and the new Jerusalem will come down out of heaven. Then, the redeemed of all ages will dwell in the manifest presence of God forever! Hallelujah!

When all of Christ’s enemies have been brought into submission and death itself has been eternally eradicated, Jesus will turn the kingdom over to His Father. The Son will subject Himself to the One who has subjected all things to Him (Psalm 110:1). Thus, all of creation will be subjected to King Jesus, who Himself will be subjected to the Father, so that God is over all.

## III. THE SUBSTANCE (1 Cor. 15:29-34)

Paul asked the Corinthians why some people were being baptized on behalf of the dead. Apparently, some erroneously believed this would benefit their deceased loved ones in some way. Obviously, this was an unbiblical application of baptism, but Paul wasn’t commenting on the inappropriateness of the practice. Rather he was pointing out that no one would be doing this if they didn’t sincerely believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Paul went on to say that he and his companions placed themselves in constant peril by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. They denied themselves and died to their carnal ambitions and desires on a daily basis. Paul even fought against wild beasts at Ephesus, possibly referring to actual animals or metaphorically to vile people, for the cause of Christ. Again, why would he and his colleagues do such things if Jesus had not been risen?

Paul concluded that if the dead cannot be raised, everyone might as well live for today and not concern themselves with the future. They should indulge in the things of this world while there is still time. But because the dead are raised, Christians must be careful not to allow the bad company of those who live only for the here and now to corrupt the good morals of those who live in light of eternity. He told the Corinthians to think soberly, to stop sinning, and to quit doubting in resurrection. He scolded some of them for their shameful lack of the knowledge of God.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus is risen and resurrection is true. The people's own actions testified to the Corinthians of this truth. Those who questioned the resurrection could simply look around and see evidence of the resurrection in the motivations and practices of others around them. A fervent and unyielding belief in resurrection had become the foundation of many people's lives.

One day, after all of creation is subjected to Christ and death itself has been permanently abolished, King Jesus will hand the kingdom of God over to the Father. But before that happens, all people will be resurrected - either to eternal life or eternal condemnation. This is the order of resurrection: Jesus is the first fruits whose resurrection has already occurred, the righteous and redeemed will be raised next at the return of Christ, and finally the unrighteous and unsaved will be resurrected immediately prior to the dawning of the new heaven and new earth. Thus, every person will exist forever both spiritually and physically as a human being in either heaven or hell. If you were to die today, where would you spend eternity?



# The Mystery of Resurrection

Originally Preached on 10/22/2023

*Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." - John 11:39*

This morning we will wrap up our 3-part study of resurrection from 1 Corinthians 15. Paul began the chapter by establishing the fact of Christ's resurrection, then proceeded to explain the order of resurrection. At the end of the chapter, he discusses the mystery of resurrection. What will the bodies of the dead be like when they are resurrected? Like decaying zombies? I sure hope not! In today's message we will contrast our earthly bodies with our future resurrected bodies.

## I. A FEW EXAMPLES (1 Cor. 15:35-41)

At the beginning of this paragraph, Paul posed 2 questions - "How are the dead raised?" and "With what kind of body?" He then proceeded to answer them both. Starting with how the dead are raised, Paul pointed out that seeds do not produce growth and new life until they first die. The death of a planted seed results in the new life of a seedling. This is not an outlandish or unheard of phenomenon. In much the same way, the death of a Christian's temporal body gives way to the resurrection of their eternal one.

As for the type of bodies that resurrected believers will have, Paul provided 3 examples. Paul explained that bare grain sown into the ground has a very different body than the wheat or other type of crop that it becomes. In accordance with His divine wishes, God gives seeds a different body than the plants which sprout forth from them. Whatsmore, not all flesh is the same kind - Paul pointed out that people, animals, birds, and fish all have different types of flesh.

Then he stated that the glory of heavenly bodies and earthly bodies also differs. The glory of the sun, the glory of the moon, and the glory of the stars are each different and unique. Their visible brilliance constantly changes. In fact, each star is distinctly different from the others. Thus, creation itself declares that life emerges from death, that not all flesh is the same, and that not all bodies have the same type of glory.

## II. THE RESURRECTED BODY (1 Cor. 15:42-49)

Based on the examples he'd given and the principles he'd established, Paul began teaching about the resurrected human body. It is sown as a perishable body, but is raised as an imperishable body. It is sown in dishonor, but is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, but is raised in power. It is sown as a natural body, but is raised as a spiritual body. When the dead are resurrected, their bodies will be wonderfully changed - they will have a new and greater essence, composition, power, and glory.

Paul wrote that God breathed life into the first man, Adam, and through him all people have natural lives. However, in the last Adam, referring to Jesus Christ, all people have the hope of

spiritual and eternal life through faith in Him. The progression is simple - the natural precedes and ultimately gives way to the spiritual. The earthly comes before the heavenly. This explains why Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born first of water (naturally) and then of the Spirit (spiritually) in order to be saved (John 3:5-6).

Thus, Paul declared, there are 2 categories of people. Some are earthly, which means they are fallen, corrupt, and still under the curse of sin and death (all people start out this way). Others are heavenly, which means that they are redeemed, righteous, and freed from the curse of sin and death. What accounts for the difference? Some have trusted in Jesus for salvation and others have not. Describing himself and his colleagues, Paul stated that they once bore the image of the earthly, but now bore the image of the heavenly because they had believed.

### III. LIFE IS VICTORIOUS (1 Cor. 15:50-58)

Paul made it clear that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, natural bodies are incompatible with and thus cannot exist in heaven. That which is perishable is not suited for imperishability. Having said this, Paul revealed a spectacular mystery. In a moment, in just the twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet sounds, at the coming of Christ the dead will be resurrected and instantaneously changed. So also, those who are alive in this moment will be changed. I believe these verses are describing the rapture. The fleshly, mortal, perishable bodies of all Christians will be transformed into imperishable, immortal, glorified bodies fitted to abide for eternity in heaven. As necessary, these eternal bodies will be reconciled with their souls.

When the righteous have been resurrected and their bodies glorified, then the prophecy that death will be swallowed up in victory will be completely fulfilled (Isaiah 25:8). Furthermore, the taunts that death's victory and stinging power are forever absent will be fully realized (Hosea 13:14). The sting of sin led to death and the Law defined sin thus contributing to its fatal potency. But thanks be to God, who gives victory over sin and death to those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation.

As so, having finished his teaching on resurrection, Paul urged the Corinthians - his beloved brethren - 'to be steadfast, immovable, [and] always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.' They need not be anxious about their deceased loved ones or even their own eternal destinies. They could serve God with confidence knowing that the resurrection would come in accordance with the LORD's perfect will and timing.

### CONCLUSION

In the passage of Scripture we looked at this morning, Paul focused primarily on the glorious change that will take place to the physical bodies of believers. But let's not forget that nonbelievers will be raised also. They too will be fitted with everlasting bodies, but theirs will be fashioned for unending suffering and judgment. If you like creepy movies, I'm sorry to break it to you... there will be no zombies in either heaven or hell.

And so, what are some of the main lessons that we've learned about resurrection? Let's take a few minutes to review them, shall we?

1. The gospel of Jesus Christ includes His death, burial, and resurrection. The resurrection is absolutely essential.
2. Literally hundreds of people personally encountered the physically risen Lord Jesus in the days and weeks following His resurrection. His resurrection is a well-established fact.
3. Apart from the resurrection, Christian preaching and faith is worthless and pitiful.
4. Jesus' resurrection was and is the fruit fruits of those who have died and will be resurrected.
5. The righteous will be physically resurrected next at Christ's Coming.
6. The unrighteous will be physically resurrected last immediately prior to the end of the age.
7. The death of our earthly bodies precedes and gives way to the life of our eternal bodies.
8. Our eternal bodies will be different from our earthly bodies in numerous ways.
9. The transformation of our bodies will take place in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye.
10. All people we abide forever - both body and soul - in either heaven or hell.

There you have it. 10 major lessons about resurrection. I am sure there are others that I've failed to point out. Nevertheless, next week we will move into the final chapter of 1 Corinthians. Until then, I pray you have a blessed week.

## Final Thoughts

Originally Preached on 10/29/2023

*But now, I am going to Jerusalem serving the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. - Romans 15:25-26*

This morning we will move into the last chapter of 1 Corinthians. We will discuss most of it in today's message and finish up with the last few verses next week. In this chapter Paul will:

- provide some practical instructions to help the Corinthians prepare for his next visit
- give a detailed description of his immediate and upcoming travel plans
- share a brief update on a pair of his close colleagues
- issue a final charge to the Corinthians
- make a final plea to the Corinthians
- send various greetings to the Corinthians from himself and those in Ephesus

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 16 and let's begin.

### I. THE COLLECTION FOR THE SAINTS (1 Cor. 16:1-4)

During his 3rd missionary journey, Paul took up a collection from the various Gentile churches that he visited. This money was to be given to the poor Christians in Jerusalem who had recently undergone a severe famine and were also suffering under heavy persecution from the Jews. Paul promoted this offering and received contributions from churches throughout Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. For accountability purposes, he invited select members of these churches to return with him to Jerusalem to witness the giving of this collection to those who lived there. Paul mentioned this special offering in several of his letters, including both 1 and 2 Corinthians.

Paul gave the same instructions to Corinth as he had given to the Galatian churches. He advised them to give an offering specifically for the Jerusalem saints on the 1st day of each week and to save these recurring gifts. Following this strategy, no additional or special collection would be made when Paul arrived, but rather he would simply accept monies that had already been accumulated for this purpose. Paul also told the Corinthians to choose someone who would either carry the money to Jerusalem themselves with a letter of authorization from him or travel with Paul and his entourage back there.

In these verses, we see evidence that the early Christian church met for worship on the 1st day of the week - Sunday, in honor of Jesus' resurrection. As a part of their worship, they collected offerings. Even in its infancy, the Christian church was committed to helping those in need and contributing to the church at large through missional giving. Furthermore, we see an example of designated giving and setting aside money in a designated fund for a particular purpose.

### II. PAUL'S TRAVEL INTENTIONS (1 Cor. 16:5-9)

As we learned earlier in this series, Paul wrote the epistle known as 1 Corinthians while living and serving in Ephesus for over 3 years. In the benediction of this letter, he expressed his intention to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost because a wide door of opportunity had presented itself there for the advancement of the gospel, in spite of ongoing opposition. From there, Paul planned to revisit the churches of Macedonia, which would include locations such as Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica. After this, he hoped to return to Corinth and perhaps stay there through the winter. He didn't want to make just a passing visit, but rather wanted to remain in Corinth for a while when he came.

Although these were Paul's stated intentions and the chronology presented in Acts 18-21 mirrors this sequence, some historians have suggested that Paul made an unplanned, emergency visit to Corinth directly from Ephesus that is not recorded in Luke's detailed accounts of his travels. This would help explain some of the statements that he made in 2 Corinthians (which we will study in the coming months). If he did make this extra trip, it would have been after he'd written and sent the letter of 1 Corinthians. In such a case, his plans as stated here would have been altered slightly. We will discuss this possibility a bit more later.

### III. TIMOTHY AND APOLLOS (1 Cor. 16:10-12)

During his extended stay in Ephesus, Paul sent Timothy on ahead to Macedonia (Acts 19:22). He indicated that Timothy might, of his own volition, come and visit them in Corinth. If he did so, Paul urged the Corinthians to receive him graciously and to treat him well. They were to give him no cause for fear. Paul cheered Timothy for doing the Lord's work, and looked forward to being reunited with him and some other brethren soon.

Paul had also encouraged Apollos, who had preached in Corinth a few years prior, to revisit the Corinthians. Unfortunately Apollos couldn't do so at the time. Nevertheless, Paul expressed that Apollos would visit them as soon as an opportunity arose.

Some historians believe that, just as Paul suggested, Timothy did indeed make a visit to Corinth. Sadly, he found that the church had embraced the false teachings of corrupt leaders and widely dismissed Paul's authority and instructions. Alarmed and unwelcomed, Timothy hurried to Ephesus and alerted Paul of the troubling news. This led to Paul's previously mentioned "emergency" visit, also known as his "tearful visit". Again, this is uncertain, but certainly plausible.

### IV. THE CLOSING CHARGE (1 Cor. 16:13-14)

Paul issued a final charge to the Corinthian Christians, which can be applied to us as well. He urged them to be alert, ever mindful of the wickedness and deception that constantly endangered them. Friends, the Devil is actively looking for ways "to steal, kill, and destroy" and we must constantly be on guard lest we slip and fall. Paul also encouraged the Corinthians to

stand firm, be courageous, and strong. Even when facing the world's intense pressure, they should not deny or compromise the truth of Christ. We must exercise this same boldness today.

Perhaps most importantly, Paul called the Corinthians to do everything in love. The division that threatened to splinter their church could be resolved with love. The sexual immorality and callous indifference that weakened their church could be remedied with love. Biblical marriage practices and proper Christian order could be embraced by the congregation and adhered to in love. Christian liberty and spiritual gifts could be rightly exercised among believers in love. God honoring ordinances and orderly church services could be practiced and tempered with love. In every area where the church struggled, a sincere love for the LORD and for one another would help make things substantially better.

## CONCLUSION

Next Sunday we will wrap up 1 Corinthians and introduce 2 Corinthians. While 1 Corinthians is primarily a pastoral letter, in which Paul seeks to provide godly wisdom, counsel, and instruction on a host of different issues that were adversely affecting the church, 2 Corinthians is more of an apologetic letter in which Paul fiercely defends his ministry, his faith, and his reputation. We will see the distinction quite clearly as we continue through this series.

In closing, I echo the words of the Apostle Paul, which were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That said, these are the very words of God. "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love."

# From 1 to 2 Corinthians

Originally Preached on 11/5/2023

*After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia. When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece. - Acts 20:1-2*

Last Sunday morning we almost finished 1 Corinthians. We only lack a few more verses. So this morning we will read these last verses and then move into the opening of 2 Corinthians. I will also try to provide some insight into what may have happened in between the writing of these 2 letters. As I said last week, these 2 messages will be more informative than transformative. This is more teaching than preaching. That said, every word in the Bible is important - even those that may seem trivial. Perhaps by understanding the context, setting, and purpose of these letters, we can learn more from them.

## I. A PLEA & GREETINGS (1 Cor. 16:15-24)

Paul issued a final plea to the Corinthians. He urged them to subject themselves to godly leaders who labored faithfully in the ministry. Specifically, Paul mentioned the household of Stephanas. He described them as the first fruits of Achaia because they were the first of those whom Paul baptized in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:16). He said that they had devoted themselves fully to the ministry of the church and should be acknowledged for their service. Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus had come to visit Paul in Ephesus and he was encouraged by their presence. Perhaps this trio brought the Corinthians' letter of inquiry to Paul and then carried his written responses back to them in Corinth.

Finally Paul sent greetings from all of the churches in Asia. He also sent greetings specifically from Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca) and the church that met in their house. Remember, Aquila and Priscilla had lived in Corinth and were there a few years earlier when Paul founded the church during his 2nd missionary journey. Though they had moved to Ephesus, they had personal relationships with many of the saints in Corinth. Paul sent greetings from the brethren, which likely refers to the Christians in Ephesus. They were to greet each other with a holy kiss, a common expression among believers.

Lastly, Paul wrote a brief greeting to the Corinthians in his own handwriting. Paul did not write his own letters (many scholars believed he had impaired vision), but rather he used a scribe or amanuensis. In his own handwriting he penned a curse on anyone who didn't love the Lord. He wrote "Maranatha" which means "Our Lord is coming". He blessed them with the Lord's grace and expressed his love for them in Christ Jesus. He closed the letter by simply saying "Amen".

## II. BETWEEN THE LETTERS

Paul remained in Ephesus for a while after writing and sending the letter called 1 Corinthians. As mentioned in last week's sermon, many scholars believe that - while there - he received

news from Timothy that the situation in Corinth had severely deteriorated. As such, he decided to make an immediate visit from Ephesus directly to Corinth. It should be noted that this visit, if it occurred, is not mentioned by Luke in the book of Acts. When he arrived, he found that his opponents had gained leadership and influence over the church and had led most of the congregation astray. The majority of the Corinthians rejected Paul's authority and questioned his integrity. After a brief and tumultuous visit, Paul left Corinth heartbroken over the wayward condition of the church.

Following this theory, Paul returned to Asia saddened but determined to continue and complete his 3rd missionary journey as planned. Thus, when his work there was finished he traveled on into Macedonia to visit the churches there. About a year after he'd written 1 Corinthians, while still somewhere in Macedonia, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in anticipation of his departure from the region and upcoming arrival in Achaia. This would date the letter to sometime around 56 AD.

Some historians believe that, immediately after his emergency visit to Corinth, Paul wrote another letter to them in which he boldly defended his integrity, character, and authority while calling their church to repentance. If so, this additional letter would date chronologically between 1 and 2 Corinthians. It is referred to as his "tearful letter" (2 Corinthians 2:3-4). Other historians suggest that the "tearful letter" Paul mentioned in 2 Corinthians refers to 1 Corinthians and that there was no intermediate letter.

There are 2 schools of thought among those who believe that Paul wrote an additional letter between 1 and 2 Corinthians. Some think that this letter has been completely lost. Others argue that this intermediate letter has been combined with the letter referred to as 2 Corinthians. If this is the case, then 2 Corinthians is actually a composite of 2 letters (or, as some believe, even more) that have been edited slightly to read as a single letter. Those who accept the composite letter theory argue that chapters 10-13 of 2 Corinthians is actually the "tearful letter" and was therefore written before and later added as an addendum to chapters 1-9. There is a clear change of tone between chapters 10-13 and chapters 1-9. Nevertheless, this is all speculation.

For the sake of this series, we will simply study through 2 Corinthians in the order that it is presented in the Bible. There is no compelling reason to do otherwise. I just wanted us to be aware that there are a few different theories as to the makeup of 2 Corinthians. Is it 1 letter or more? Either way, all of it is universally accepted as the inspired word of God and is, therefore, completely instructive, trustworthy, and authoritative. That's what matters.

### III. A BRIEF SALUTATION (2 Cor. 1:1-2)

Paul opened the letter known as 2 Corinthians by clearly identifying himself as the author. He referred to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ just as he had done in 1 Corinthians. Paul was trying to establish his role and legitimacy as an apostle. He also named Timothy as a possible co-author and contributor. It was probable that Timothy served as the amanuensis for this letter. Paul then stated to whom the letter was written. It was for the church at Corinth and the saints scattered about in the surrounding region of Achaia.



Next, Paul extended his usual greeting which is found in some form or fashion at the beginning of most of his letters. He wrote, "Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ." Grace always precedes peace because, as a former pastor of mine was fond of saying, "You will never know the peace of God until you have first received and experienced His saving grace."

## CONCLUSION

Let me close today's sermon with a summary of 2 Corinthians that I found online. I thought it was pretty good. It will help set the stage for our study in the weeks and months ahead:

The book of 2 Corinthians is a deeply personal letter from the Apostle Paul to the church he'd established in Corinth. Its central theme is the relationship between Paul's own suffering and the power of the Spirit in his life, ministry, and message. Paul's message to the Corinthians encourages them to live in a new way, embracing the sacrificial life of Jesus. In this letter, the apostle seeks to rebuild his relationship with the Corinthians, to defend his own integrity as a trustworthy and competent servant of Christ, and to refute what he perceives as the claims by other evangelists of background and gifts that are superior to his own.

# Comfort in Suffering

Originally Preached on 11/12/2023

*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word. - 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17*

Hello again. Today's message will be the 30th in our current sermon series titled, "The Messed Up Church: Paul's Letters to Corinth". We have discovered that the church in Corinth was indeed a messed up church that suffered with many problems. Paul addressed several of these issues in 1 Corinthians. However the majority of the church turned against him and rejected his council. This led to the writing of 2 Corinthians, which we began last Sunday.

The passage we'll examine this morning is a popular scripture among pastors for funerals. I have used it myself many times. It deals with comfort and is appropriate for families who are grieving the loss of a loved one. Of course, there are many other occasions when we need encouragement and comfort from our sorrows. I have titled this message, "Comfort in Suffering".

## I. THE GOD OF COMFORT (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

After introducing his letter, Paul blessed God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity. He called Him the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. If you think about it, when God comforts us it is an expression of His undeserved mercy. Paul wrote that God comforts us in our affliction so that we will be able to comfort others suffering in affliction with the same comfort that we've received from Him.

Paul made it clear that God is the source of all comfort - that is, all true comfort. Those who are hurting seek to find comfort in all sorts of things. Some turn to people, while others turn to things. Family, friends, and even counselors may help. Proper medications might be appropriate in some cases. Unfortunately, many try to drown their sorrows in a bottle, through drug abuse, or other destructive practices. In the end, only the Lord can provide lasting, healing comfort.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians after receiving a report that the church had repented and turned back to God (for the most part). While there were still a few rebels, most had humbled themselves and shown a restored faith in Paul (2 Corinthians 7:5-7). News of this turnaround was very comforting, especially seeing that he'd grieved their fallen condition for several months.

## II. SHARERS OF THE SAME (2 Cor. 1:5-7)

Paul continued that though he and his companion's sufferings were abundant, so also was Christ's comfort. He explained that their sufferings were for the benefit of the Corinthians, and their comfort came from knowing that the Corinthians themselves had been comforted from similar sufferings. Paul expressed a firmly grounded hope in the Corinthians because they were sharers in both his sufferings and comfort.

God's comfort is all sufficient for our sufferings. There is no sorrow, heartbreak, or hurt that God cannot remedy. It is true that some pains never completely go away - nor should they - yet we can trust the Father to hold us and sustain us through the brokenness. When sufferings come, His comfort abounds (Psalm 34:18).

Did you notice that Paul described the Corinthians as sharers in both his sufferings and comfort? Though their experiences were somewhat different, both faced persecution and enjoyed relief. We as Christians are called to bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). We should share each other's highs and lows. We are a family called to mutually support one another and walk through life together.

### III. DELIVERED THROUGH PRAYER (2 Cor. 1:8-11)

Paul candidly informed the Corinthians that he and his colleagues had endured extreme affliction and faced significant burdens during their time in Asia, to the point that they despaired for their lives. Their situation was dire and beyond their control, to the point that they were forced to trust in God alone for deliverance. Just as the LORD had delivered them from that danger, Paul trusted that He would continue to do so in the future. He acknowledged that the prayers of the Corinthians (as well as those of many others) had helped them experience God's favor.

What was this deadly peril that Paul and his friends faced in Asia? Well, we don't know for certain. As we progress through this letter, Paul will openly share many details from and accounts of his various travels, sufferings, and afflictions. In this particular case, he might have been referring to the riotous crowd in Ephesus that was intent on harming him and those with him (Acts 19:28ff). Perhaps it refers to something else...

Paul was thankful for the numerous prayers that had been offered on his team's behalf. He said that God's favor had been bestowed upon them through the prayers of many. Beloved, our prayers change things. Prayers yield results. It is God's will and repeated command in scripture that we pray for one another (and in everything). So, if we don't turn to God in prayer we are acting in clear-cut disobedience and are functioning outside of His will. Our prayers may not always be answered in the manner we'd like or on the timeline we'd desire, but remember this - God never answers unoffered prayers. Think about that for a minute.

### CONCLUSION

As we close this morning, let's quickly review a few of the main points from today's message.

First, all true and lasting comfort comes from God. He might bestow it through someone or something, or He might bestow it directly as we lean on Him, but either way He is responsible for it. The comforts of this world are fleeting and hollow. They will never satisfy.

Second, we as believers are called to share one another's sufferings and comfort. We are to shed tears of joy and tears of sorrow together. While we are all individuals, we must not neglect the fellowship and community that binds all Christians together.

Third, God desires to deliver His people through prayer. Prayer is the prerequisite. We may not always get the answers we want, but we'll never get any answers if we don't ask any questions. Place your petitions before God and trust Him with the results. Prayer makes a difference.

Putting this all together, let me offer the following invitation. If you are suffering this morning and in need of God's comfort, would you turn to Him just now? Would you allow others to share your burden and pray for and even with you? Would you do likewise for them?

## Paul's Integrity

Originally Preached on 11/19/2023

*The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. - Proverbs 16:9*

In last week's message, we learned that Paul had received and been comforted by news that the church in Corinth had - at least for the most part - repented of their sinfulness and turned back to the Lord. They had once again embraced Paul's teachings and had thrown out the false prophets and leaders who had temporarily led them astray. In short, to Paul's great delight, they had experienced renewal and revival.

Nevertheless, Paul deemed it was necessary and prudent to defend himself and his ministry against those naysayers who still remained. The Corinthians had been misled before and were prone to be misled again. Paul needed to set the record straight, to correct the lies that had been told about him, and to explain his true motives and feelings for the believers in Corinth lest there be any lingering hard feelings and further apprehension.

### I. DEFENDING MY CHARACTER (2 Cor. 1:12-14)

There had been some in Corinth who'd openly and severely maligned Paul's character. The apostle defended himself and said that he was proud of how he and his colleagues conducted themselves in the world, and especially among the Corinthians. He described their behavior as holy and full of godly sincerity. He attributed their speech and actions to God's grace rather than worldly wisdom. Paul and his cohorts weren't perfect by any means, but they strove to live righteously, and were not the villains that they were being made out to be.

Paul added that his letters were intended to be plain spoken and straightforward. There were no hidden messages or secret agenda in them. The Corinthians were to read and understand these letters as written, without trying to infer cryptic meanings hidden between the lines. There were no ulterior motives. Paul was as honest and transparent as possible in his correspondence.

The Corinthians had partially understood the things that Paul had taught them, but they still needed further explanation and clarification in some areas. Ultimately, Paul hoped that they would reach the point that, on the day of the Lord's return, both they and Paul's team would be proud of each other. In other words, they would recognize how God had used their relationship to work through and grow them all. In short, that they would value one another.

### II. DEFENDING MY DECISION (2 Cor. 1:15-22)

There were some in Corinth who had accused Paul of waffling and flip-flopping in his speech and decision making. Apparently, Paul's original plan for his 3rd missionary journey was to travel through Corinth before visiting the region of Macedonia and then to return there afterward. Thus, he originally intended to visit the Corinthians twice before returning to Jerusalem. Perhaps

he had informed them of this plan in his first letter and they were expecting it to happen (1 Corinthians 5:9). However, when Paul arrived in Ephesus God opened a door of opportunity for fruitful ministry and he stayed much longer than he'd anticipated. This extended stay (over 3 years) may have led Paul to change his itinerary. He decided to go directly from Asia into Macedonia and to come to Corinth just once for a longer visit near the conclusion of his journey (1 Corinthians 16:5-6).

Paul's enemies claimed that this change of plans was a reflection of his dishonesty, his lackluster commitment, and even his marginal affection for the Corinthians. They claimed that he was unreliable. Paul explained that his plans to visit them were not made on a whim or on fleshly motives, but in good faith. He was not being fickle. He had truly intended to come twice, but God had changed his plans. That said, his word could still be trusted.

When he had originally preached the gospel to them, there was no wavering, timidity, or fluctuation. Likewise, the promises of God he declared were certain and sure. Paul and his friends stood firm in the glory of God that was displayed through them. They had been established in Christ, anointed by God, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Yes, he had changed his original travel plans, but only because the Lord had led him to do so. He still cared deeply for the Corinthians.

Sometimes unexpected things happen and our plans change. We have to be open to the direction of the Holy Spirit. And this might mean that we forgo something we'd originally intended to do. This could lead to misunderstandings or hurt feelings, especially if there are those actively seeking to aggravate the situation. But, regardless, we should always strive to follow the Spirit's leading because His plan for us is better than our own.

### III. EXPLAINING MY RATIONALE (2 Cor. 1:23-24)

Paul gave another reason for delaying his planned visit to Corinth until later, after he'd gone through Macedonia. He stated that it was, at least in part, to "spare" them. At the time in question, the church at Corinth had grown contentious and adversarial toward Paul. It is possible that he made a brief emergency visit to intervene, but was defiantly rebuffed and sent away sorrowful. That being the case, Paul didn't want to return so soon, only to be a further source of aggravation and displeasure.

It was not Paul's desire to lord over them as a strict disciplinarian constantly rebuking and chastising them for their waywardness and sin. He didn't like having to approach them in such a heavy-handed manner. Rather, Paul expressed his longing to work with the Corinthians in mutual joy. He wanted them to stand firm in the faith, rather than drift about in disbelief and sin.

Paul decided that the timing was not right for visiting Corinth again. The situation was very sensitive and the circumstances were not conducive for a healthy, productive meeting. Beloved, sometimes the best solution is simply to leave the situation alone, give it time, and pray about it. In such cases, our sincere attempts to intervene or fix the problems might actually make things

worse. We have to put things in God's hands and trust Him to bring about resolution in His own time and way.

## CONCLUSION

Though he had done nothing wrong, there were many people in Corinth who were upset at Paul. They were being told that Paul was untrustworthy and unreliable, and many of them believed it. Eventually most of them came around and realized the reasons for Paul's decisions, yet some were still leery and suspect. Thus, Paul explained himself and defended his integrity.

You can't make everybody happy, and if you try to, it's likely that no one will be happy. God was moving in Ephesus so Paul chose to stay. Had he left prematurely, the Ephesians would have been shortchanged and his work stunted. Because he stayed, the Corinthians felt slighted. When they became upset and bitter, Paul felt it wise just to wait and visit them later so as not to make the situation worse. The bottom line - this was what God led him to do, and there was no need for him to apologize for it.

This passage highlights the importance of flexibility. We need to be willing to change our plans as God directs and moves, and be willing to extend grace to others as they do so. This doesn't mean that we should compromise truth or convictions, but rather be sensitive to the Lord's leading.

In next week's message, Paul will continue to explain his rationale for not visiting the Corinthians as planned. He will also urge them to do something important to put this brief and ugly chapter behind them. Until then, may the LORD bless you and your family.

## Reaffirm Your Love

Originally Preached on 11/26/2023

*For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. - Matthew 6:14-15*

Good morning. I have titled today's message "Reaffirm Your Love". It is the 32nd message in "The Messed Up Church: Paul's Letters to Corinth" sermon series. It focuses on 2 Corinthians 2:1-17.

During our message last week, Paul defended his integrity and began explaining the reasons why he'd changed his travel plans and delayed his previously planned visit to Corinth. Because God had afforded him an extended opportunity to share the gospel in Ephesus, Paul chose to stay longer than he'd expected. Furthermore, because he wanted to spare them of harsh, strict discipline, Paul decided that going to Corinth at that time would have been unfruitful. This morning, we'll pick up in the midst of this ongoing explanation.

### I. A CAUSE OF SORROW (2 Cor. 2:1-4)

Paul said that he'd determined for his own sake not to come visit the Corinthians "in sorrow" again. This statement provides strong support for the notion that he made a brief, unplanned trip to Corinth after hearing of their waywardness. It seems unlikely that this refers to his initial visit to the city near the end of his 2nd missionary journey, during which time the church was established. Rather, on this particular occasion, Paul arrived to find the majority of the church in open rebellion against sound teaching and even defiant toward him. Thus, he'd left Corinth discouraged, saddened, and distraught.

Paul asked, "If my presence makes you sorrowful, how then will you make me glad?" He referred to a statement he'd written in a previous letter to them which said that their company ought to make him rejoice rather than be sorrowful. Furthermore, he hoped that his joy would be a cause of joy for them all.

Again Paul mentioned this previous letter, explaining that he'd written it out of much affliction and anguish of heart with many tears. He said that he'd not intended it to make them sorrowful, but rather to express his deep love for them. Apparently, this letter described Paul's personal heartbreak over the fallen condition of the Corinthian church. It seems improbable that this description refers to the letter we call 1 Corinthians.

This passage suggests that Paul wrote an additional letter, known among theologians as his "tearful letter", some time between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. As we discussed earlier in this series, some believe that this intermediate letter has been lost. Others believe that chapters 10-13 of 2 Corinthians are this letter, perhaps edited slightly, and that they were tacked on as an addendum to chapters 1-9 (which were written later as a separate letter).



## II. A CALL TO FORGIVE (2 Cor. 2:5-11)

Paul acknowledged that, during the months of the church's estrangement, some of its members had caused great sorrow - not only to him personally, but to the entire congregation. Later, after the church experienced renewal and restoration, apparently the majority of the congregation inflicted some type of church discipline upon those who had led the church astray. Paul wrote that this punishment was sufficient, and now they needed to focus on forgiveness and comfort, so that those who'd been disciplined might not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

Paul urged the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for any who'd caused them sorrow and/or foolishly led them astray. He had already challenged them to do this in his previous letter (the tearful letter?) - that is, to be obedient in forgiveness. Thus, he was making this appeal again.

If they forgave the guilty person(s), then Paul would forgive that person(s) also. He would do so for their sake, so that there would be no remaining grudges or hard feelings between them. Beloved, unforgiveness provides an advantage for Satan, who uses it to destroy relationships, impede God's work, and entice people to sin. Paul described this as a scheme of the devil.

Take a moment to consider what Paul was asking the Corinthians to do. Their church had recently gone through a terrible season of spiritual disruption and upheaval. Many members of the congregation had caused deep hurt and sorrow to others. For a time, the church was badly broken and in disarray. Yet, by God's grace, they had come out of the dark valley and were once again moving in the right direction. But, in order for their restoration to be complete, they needed to forgive those who had caused them pain. They needed to reaffirm their love for them. Be honest, would you have done that?

## III. A SCENT OF LIFE (2 Cor. 2:12-17)

It seems likely that soon after his sorrowful visit to Corinth, Paul wrote his tearful letter to them and sent it by way of Titus. Paul had hoped that Titus would deliver the letter and return to him quickly with a good report. Paul apparently thought he would reunite with Titus in the city of Troas. But when he came to Troas, despite having an opportunity to preach the gospel there, Paul was troubled in spirit because Titus never showed up. Thus, he went on into Macedonia.

Despite being restless, Paul declared thanksgiving to God for leading him and his ministry team triumphantly in Christ and for manifesting the sweet aroma of His knowledge in every place they went. The Roman army used to march in processions with sweet spices and smells lining the streets. Speaking figuratively, Paul stated that they were a fragrance of Christ to God for both those who were being saved and those who were perishing. To those who were dying, they were an aroma of death; to those who would live, they were an aroma of life.

Paul concluded that he and his fellow believers were unworthy of carrying the sweet aroma of life. Nevertheless, he insisted that they spoke and proclaimed the name of Christ in the sight of

God with humility and sincerity. Many others, on the other hand, whose aroma was the putrid stench of death, such as some who had led the church of Corinth astray, were peddling the gospel for their own personal gain or ambition.

## CONCLUSION

From the birth of the Christianity until now, and I suppose as long as the church exists, there have been and will continue to be false teachers who seek to mislead and deceive the saints of God. Unfortunately, many people have been and will be led astray by their cheap lies and distortions. Nevertheless, those who are truly saved must stand firm on the truth of God and courageously reject these false teachers and their wicked doctrines.

That said, even still we should seek their salvation and restoration. We should pray for Christ to transform their lives and for the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sin. As a church, we should impose church discipline against members and leaders who brazenly harm the congregation, but afterwards we should reaffirm our love for them. When we harbor unforgiveness in our hearts, we cede the high ground to Satan and give him an advantage over us.

Who do you need to forgive this morning? Who have you punished long enough? Who do you need to reaffirm your love for? If you are a born-again believer, you should emanate the sweet fragrance of life in Christ. Have you allowed unforgiveness to taint your odor?

## Ministers of a New Covenant

Originally Preached on 12/10/2023

*“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. - Jeremiah 31:33*

As you may recall, at the conclusion of chapter 2 Paul contrasted himself and his colleagues with the false teachers who’d infiltrated the early church. He charged them with peddling the gospel for their own personal gain. On the other hand, he explained that he and his team selflessly preached the gospel with sincere hearts and pure motives solely for the sake of Christ.

In today’s message, Paul will focus less on the character of the preachers (whether himself or his adversaries) and more on the content of his preaching. Prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Jews sought to earn God’s favor and attain salvation by keeping the Law. This works-based approach to salvation was known as the Old Covenant. But by the blood of Christ, a New Covenant had been established based upon God’s grace. The New Covenant offered salvation through faith in Jesus’ atoning sacrifice.

### I. YOU ARE THE LETTER (2 Cor. 3:1-6)

Paul asked if he needed to commend himself and his ministry partners again, as he had been doing convincingly in the previous paragraphs. He asked if, perhaps, he needed to present letters of commendation to them or receive such letters from them in order to validate his honesty and integrity. Then he wrote that the Corinthians themselves were his letter of commendation, as they were evidence of his true character and the authenticity of his ministry. Their changed lives spoke much more powerfully than any letter could. Metaphorically speaking, he said that they had not been written in ink but with the Spirit of God, not on tablets of stone but rather on human hearts.

Paul was confident in Christ that God had and would continue to use him and his friends in great ways to advance the gospel in Corinth and beyond. However, their adequacy to accomplish such a great task did not come from themselves, but through God. Paul credited the LORD for making them ministers of the New Covenant, not based upon the letter but instead on the Spirit. He stated that the letter - that is the written Law - kills, while the Spirit gives life.

In these verses, Paul made a beautiful parallel between letters of commendation and the covenants of God. While written letters of commendation for traveling evangelists were good, living letters of commendation displayed by transformed hearts were even better. In like fashion, while the Old Covenant written on tablets of stone was good, the New Covenant written on hearts by the Holy Spirit was much better.

### II. A SURPASSING GLORY (2 Cor. 3:7-11)

Even the Old Covenant, typified by the 10 Commandments which were engraved on stone tablets, came with a degree of God's glory. After he met with God on Mt. Sinai and received a replacement copy of the commandments, Moses' face shone with the glory of the LORD for many days (Exodus 34:29-32). Though this glory faded over time, still the sons of Israel could not look intently on his face while it was shining brightly.

Paul made the point that if the ministry of condemnation, which he had previously referred to as the ministry of death, possessed sufficient glory to make Moses' face glow then surely the ministry of righteousness would abound in even more glory. He was contrasting the glory of the Old Covenant with that of the New Covenant. The Old brought about death and condemnation through the Law, while the New brought about forgiveness and redemption by grace through faith in Jesus.

Paul suggested that, though the Old Covenant did have a measure of God's glory, compared to the all-surpassing glory of the New Covenant it was as though it had none at all. Furthermore, while the glory of the Old Covenant faded away, that of the New Covenant remained unfaded. In every way, the New Covenant of God's grace excels over the Old Covenant of human works. Its glory is immeasurable and indescribable.

### III. UNVEILED FACES AND HEARTS (2 Cor. 3:12-18)

Because of the great hope that Paul and his team had in this New Covenant, they spoke boldly of Christ. While Moses covered his face with a veil, Paul and his friends would not conceal the glory of God in them but rather let it shine for all to see. Centuries earlier during the days of Moses, the Israelites were unable to look upon God's glory because their hearts were hardened. Even generations later during Paul's lifetime, whenever the Old Covenant was read among them, they still could not see God's glory because the veil over their eyes remained unlifted. The only means of removing it was through faith in Christ.

Not only were their faces covered, but their hearts were also. It is only when a person turns to the Lord that the veil is taken away. In other words, the glorious salvation of God is only seen and experienced by those who have trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. When a new believer is indwelt by the presence of the Holy Spirit, they are set free from the curse of sin and death. In Christ the veil is removed and the glory of God is revealed.

Paul declared that our glory as Christians is being transformed into a mirror image of the glory of the Lord. This process is taking place over time, from glory to glory, as the Spirit of God works within us. In theology, we refer to this gradual transformation of the believer into the likeness of Christ as sanctification. Therefore, may we live with unveiled hearts and unveiled faces openly and unashamedly radiating the glory of God in a dark and dying world.

### CONCLUSION

Like the apostle Paul, we as Christians today are ministers of a New Covenant. While the Old Covenant was based on works and obedience to the Law as the means of attaining God's favor, the New Covenant is founded on God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant set forth a standard that no mere person could live up to, and thus all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). However, Jesus, the Son of God, lived a sinless life and fulfilled the requirements of the Law. He gave His life on the cross as a perfect, unblemished sacrifice wholly acceptable to God. When we trust in Him by faith, His righteousness is imputed upon us and we are justified and forgiven in God's sight. This is the glorious message of the New Covenant, that salvation comes by grace through faith in Christ, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

As born again Christians, the marvelous light of Jesus resides within us. During the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord taught, "No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:15-16). Beloved, may we follow Paul's example and be unafraid to remove the veils from our faces so that others may behold the glorious light of Christ in us.

# Encouragement for Ministry

Originally Preached on 12/17/2023

*But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. - 2 Timothy 3:13-15*

We began our study of 2 Corinthians about 6 weeks ago. After introducing this letter, Paul expressed his comfort in hearing the news that the Corinthians had repented from their apostasy and turned back to God. He defended his integrity and character against those who had and continued to question it. He urged the Corinthians to reaffirm their love for those who had temporarily led them astray. He also described the glory of the New Covenant as exceedingly greater than that of the Old Covenant.

In chapter 4, Paul elaborates on several sources of encouragement and strength that serve to undergird and sustain his apostolic ministry. As Christians, we all become discouraged and feel defeated at times. Serving the Lord isn't always easy, and can sometimes be stressful and exhausting. Paul felt this weight too, even more so in light of his circumstances, yet he remained wholeheartedly committed to his calling.

## I. THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL (2 Cor. 4:1-6)

Having been entrusted by God with the ministry of teaching the New Covenant (as discussed in the previous chapter), and having received the mercy of God to effectively do so, Paul and his colleagues had committed to leave the sinful, shameful, hidden things of this world behind. They would not walk in craftiness or adulterate the word of God for their own benefit. Instead, they would live and preach the truth and thus be commended in the eyes of both God and man.

Paul reasoned that even if the gospel they proclaimed was veiled, it was veiled only to those who were perishing. Others were seeing and responding to it. This imagery refers back to the previous chapter. That said, the veil that blinded the eyes of unbelievers and prevented them from seeing the wondrous light of the glory of Christ was placed there by the god of this world (Satan). Paul and his friends were not responsible for its obstructing presence, and were not deterred by it either.

They preached that Jesus Christ was Lord and that they were His bondservants who ministered for His sake. The same God who created the universe and caused light to shine out of the darkness (Genesis 1:3-4) had shone His light in their hearts. As bearers of the light of the knowledge of God, they would boldly display the light of Jesus on their faces for all to see (again, a reference to the previous chapter).

## II. THE POWER OF GOD (2 Cor. 4:7-12)

Paul equated the light of Christ that abided in their mortal bodies with treasure contained within earthen vessels. The indwelling presence of God empowered them to endure for the sake of the gospel, as their own strength was woefully insufficient. It enabled them to face every sort of affliction, yet not be crushed by them. It permitted them to be perplexed, but without despair. It allowed them to withstand persecution without being or feeling forsaken. It prevented them from being destroyed despite being repeatedly struck down. The all surpassing power of God sustained them in every situation and circumstance.

Though they regularly experienced a semblance of Christ's physical pain when he was beaten and crucified, Paul and his friends also enjoyed the vigor and vitality of Jesus' life when He was resurrected. Their lives in Christ contrasted starkly with the threats of death that they constantly faced for His Name's sake, similar to how a light shines more visibly on a dark canvas. Paul and his team were not being persecuted by God for being false prophets (as some had maliciously contended). Rather, they were being persecuted by the world for being faithful servants of God, who willingly faced death so that the church - including the Corinthians - might live.

### III. THE SPIRIT OF FAITH (2 Cor. 4:13-15)

Paul quoted Psalm 116:10, in which the psalmist (believed by many to be David) declared his faith that God had delivered him from death. Paul and his fellow workers shared this same belief. Thus, they preached the message of Christ courageously knowing that the same God who had raised Jesus from the grave would raise them also, as well as the saints in Corinth and all other Christians for that matter, and present them together on the last day.

The work that Paul and others like him were doing was in part for the sake of the Corinthians, but more broadly for the church at large. It was being done so that the grace of God, evidenced by the salvation of souls, might spread to more and more people. This expansion would be a cause for abundant thanksgiving that would bring glory to God. Beloved, this is a beautiful description of why we should strive to fulfill the Great Commission.

### IV. THE HEART OF RESOLVE (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

Therefore, because they were illuminated by the light of the gospel, empowered by the strength of God, and impassioned by the spirit of faith, Paul and his colleagues were encouraged and did not lose heart. Though their earth bodies were slowly passing away, their inner man was being renewed day by day. The same is true for all born again Christians, and thus we can share in the same resolve that Paul felt.

The numerous and seemingly severe afflictions that Paul faced were, in fact, momentary and light compared to the eternal weight of glory before him. Thus, he and his collaborators chose not to focus on that which was seen - the short-lived hardships of this world, but rather on that which was unseen - the never-ending wonders of heaven. This is the perspective that all Christians should have (John 16:33).

## CONCLUSION

Sometimes we do not appreciate the contributions of others because we don't truly know the extent of their sacrifice. In our ignorance, we doubt their motives, question their actions, and even dismiss their affection. This was certainly the case in the on-again, off-again relationship between the Corinthians and Paul. Thus, Paul felt it necessary to inform them of the lengths he and his team had gone for their sake. This explanation was not intended to be boastful, but simply to increase their awareness. May we learn from the Corinthians to be careful about casting judgment upon others without knowing all the facts.

Lastly, let me repeat and emphasize a point that I made in the introduction of this sermon. Ministry and Christian service is hard work. Those who commit to live wholeheartedly for Christ will face hatred and persecution in this life (John 15:18-20). This is why the Lord fills us with His light, invigorates us with His strength, and lovingly sustains our often fragile faith. In Him we find the courage to persevere, the determination to overcome, and the fortitude to last...



# Temporal and Eternal Bodies

Originally Preached on 1/14/2024

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. - Philippians 3:20-21*

I hope that you and your family had a merry Christmas and a happy New Year celebration. Now that the holidays have passed us and we've begun to settle into 2024, we will resume our sermon series titled, "The Messed Up Church: Paul's Letters to Corinth". We will be in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 this morning.

As you may recall, Paul is writing to the Corinthian church to express his delight in the news that they have, for the most part, repented and turned from their season of apostasy back to the Lord. He is also vigorously defending his ministry and personal integrity from those who still have their doubts. Along the way, Paul seamlessly sprinkles in some theology and teaching as well.

This morning's message is called, "Temporal and Eternal Bodies". This is an issue Paul addresses in several of his letters, not just in Corinthians. We will be contrasting our present bodies and our future bodies.

## I. TENTS OR HOUSES (2 Cor. 5:1-5)

Paul wrote that our physical, human bodies are like earthy tents that can, and someday will be, torn down. However, as Christians, we will receive new bodies which are like buildings from God, not made by human hands, that are eternal and will never be destroyed. In other words, our present bodies of flesh are temporary and susceptible to destruction, while our future bodies will be permanent and not subject to destruction.

We as Christians will be clothed with these eternal bodies, referred to purposely as houses rather than tents, when we dwell in heaven. In the meantime, while living in these earthly bodies, it is though we are naked. We are always exposed to and burdened by the damaging consequences of sin. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, this nakedness brings about shame and reproach. This being the case, Paul stated that he groaned for and longed to be clothed in his heavenly, sinless body rather than being unclothed in his earthly, fallen one.

Paul explained that, when we receive our eternal bodies, that which is mortal will be swallowed up in life. Scripture teaches that in heaven, there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain. Our bodies will not age, ache, hurt, or grow weary. They will be spiritual bodies, imperishable, undefiled, and incorruptible, that are fitted for eternity.

God has prepared His children for this very purpose, to be clothed with these eternal bodies after our mortal bodies are torn down. In the meantime, He has given us the Holy Spirit as a pledge or guarantee of this glorious transition to come. All Christians, who have trusted in Jesus for the salvation of their souls, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the moment of their salvation until their earthly bodies are destroyed. There will be no need for Him to continue indwelling our eternal bodies, as we will already be present with God in heaven.

## II. AT HOME OR ABSENT (2 Cor. 5:6-8)

Having the promise of these future bodies in heaven, Paul told the Corinthians to be encouraged. He wrote that while we are at home in these earthly bodies we are absent from the Lord. In this condition, we must walk by faith and not by sight because we are not physically able to see Him yet. However, we can trust in His word and converse with Him in prayer, walking confidently in faith, until the day we behold Him face to face.

That said, Paul added that he and his colleagues were of good courage. In fact, he wrote that they would prefer being absent from their earthly bodies and being at home with the Lord. To be clear, Paul wasn't being morbid or wishing for his own death, but rather was simply pointing out the obvious truth - being in heaven in the manifest presence of Jesus is exceedingly better than being here on earth apart from His manifest presence. For that reason, we as Christian should not fear physical death - because when we leave this life, we go to see Jesus!

Notice that Paul specifies only 2 realms of existence for Christians. They are either at home in the body and absent from the Lord or absent from the body and at home with the Lord. There is no in-between or intermediate step. There is no heavenly waiting room or lobby. When a Christian dies they go immediately into the presence of God in heaven. This is the clear and repeated teaching of scripture, in this passage and elsewhere. The doctrine of Purgatory is not found anywhere in the Bible and such a place does not exist.

## III. GOOD OR BAD (2 Cor. 5:9-10)

In light of these wonderful truths, Paul expressed the shared ambition of he and his friends. Their joint desire was to be pleasing to God, whether at home in the body or absent from it. In other words, they sought to honor and faithfully obey God in both life and death. Friends, this should be our ambition too.

Paul declared that all Christians will someday stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be recompensed for all the deeds they've done while in their earthly bodies - whether good or bad. In theology, we refer to this as the Bema Seat Judgment. It is exclusively for Christians, as the unrighteous will be judged separately at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15). The primary purpose of this judgment is to bestow rewards, or crowns, to those believers who have served the Lord well.

## CONCLUSION

The physical bodies we live in right now will someday be replaced by new, spiritual bodies. Theologians refer to this coming change as glorification. It is the final, climactic step in the process of redemption. Our present bodies are corrupted by sin and possess a carnal, sinful nature. Our new bodies will be pure, righteous, and conformed to the image of Christ. They will not be tainted by nor inclined to sin. They will be holy and undefiled, thereby allowing us to abide forever in the physical presence of God.

That said, we will still be human beings - not angels. Our glorified bodies will be like that of Jesus after He rose from the grave, but before He ascended into heaven. They will have remarkable qualities that are vastly superior to our current bodies. They will have spiritual attributes, yet still be physical, tangible, and able to touch. Each of us will still be the same person we are now and will retain our own individual identity. We will be restored, like Adam and Eve before the fall.

In closing, this glorious promise is for Christians only. It does not apply to those who reject Jesus. Scripture teaches that the lost will suffer pain and torment in hell. Their eternal bodies will be fashioned to feel and endure endless condemnation. No thank you! I will cling to Christ and the hope of a heavenly building to replace this tattered tent of mine. I'm ready for an upgrade!

# The Ministry of Reconciliation

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*For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. - Romans 5:10*

Good morning friends. In last week's message, we covered the first 10 verses of 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Today, beginning with verse 11, we will read and study the rest of the chapter. I hope you'll recognize some familiar verses, perhaps even a few you know by memory, in today's text. I have titled this sermon, "The Ministry of Reconciliation".

## I. CONTROLLED BY CHRIST (2 Cor. 5:11-15)

In the previous verses, Paul stated that his ambition was to live and serve in a manner that was pleasing to God. He acknowledged that all Christians will someday give account for the deeds they've done in this life, whether good or bad. Knowing this, Paul and his colleagues sought to make their righteousness known to God and hoped that it would be clearly evident to the Corinthians (and others) as well.

It was not Paul's intent to brag about his godliness, but rather to express the reason for it. Paul and his missionary team labored tirelessly in order to please God. As such, the Corinthians should have been proud of them. Paul's example provided a stark contrast to those who took pride in the outward appearance (impressing men) rather than in a lowly, contrite heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

Apparently, some of Paul's skeptics had questioned his sanity. His zealous commitment to the cause of Christ seemed too extreme for them to comprehend. They reasoned that he must have been out of his mind. Paul wrote that he knew exactly what he was doing. If he seemed crazy, it was for the Lord, for the Corinthians, and for believers everywhere.

Paul's actions, and those of his peers, were controlled by the love of the Lord. Jesus died for everyone, and those who trust in Him for salvation should, in a sense, die also. Born-again believers should die to themselves, their own lusts, dreams, and carnal ambitions. Instead, they should live wholeheartedly for Christ - no matter how bizarre that might seem to some - because He died and rose again on their behalf.

## II. RECONCILED TO GOD (2 Cor. 5:16-19)

Therefore, because they had died to their flesh, and knew that all true Christians do likewise, Paul and his friends no longer regarded people in the same way they had previously. Whatsmore, though some of them had personally walked with Jesus during His earthly ministry and/or knew Him as a man, they now recognized Him differently. Their perception of Jesus and those who trusted in Him for salvation had changed and become elevated.

Paul explained that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away and new things have come.” When a person encounters the saving grace of God Almighty, they are made new. This newness comes from God, who has reconciled believers to Himself through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Those who have been reconciled to God, such as Paul and his group, have been given the ministry of reconciliation. It is based on the foundational truth that God chose not to count the world’s trespasses against them, but rather to reconcile them to Himself through Christ. This is the word or message of reconciliation that Paul proclaimed.

The word reconcile is often used in business and finance. It means “to come into agreement”. When I reconcile my bank statement, I try to align my personal record of debits and credits with those shown by the bank so that the 2 match. In terms of theology, all have sinned and are separated from God. Our sin disrupts our alignment with Him, throwing us out of agreement with Him. Salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the only means of reconciliation with God.

### III. CALLED AS AMBASSADORS (2 Cor. 5:20-21)

Paul concluded that he and his fellow ministers were ambassadors of God. An ambassador is someone who serves as a representative of their native country while living in a foreign country. The Bible teaches that we, as Christians, are citizens of heaven who live as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. While we are here, it is our privilege and purpose to represent the Lord well.

To that end, Paul passionately echoed and advocated the gospel message of his home country. On behalf of Christ, he urged all sinners everywhere to be reconciled to God. He was calling the lost to repentance, that they might be made new just as he had been.

Paul taught that God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf. He bore the full weight of humanity’s sin and paid its full penalty on the cross. In exchange, the LORD provides that sinners might become the righteousness of God in Christ. How is this transition possible? When a lost person repents of their sin and places their faith in Jesus, His righteousness is imputed by God upon them. Thus, the righteousness of a Christian is not their own, but rather that of Christ Himself. He bore our sin; we bear His righteousness!

### CONCLUSION

As we close the message this morning, let’s quickly review and emphasize a few of the major points we’ve touched on.

First, Paul said that his life, and that of his coworkers, was controlled by the love of Christ. The love of Jesus held sway over them, salting their speech and lighting their steps. They didn’t just understand and teach the will of God, but also humbly consented to it and walked in faithful

obedience. They submitted themselves to Christ as the Lord of their lives. Beloved, hear me... Jesus isn't truly the Lord of your life if He doesn't have control over it.

Second, Paul explained that born-again Christians are not the same people as they were before they got saved. They are new creatures, who were previously dead in their sins but are now made alive by God in Christ Jesus. They were previously corrupt and condemned, but now are forgiven, pardoned, and made righteous. They were previously separated and alienated from God, but are now reconciled to Him in harmonious fellowship.

In the beginning of this chapter, which we discussed last Sunday, Paul described a glorious day when each Christian will receive a new, glorified body that will endure for eternity. Though that has yet to happen, you can be certain that those who've been saved are already made new. This amazing newness is unfolding incrementally every day, and God can already see the end result.

Thirdly, just like Paul, all Christians have been called to be ambassadors or representatives of God. We are His witnesses who've been commissioned to proclaim the message of salvation to this lost and dying world that many might be saved. Notice that salvation isn't automatic, but rather must be received. Therefore, on God's behalf, I issue this heartfelt appeal to any and everyone who hears this message - repent of your sins and trust in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of your life. Oh please, wayward sinner, be reconciled to God.

# Live In God's Grace

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*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, - Ephesians 4:1*

In the book of 2 Corinthians Paul spends a considerable amount of time describing and defending his character and ministry. He names and discusses several of the challenges that he and his friends have faced during their travels. He talks candidly about the purpose of their labor and the motivation that compels them to godly service. He acknowledges and gives thanks for the strength of God which empowers them to serve even in their own weakness.

In today's sermon, we will continue focusing on the work of ministry. We will read more personal testimony about Paul's efforts to serve God in a worthy manner. In addition, we will encounter some guidance for the Corinthians as to how they might serve God better. Of course, this counsel can be applied to our Christian service as well.

## I. BE PLEASING TO GOD (2 Cor. 6:1-10)

Paul opened this portion of his letter by saying that he and his ministry team were working together with God. Think about that for a moment. God allows His children, those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, to serve as His hands and feet. We are the LORD's servants, called to and equipped for the Kingdom work that He has entrusted to us. We get the privilege and honor of working alongside Him! This shouldn't be taken for granted.

To that end, Paul urged the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. He didn't want them to ignore or dismiss the saving message of God's grace. He didn't want them to continue walking in their old ways, but rather to experience the transformational power of God's grace. Paul cited the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 49:8) and urged the Corinthians to live in the light of God's glorious grace right now - today!

Understanding themselves to be servants of God, Paul and his fellow missionaries sought to avoid causing offense in anything so as not to discredit or undermine their ministry and thereby disparage the LORD's name. They had committed to serve Him despite enduring afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, and hunger. They would speak and act in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, and in the power of God.

The members of Paul's team were determined to live righteously, regardless of whether it brought them glory or dishonor - a good report or a bad report. He knew that their enemies would regard them as deceivers, but they told the truth; as unknown, but they were well-known; as dying, but in Christ they lived; as punished, but they had not been executed; as sorrowful, but they rejoiced; as poor, but they made many rich; and as having nothing, yet they had everything.

Simply put, they would not be discouraged or deterred by the false claims of their critics, but would instead remain fully focused on and dedicated to pleasing God.

## II. BE OPEN TO BELIEVERS (2 Cor. 6:11-13)

Paul told the Corinthians that he and his colleagues had been open and honest with them all along. He had shared the feelings of his heart, expressing his deep sorrow and frustration when they went astray. Even though it was somewhat uncomfortable, he rebuked them for their waywardness and called them to repentance. Through all of this he had been transparent and truthful, and his love for them never faded (Proverbs 27:6).

Though his fondness for the Corinthians had never wavered, their affections for him certainly did. During their season of apostasy, having been misled by false teachers, they had blatantly ignored his instructions and regarded him as unreliable. They wanted nothing to do with Paul or his associates. Now that they had returned to Christ, Paul urged them to open themselves wide for renewed fellowship and love.

Beloved, we as Christians need to be honest and transparent with one another. We are a family. As such, we need to tell each other the truth even when it is difficult to do so. We should share our true feelings and burdens so that we can encourage and pray for one another. We should love unconditionally, forgive those who stumble, and always seek restoration and reconciliation.

## III. BE SEPARATE FROM UNBELIEVERS (2 Cor. 6:14-18)

On the other hand, Paul warned the Corinthians to separate themselves from unbelievers. To make his point clear, he asked a series of questions. What partnership does righteousness have with lawlessness? What fellowship does light have with darkness? What harmony does Christ have with Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement does the temple of God have with idols?

Following up on his last question, Paul explained that born-again believers are the temple of God. He weaved together a collection of Old Testament verses including Leviticus 26:12, Exodus 29:45, Isaiah 52:11, Ezekiel 20:41, and Isaiah 43:6. Using these texts, he taught that we as Christians should set ourselves apart from the world just as the Israelites were supposed to do among the heathen nations.

While Christians are certainly called to live among unbelievers and to engage this lost culture with the gospel, we are simultaneously commanded not to be bound to them. This includes things like formal partnerships, contractual agreements, and even covenant relationships. Beloved, no one is perfect, and every human bond is flawed to some degree, but we should avoid alliances with those who practice iniquity. Such associations are dangerous and will invariably lead believers to impurity and compromise.

## CONCLUSION



So, how can we as God's children walk in His grace? It must begin by recognizing grace's incredible value. God has bestowed His unfailing love and favor upon us, though we are so undeserving of it. His grace is all that gets us through the day! He invites us to participate in His work. Therefore, in appreciation and gratitude, we should willingly and joyfully serve Him. In every circumstance, whether good or bad, we should seek to follow the LORD in obedience and live lives that are pleasing to Him.

As we do so, we should walk in close and open fellowship with fellow believers. We are, collectively, the children of God - brothers and sisters, members of the body of Christ. We are His church, the Son's chosen bride, and the temple of God. We are colabors in the same harvest, comrades in the same army, athletes in the same race, and sheep of the same pasture. May we learn to love and support one another in truth rather than constantly tearing each other down.

Finally, we should remove ourselves and be distinct from unbelievers. God has called us to a higher standard, one of holiness and purity. Though we know it is a bar we'll never clear in this life, we should strive for it nonetheless. We cannot fully enjoy the light of His grace while shaded by umbrellas of sinful relationships and associations.

## Paul's Heartfelt Expression

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*For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy comes in the morning. - Psalm 30:5*

When 2 Corinthians began, Paul was explaining and defending his decision to alter his original travel plans. When charting the route for his third missionary journey, it appears as though he intended to visit Corinth twice, both before making his way into Macedonia and then again afterward. However, when his stay in Ephesus was prolonged far beyond what he'd expected, he changed his mind. He told the Corinthians that he'd skip the initial visit and come just once after going through Macedonia. This decision provided an opportunity for false teachers, who had risen up in the church, to question his reliability and even his love for the Corinthian believers.

It seems that, when Timothy brought news of the Corinthians' wayward condition, Paul suspended his work in Ephesus and immediately went to see them after all. Sadly, they were unreceptive and even hostile toward him, so after a brief and ineffective encounter he returned to Ephesus in sorrow. Soon thereafter, he wrote a letter to the Corinthians in which he expressed his brokenness over their fallen state, rebuked them for their sin, and called them to repentance. He dispatched Titus to deliver this letter. After finishing up in Ephesus, Paul made his way to Troas and then went on to Macedonia as planned.

Paul described this series of events in the first few paragraphs of 2 Corinthians, but then shifted the focus of his letter to his ministry. From near the end of chapter 2 through chapter 6 he discussed the nature of his ministry, the purpose of his ministry, the challenges he faced in ministry, and the motivation for his ministry. As we move into chapter 7 this morning, Paul reverts back to his earlier presentation of events, picking up with what had happened to them most recently, since their arrival in Macedonia.

### I. CAN WE BE FRIENDS AGAIN (2 Cor. 7:1-4)

In the opening chapter of this letter, Paul wrote that all of the promises of God are found in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:20). Several pages later, at the beginning of chapter 7, he added that all Christians, having accepted Jesus, are recipients of these promises. This being the case, Paul urged the Corinthians, himself, and all believers to cleanse themselves of sinful defilements and to seek holiness. Though we as believers have already been justified by God (positionally), we should strive to live pure and righteous lives (practically).

Paul asked the Corinthians to renew their love and affection for him and his coworkers. He had made this same request in the previous chapter (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). Their relationship had been badly damaged in prior months while the church was astray. Paul asserted that he and his team had done nothing wrong nor harmed anyone. He didn't speak critically of them, but rather felt empathy on their behalf, as though his heart was bound to them in all circumstances.

Paul stated that, despite their missteps, he had great confidence in the Corinthians. He spoke well about them to others. They brought him joy even in the midst of his struggles. They were a source of comfort to him, as he'd discussed earlier in this letter (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). This comfort was amplified in light of their recent repentance.

## II. WHY I SAID WHAT I SAID (2 Cor. 7:5-13a)

Paul described the tiredness, affliction, and trouble that he and his colleagues felt when they came to Macedonia (just a few months before this letter was written). Nevertheless, when Titus arrived from Corinth with a good report, they were all greatly comforted by the news. Furthermore, they were comforted by Titus' upbeat demeanor as he told them about the Corinthians' renewed longing for God, sorrow over their sin, and enthusiasm for Paul.

In his previous letter, referred to as the "tearful letter" (2 Corinthians 2:4), Paul had confronted the Corinthians with their sin and had called them to repentance. He now explained that, though those words may have caused them sorrow, he did not regret saying them. Any sorrow they may have caused was only temporary. Instead, Paul rejoiced that the sorrow his words created had, by God's will, led to the church's repentance.

Godly sorrow leads to repentance, which in turn leads to salvation. Thus, it is not something that we should regret. On the other hand, worldly sorrow leads to misery, shame, and death. In this case, the Corinthians' response to godly sorrow had resulted in a newfound affection for and fear of God, a bitter distaste of sin, and a desire for justice and impassioned Christian service. They were no longer guilty of apostasy, but now walked in innocence once again.

Apparently, in the aforementioned "tearful letter", Paul had instructed the Corinthians to take disciplinary action against some who were causing offense in the church. Here, he clarified that this directive was not made for the sake of the offender or even those being offended. Rather, it was meant to challenge the church's appreciation for Paul's Holy Spirit inspired directions. By adhering to them, the Corinthians had reaffirmed their respect for him and, more importantly, their fear of God. Their obedience was comforting to Paul and his friends.

## III. TITUS LOVES YOU (2 Cor. 7:13b-16)

Not only were Paul and his cohorts delighted to hear of the Corinthians' renewed fervor for God, but they also rejoiced in seeing how it had impacted Titus. Remember, Titus had delivered Paul's "tearful letter" which, among other things, called them to repentance. As such, he was there when they read it and likely urged them himself to comply. Titus was actually present with them when they fell under conviction, turned back to the Lord, and experienced a powerful revival. It had clearly refreshed his spirit also.

Before sending him with the letter, Paul had spoken quite positively to Titus about the Corinthians. He commented that Titus had not been disappointed when he'd met them in

person, but rather they had lived up to all his expectations. The repentant Corinthian church had received Titus with fear and trembling. They'd responded to him in obedience, regarding him as a faithful man of God. Titus was deeply touched by their warmth and kind treatment. They had made an impression on him, and he was filled with affection for the Corinthian church.

Paul closed this portion of his letter by repeating his confidence in the Corinthians. He'd already said this back in verse 4. He believed that this church could accomplish great things for the LORD. He believed that its members could live upright, moral lives that were pleasing to God. It was a word of encouragement. Paul's confidence in them was quite remarkable considering that they'd recently gone astray. That said, it was not based on their weakness or inability, but rather the strength and ability of Christ working in them.

## CONCLUSION

In closing, I want to revisit the concept of godly sorrow. Have you ever told someone that you were sorry, but you really weren't? Has anyone ever done this to you? Such apologies are hollow and meaningless - they are, frankly, lies. The same is true when they are spoken to God, and He knows the difference between what is real and what isn't. Beloved, sin is hurtful to the Lord, to others, and even to ourselves. Its devastating effects should cause us deep sorrow and remorse. If a sinner doesn't feel sincere guilt and/or shame for their sin, can there be any real repentance? Genuine repentance is always preceded by godly sorrow. It is a critical component of true, Holy Spirit conviction. But when sorrow leads to salvation, it becomes a source of incredible joy!

# Great Generosity (Part 1)

Originally Preached on 2/11/2024

*Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on." - Mark 12:43-44*

Earlier in this series we learned that Paul took up a collection from the various Gentile churches he visited during his 3rd missionary journey. This money was to be given to the poor Christians in Jerusalem who had recently undergone a severe famine and were also suffering under heavy persecution from the Jews. Paul promoted this offering to the churches and received contributions from those throughout Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia. For accountability purposes, he invited select members of these churches to return with him to Jerusalem to witness the giving of this collection to those who lived there.

This special missions offering is emphasized in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9. Thus, as good Bible students we need to be somewhat familiar with this ministry endeavor in order to properly understand these passages. It is important for us to have the relevant background information and context when reading and studying Scripture.

## I. THE MACEDONIAN EXAMPLE (2 Cor. 8:1-6)

Having expressed his joy over the Corinthian church's repentance, Paul then turned his attention to another subject - the collection for the saints. He described how the churches in Macedonia had eagerly participated in the offering. Though they faced great affliction and were in deep poverty, still they joyfully and liberally contributed to it.

Paul stated that the churches of Macedonia, despite their meager resources, begged to participate in the missions offering for the saints in Jerusalem. They viewed the opportunity to give as a tremendous blessing and favor from God. Paul and his companions did not compel them to make an offering, but they did so voluntarily - of their own accord. Paul reported that their incredible generosity was not what he'd expected, and that they gave beyond their ability.

Paul explained that the Macedonian churches had first given themselves fully to the LORD. They had also submitted to Paul's authority as an apostle and trusted him and his team to properly handle and deliver the funds that were collected. Even in their lack, the Macedonian churches believed that God would provide for all their needs (Philippians 4:19). Having this confidence, they readily and cheerfully gave of the monies they had.

## II. FOLLOW THROUGH WITH GIVING (2 Cor. 8:7-15)

After citing the Macedonians as an example, Paul then spoke directly to the Corinthians. He rejoiced that they abounded in everything - in faith, in utterance, in knowledge, in earnestness, and in love. In like manner, Paul asked them to abound in generosity - specifically, their giving to

the collection for the saints. Paul did not command them to do so, but rather presented the offering as an opportunity to prove their love for the LORD and for others.

Paul told the Corinthians how the Lord Jesus Christ left His riches in glory and became poor for their sake, so that they might be made rich through His poverty. Jesus had given everything for them; wasn't it reasonable and appropriate that they give something to Him in return? Beloved, this is a question we should ask of all Christians - not just those in Corinth.

Paul added that, in his opinion, it would be advantageous for them to give, as such generosity evokes God's blessing. He reminded them of their earlier desire to participate in the offering back when they'd first learned of it a year before. Now the time had come to actually "put their money where their mouth was" and follow through with their giving. Even so, Paul requested that they give an acceptable amount of what they had, not of what they didn't have. He didn't expect them to give beyond their means or ability.

This missions offering wasn't to be perceived as something that punished the giver while rewarding the recipient. Rather it was an effort to promote equality. At that time, Paul explained, the Corinthian church had wealth in abundance - plenty to supply some of the needs of those in Jerusalem. Perhaps in the future, the roles would be reversed and the Jerusalem church could help the Corinthians. In order to illustrate his point about equality, Paul remembered how the Hebrew Children received equitable amounts of manna during the exodus, so that no one had too much and no one had too little (Exodus 16:18).

### III. A TRIO OF MEN (2 Cor. 8:16-24)

Though Paul planned to personally visit Corinth after leaving Macedonia, he went ahead and sent a group of 3 men ahead of him in order to prepare the church for the upcoming missions offering that would be taken when he arrived. The first of these 3 men was Titus, who had himself just recently come from Corinth with news of their repentance. Titus had developed a warmth and fondness for the Corinthians and happily volunteered to return.

Paul did not provide the name of the second member of this team, but apparently his fame had spread throughout the churches. He had been appointed by the churches to travel with Paul in order to oversee the administration of the collection of the saints. He was selected and tasked with ensuring that the offering being received was handled in an honorable manner, both in the sight of God and man. Obviously, he was held in high regard by the churches.

Paul didn't give the third team member's name either. That said, he was described as a diligent man who had been well-tested. In other words, he wasn't a new and untested believer but rather an experienced and reliable Christian. Paul obviously had great confidence in him also.

Paul spoke highly of Titus and his 2 anonymous colleagues and asked the Corinthian church to lovingly welcome this trio of men when they showed up. He described them as messengers. It

seems probable that they carried this letter - i.e., 2 Corinthians - with them to the church at Corinth.

## CONCLUSION

As we draw today's sermon to a close, let me elaborate on 2 points:

First, the missions offering that Paul collected serves as a prototype for missions giving today. We as Christian churches should cooperate and work together to fund needs beyond those of our own local church. We are commanded in Scripture to do so. Through mutual participation, sister churches can establish and support ministries regionally, nationally, and internationally. This is the basis of the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program. Hundreds of SBC churches contribute to it, and the combined offerings are used in numerous ways to advance the kingdom of God. As the saying goes, we can do more together than we can separately.

Second, although the Macedonians gave generously and sacrificially, and are a wonderful example for all Christians and churches to follow, the greatest Giver of all is the Lord Jesus. Let me repeat what I said earlier, and as I do please reflect upon the magnitude of it - Jesus voluntarily left His immeasurable riches in heaven, came to the earth as a poor and lowly Man, and gave His life on Calvary so that sinners might be forgiven and receive salvation. Friends, in light of His incredible sacrifice for us, doesn't it seem appropriate that we'd give our lives and our offerings freely to Him with gratitude and joy? Anything less seems, well, selfish and petty...

## Great Generosity (Part 2)

Originally Preached on 2/18/2024

*Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return. - Luke 6:38*

Good morning church family! Are you grateful to be in the Lord's house today? Are you eager to hear and receive His word? Are your hearts tender and prepared for its life-giving nourishment? Are your ears open to heed and obey His magnificent voice? Have you come here today to encounter and be transformed by Almighty God? I trust that you have, and I pray that He'll move powerfully among us!

Today's message is a continuation of last week's message on generosity. As you may recall, Paul was discussing the missions offering that he was collecting during his third missionary journey. Let's pick up where we left off last Sunday at the beginning of chapter 9.

### I. DON'T LET US DOWN (2 Cor. 9:1-5)

Paul stated that it was rather unnecessary for him to write to the Corinthians about "the collection for the saints". As made plain in the previous chapter, they were already well aware of this missions offering, had been eager to participate in it, and had even been preparing for it for almost a year's time. In fact, Paul boasted of Corinth's readiness to the various churches in Macedonia, who themselves became stirred up by their zealous attitude.

For this reason, Paul explained, he was sending the 3 men he'd just mentioned in chapter 8:16-24 ahead of him to make final preparations for the offering. Paul wanted to ensure that their gifts would be ready to collect when he arrived. He feared that if he were to show up, especially if accompanied by some of the Macedonians, to find the Corinthians unprepared or unwilling to give as they had earlier indicated, he'd be embarrassed and ashamed for having boasted of their generous intentions - not to mention how they'd feel.

Therefore, Paul sent his messengers to make arrangements beforehand to ensure that the bountiful gift they'd already promised would be ready. He wanted to make certain that in the meantime the Corinthians had not been overcome with greed, stinginess, or covetousness that would adversely affect their offering. Otherwise, both they and he would have egg on their face...

When we make promises it is important that we keep them. When we boast that we are going to do something, it is critical that we follow through. When we fail to honor our word, it is a cause for shame and embarrassment - not only for us, but for those who were counting on us. Not only that, it erodes our trustworthiness and damages our reputation. This is why we should be slow to make promises or boastful commitments unless we are serious about keeping them.



## II. PRINCIPLES FOR GIVING (2 Cor. 9:6-11a)

Paul continued by describing some principles for giving. First, those who sow sparingly will reap sparingly, and those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully. To say that in simpler terms, “You reap what you sow.” As this rule pertains to giving, those who are stingy and close-fisted will receive little of God’s blessing while those who are generous and open-handed will receive much of God’s blessing.

Second, a person should give voluntarily and not under compulsion. Generosity is a matter of the heart. Thus, it is up to each individual person to determine how much they should give and the attitude with which they do so. Offerings should never be made begrudgingly, but rather cheerfully. For the LORD loves a cheerful giver!

Third, those who give may rest in the confidence that God is able to make His grace abound so as to supply sufficiency in everything. He will provide abundantly for every good deed. Citing Psalm 112:9, Paul urged the Corinthians to follow God’s example by giving to the poor. He wrote that the same God who supplies seed to the sower and bread to the hungry will multiply the giver’s sowing and their harvest of righteousness, thereby enriching them in all things.

Let’s briefly review these 3 principles before moving on to the final point. 1 - The wise and universal proverb “You reap what you sow” also applies to giving. 2 - People should give voluntarily and with a cheerful heart. Forced giving does not express generosity. 3 - God will graciously supply the needs of those who give.

## III. OTHER BENEFITS OF GIVING (2 Cor. 9:11b-15)

Finally, Paul concluded his discourse on giving by detailing some of its other benefits. Not only did it provide materially for the needs of the poor, but beyond that it produced thanksgiving to God. Those who were collecting the offering, those who were contributing to the offering, and even those who were simply witnessing the generosity that was taking place among the churches all overflowed with gratitude to the LORD.

In addition, because the cheerful and generous giving of an offering demonstrated evidence of obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ, it led many to give glory to God. They were not only thankful, but also acknowledged and exalted God as the divine provider of all things. Beloved, we as Christians need to realize that giving is an act of worship just as much as singing is.

Lastly, Paul wrote that those who receive offerings given by others - especially when the recipients are also Christians, as in this case - typically develop an appreciation and strong affection for those who gave. They recognize it as an expression of God’s surpassing grace at work through the giver. This leads them to pray on behalf of and yearn for those who’ve provided for them.

Thus, we read in these verses that generous giving results in thanksgiving to God, in the worship of God, and in fondness for and heartfelt prayers on the behalf of others. Ultimately, all of this - the material and immaterial blessings that result - are gifts of God, who Himself gave His only begotten Son so that we might be redeemed from sin. Moved by this wonderful thought, Paul declared, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"

## CONCLUSION

Earlier in this series we discussed a few competing theories regarding the make-up of the Biblical book we call 2 Corinthians. The traditional view is that it is a single letter - all 13 chapters. There is no historic record of anyone seriously questioning its oneness until more recent times. For this reason, I have presented it chronologically during this sermon series.

However, modern scholarship suggests that the book of 2 Corinthians might actually be composed of 2 (or even more) letters that were combined into a single piece. This theory is based upon the differing tones and somewhat abrupt transitions between certain passages. Some who follow this school of thought believe that chapters 1-9 and chapters 10-13 are actually 2 distinct letters that have been slightly edited and joined to form a composite.

Having studied 2 Corinthians carefully, I believe it is quite possible that it does consist of 2 letters. If so, we have concluded the first letter by completing chapter 9. It was written by Paul from Macedonia after receiving news of the Corinthian church's repentance. It expresses Paul's comfort and feelings on behalf of Corinth, explains why he altered his original travel plans and wrote his tearful letter, describes the nature and work of his ministry, and challenges them to give generously to the upcoming missions offering.

Next Sunday we will begin chapters 10-13, which might possibly be a different letter altogether. As we work our way through them, you can decide for yourself. Either way, you can rest assured that all of 2 Corinthians (whether 1 or more letters) is the inspired, authoritative Word of God!

# Paul Describes Himself

Originally Preached on 2/25/2024

*Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense. - Acts 26:1*

It has been suggested by some Bible scholars that the contents of chapters 10-13 of 2 Corinthians come from a different letter than those of chapters 1-9. Those who support this theory suppose that chapters 10-13 are the main body of Paul's "tearful letter", which he likely wrote from Ephesus after returning from his brief, heartbreaking visit to Corinth during its season of rebellion. If this is true, chapters 10-13 were written prior to chapters 1-9 and under very different circumstances. Following this hypothesis, chapters 10-13 were written to a wayward Corinthian church while chapters 1-9 were written to a recently repentant Corinthian church.

As we study chapter 10 this morning, notice how the tone shifts. In chapters 8-9 Paul had been speaking to the Corinthians about his confident expectation that they'd participate generously in "the collection for the saints". Rather abruptly, he now erupts into a fierce defense of himself and his own personal integrity. He courageously calls out the false prophets who were (or recently had been, depending on which theory you follow) prevalent in the Corinthian church. I have titled today's message, "Paul Describes Himself".

## I. SPIRITUAL, NOT PHYSICAL (2 Cor. 10:1-6)

By the meekness and gentleness of Christ, Paul urged the Corinthians to change their ways. He knew that if their resistance to the gospel continued, when he came again he'd have no other choice but to approach them with extreme boldness and confidence. He'd have to courageously combat certain people who were promoting lies and leading the church astray.

These false prophets claimed that Paul was bold in his letters, but meek in his presence. In other words, they accused him of being "all bark when absent, but no bite when present". They also regarded Paul and his team as men who walked according to the flesh. In other words, they slandered Paul as being a worldly person who was controlled by sinful, carnal desires.

Paul explained that, although he and his peers walked in the flesh - that is, they were human beings, they did not war in the flesh - that is, they didn't deal with conflict in conventional ways. His weapons of warfare were not earthly, but divine. Paul understood that the battles he fought and fortresses he encountered were spiritual, not physical (Ephesians 6:12). He sought to destroy and captivate thoughts, speculations, and everything that was raised up against the knowledge of God.

Paul knew that the battlefield of the human soul is in the heart and mind. Our thoughts and feelings control our decisions and behaviors. Knowing this, he called the Corinthians to obedience - to a proper understanding of and faithful allegiance to the truth of God. He also

declared his readiness to discipline, if necessary, those who stubbornly remained in disobedience. When the time was right, he would return to Corinth to confront his adversaries.

## II. MEEK, NOT WEAK (2 Cor. 10:7-11)

Paul faulted the Corinthians for focusing on outward appearances while not considering the inner condition of their hearts. He challenged them to evaluate the authenticity of their own faith. As for himself and his peers, Paul was confident that they were firmly rooted in Christ. What's more, he was certain of his calling as an apostle and the authority that came with that office. This authority was not for tearing the Corinthians down, but rather for building them up. Paul stated that he would not misuse or abuse his apostolic authority, otherwise he'd be put to shame.

Yes, Paul's letters directly and unapologetically exposed the Corinthians' sinful practices and beliefs. Yes, they boldly and uncompromisingly declared the truth of God and called for appropriate corrections to be made. Still, they were not intended to terrify the Corinthians as having been written without any love or affection for the church. They were not meant to be perceived as mean-spirited, hateful, brow-beating, or oppressive.

Among other things, the false teachers who had risen up in the Corinthian church described Paul's letters as weighty and strong, but alleged that his personal presence was unimpressive and his speech contemptible. Ironically, Paul wasn't overly concerned with being an eloquent, dynamic orator (1 Corinthians 2:1). Though his critics implied that he was weak and even cowardly, Paul forewarned that he and his friends intended to take bold action as necessary when they arrived in order to restore order, just as he'd written in his letters.

## III. MINE, NOT YOURS (2 Cor. 10:12-18)

Somewhat sarcastically, Paul concluded that he didn't really care how he was being compared to others. Who cares what they think? Besides, they were using foolish, worldly standards to commend themselves anyway. He simply wasn't going to play this game. Ministry isn't some sort of popularity contest to see who is the most charismatic, skilled, or likable person.

Nor would Paul take credit for things he and his colleagues hadn't done. He wasn't trying to gain followers or fans. He wasn't aiming to get more clicks. He was simply focused on the work Christ had given to him and would boast only in that. Paul had carried the gospel as far as Corinth and his hope was that, through their faith, his influence for Christ might reach to even farther regions. That said, he did not infringe upon or claim recognition for the work of other missionaries.

To finalize his point, Paul cited Jeremiah 9:24. He made this same Scripture reference in an earlier letter to Corinth also (1 Corinthians 1:31). Paul wrote that he who boasts should boast in the LORD, not in his own merits, skills, or accomplishments. Men are not approved by their own

commendations, but rather by the commendation of the LORD. God's opinion is the only one that really counts.

## CONCLUSION

Untrue things were being said about Paul to damage his reputation, undermine his credibility, and erode his trustworthiness. By slandering Paul and causing many of the Corinthians to doubt him, false prophets gained power and implemented their own erroneous agendas in the church. Paul knew that he must defend himself and reestablish his character before calling them to repentance, otherwise they wouldn't take his words seriously.

He started by explaining that his methods of implementing change were spiritual, not physical. Paul knew that genuine transformation must take place from the inside out. It can't be accomplished by beating people into submission with coercive, intimidating, or manipulative tactics. It is the free embrace of God's Word that changes hearts and minds, and subsequently behaviors. This is the essence of spiritual warfare.

To that end, Paul stood courageously and confidently in the truth, certain of his own right standing before God. He served the LORD tirelessly on behalf of others. Even in this assurance, Paul wasn't pretentious, arrogant, aggressive, or overbearing. Nor did he seek men's applause, approval, or personal acclaim. He was an honorable, righteous man whose chief concern was pleasing the LORD and advancing the kingdom of God.

Even now, there are people who criticize Paul and depict him as egotistical, chauvinistic, and self-righteous. They argue that we should disregard everything he wrote, which would mean throwing out roughly half of the New Testament. But like his accusers in Corinth, his modern day adversaries are wrong also. I suspect that their true motivations for slandering him have less to do with his character and more to do with not liking what he - under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, mind you - said.

# Paul Defends His Ministry (Part 1)

Originally Preached on 3/3/2024

*Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. - 1 Timothy 4:12*

In last week's message, Paul began a strong and lengthy defense of himself and his ministry. He clarified that the battle before him was not a physical one, but rather a spiritual one against Satan and his demonic forces. He declared that he wasn't weak, as many of his adversaries claimed, but rather meek and submissive to the Lord Jesus Christ. He also shared that he would only boast in the Lord and what he'd been given by God, and never boast in himself or in the work of others.

This morning, as we consider the first half of chapter 11, Paul's apology continues. The Corinthian Christians had been told that Paul was a liar, a thief, and someone who only cared about himself. The church brazenly questioned and rejected Paul's apostleship and credentials. In the face of their doubts and the ongoing barrage of slanderous comments being made about him, Paul offered his brilliant and inspired defense. Let's go to the text...

## I. NOT INFERIOR (2 Cor. 11:1-6)

Paul asked the Corinthians to bear with him in "a little foolishness". He seemed somewhat uncomfortable talking about himself and didn't want his words to come off as self-promotion. He didn't speak like this very often, as evidenced by his other letters. Nevertheless, he had no other choice but to defend his character and his ministry. Those who disparaged him were disparaging the LORD also, and their deception couldn't go unchallenged.

Paul likened the church to a woman that he'd introduced to a friend. He had personally presented the Corinthians to Christ, and they had become the Lord's virgin bride. But now Paul feared that their minds would be led astray from pure and simple devotion to Christ, just as Satan misled Eve in the Garden of Eden so that she (and Adam) became estranged to God.

How might such a deception occur? Paul explained that if someone preached another Jesus besides the one he and his team had preached, or if they received another spirit besides the Holy Spirit, or accepted another gospel besides the true gospel, then they'd be in danger of falling into apostasy. Sadly, this seems to be exactly what happened.

Paul declared that he was not inferior - even in the slightest degree - to even the most imminent apostles, including Peter and John. He stood equal with them in authority and legitimacy. He certainly was not inferior to the charlatans who had infiltrated the Corinthian church! Though he conceded that he wasn't a great speaker, still he excelled in the knowledge of God. This was something that should have been evident to the Corinthians, as they had witnessed Paul's vast knowledge firsthand.

## II. NOT RESTRAINED (2 Cor. 11:7-11)

Paul asked the Corinthians if he had sinned by humbling himself so that they might be exalted. To be precise, had he sinned by preaching the gospel to them without charge? When Paul first came to Corinth near the end of his second missionary journey and established the church there, he did not accept financial compensation from the Corinthians (Acts 18:1-5). Apparently, Paul's accusers twisted his act of humility into a reason for questioning his office and authority, perhaps by arguing that distinguished apostles don't work for free.

Paul explained that, during his initial visit to Corinth, he had received monetary support from other churches which allowed him not to place any financial burden on the Corinthians. He stated that when the brethren arrived from Macedonia - namely Silas and Timothy - they brought with them sufficient provision to supply his needs. The generosity of the Macedonian churches, and perhaps some other sources, funded Paul's ministry and mission in Corinth.

After recalling how he'd preached the gospel to the Corinthians without payment from them, Paul then asserted that he would continue to do likewise. While exerting as little financial burden on the churches as possible, he would continue to proclaim the truth of Christ in regions beyond Achaia. Paul was a missionary - a church planter - who had been called by God to travel from place to place. Just because he wasn't in Corinth all the time didn't mean that he didn't love them or care for their church. This was yet another false (and rather childish) allegation that had been made about him. On the contrary, he loved the Corinthians dearly, as God Himself would testify!

Notice that Paul was not overly concerned with making money. Nor was he naive in believing that a preacher's value should be measured by how much money he is paid. Of course he needed his basic necessities taken care of, but beyond that Paul just wanted to tell as many people about Jesus as possible and establish strong Christian churches while not being a burden to them.

## III. NOT DECEIVED (2 Cor. 11:12-15)

There was another reason Paul didn't expect or demand wages from the churches in exchange for his work - to distinguish himself from those who did. Paul stated that if his opponents wanted to be regarded in the same manner that he was, they should follow his lead and not insist on being compensated for their services either! Of course, he knew that they wouldn't do that.

Paul then described his adversaries as false apostles and deceitful workers who were disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. He reasoned that their behaviors were not a surprise, for even Satan misrepresents himself as an angel of light. In the same way, Satan's servants - ie, these false teachers - disguised themselves as servants of righteousness. But Paul was not fooled, and confidently declared that these wolves in sheep's clothing would ultimately be exposed and judged for their lying words and deeds.

Beloved, the apostle Paul wasn't afraid to call a spade a spade. He didn't beat around the bush or shy away from confrontation. He addressed it directly or courageously. Can you imagine the flack that would befall a prominent Christian leader if they were to call another such person a servant of the Devil? Even though they might be right, as Paul was, many people would hate them for saying it.

## CONCLUSION

As we close this morning, let me reiterate that Paul was a serious man with a serious mission. He was zealous for the Lord and wholeheartedly committed to his mission work. He didn't play games or tolerate mediocrity. He challenged perpetually immature believers to grow-up in Christ. He called out sin and admonished the guilty to repent. He rebuked false teachers without hesitation or reservation. As such, he most certainly made many enemies - both outside and inside the church.

Nevertheless, Paul loved the Lord and His church with all of his being. Sure, he may have rubbed people the wrong way at times, but the sincerity of his heart was never in question. His service to God wasn't merely a part of his life, it was his entire life. It consumed and defined him. The apostle Paul is a role model for Christians everywhere and in every generation.

Next Sunday morning we will read and discuss that second half of chapter 11. Paul will continue vigorously defending himself and his ministry. He will continue distinguishing himself from the false teachers and pretenders of his day. Until then, I urge you to get serious with God. Jesus doesn't call us to a casual, superficial relationship with Him. Rather, he wants our complete devotion - heart, soul, mind, and strength. Fellow Christian, are you all in?



## Paul Defends His Ministry (Part 2)

Originally Preached on 3/10/2024

*My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. - Psalm 73:26*

Last Sunday we began a 2-part sermon on 2 Corinthians chapter 11. We covered verses 1-15 in a message titled “Paul Defends His Ministry (Part 1)”. Among other things, Paul stated that he was not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles, that he would continue preaching the gospel in regions beyond Achaia without placing undue burden on the churches, and that he was not surprised or misled by the deceptive ways of Corinth’s false teachers.

In this morning’s service, we will discuss the remainder of the chapter, verses 16-33 in a message titled “Paul Defends His Ministry (Part 2)”. Paul is on quite a roll here, so let’s see what else he has to say. For those of you keeping track, this is the 43rd sermon in our study of Paul’s letters to Corinth. We only have 2 messages left in this series after today. We’re almost done!

### I. BEAR WITH ME (2 Cor. 11:16-21a)

Again, as he had done a few paragraphs earlier (see verse 1 of this same chapter), Paul asked the Corinthians to bear with him “in foolishness” as he continued his defense. He clarified that his words were not being spoken as those of the Lord per se, but rather were rooted in his own personal confidence in the Lord and his calling. Seeing that other men (namely, the false apostles in Corinth) regularly boasted about themselves and their accomplishments, Paul decided that he would do likewise (to an extent).

As for the Corinthians, in their “wisdom”, they gladly tolerated the leadership of those who boasted of themselves and gave themselves commendations. They cheerfully tolerated those who sought to enslave them, who devoured them, who took advantage of them, who exalted themselves, and who even (figuratively speaking I hope) hit them in the face. They blissfully put up with all sorts of abuse. Compared to the aggressive, self-serving, and worldly tactics of his opposition, Paul jokingly wrote that he did seem shamefully weak.

Paul’s remarks ooze with Holy Spirit inspired sarcasm. I am tempted to laugh at them until I realize my own fault. Take a moment to consider all of the self-destructive people and things we allow to take up residence in our lives (and churches). Despite our own self-proclaimed enlightenment, we not only permit such detriments to remain but often purposefully seek them out. We joyfully indulge in and/or put up with that which seeks to destroy us. Are we any wiser than the Corinthians? Sadly, it seems not.

### II. SOME OF MY EXPERIENCES (2 Cor. 11:21b-29)

Referring primarily to the false teachers in Corinth, Paul acrimoniously declared that he would exercise boldness in the same respect that they did. They boasted about being Hebrews. Paul

didn't question them, but simply stated that he was a Hebrew, too. They boasted about being Israelites. Again, Paul didn't question them, but said, "So am I." They boasted about being sons of Abraham. Without dispute, Paul said that he was a son of Abraham as well. They were not different from him in any of these ethnic or ancestral ways.

Finally, they boasted about being servants of Christ. Was Paul insane to question this assertion? Where was the evidence? Though he didn't flatly deny their claim (at least, not in this instance), he did contend that he was much more a servant of Christ than they were. To back this statement up, Paul expressed that he had engaged in far more labors and been imprisoned far more times than they had. In addition, he had been beaten an untold number of times and had frequently been in danger of death. To be specific, Paul listed the following occurrences:

On 5 separate occasions Paul received 39 lashes from the Jews.

On 3 separate occasions he was beaten with rods.

On 1 occasion he was stoned.

On 3 separate occasions Paul was shipwrecked.

On 1 occasion he spent an entire night and day adrift in the sea.

Besides these particular events, Paul added a long list of other general adversities. He wrote that he had been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, in dangers from his own countrymen (the Jews), in dangers from the Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers on the sea, and in dangers among false brethren. Paul had persevered through much labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and in thirst, often without food, and in bitter cold and exposure. It should be noted that this list only includes those things which had happened up to this point in Paul's life - there would be many more adversities yet to come.

Though the external challenges Paul faced were numerous and burdensome, he concluded that the internal struggles were even more difficult. He felt a deep and constant concern for the churches that he served and it weighed heavily on his heart. Whenever they were weak, Paul felt weak also. Whenever they were ensnared by sin, Paul worried for them intensely. Emotional pain can be so much greater than physical pain. Such was the case for the wayward church in Corinth, whose broken condition had brought Paul to tears.

### III. I'LL BOAST IN MY WEAKNESS (2 Cor. 11:30-33)

Putting all sarcasm aside, Paul stated that - unlike his accusers - his boasting was not focused on his strength, but rather on his weakness. Did you notice that? All of the things he had just listed in the previous paragraph were not personal accomplishments or accolades, but rather sufferings he had endured for Christ. It was God who had seen him through all of these hardships and trials. In fact, there were so many that Paul felt it necessary to insist that he wasn't lying or making any of them up!

Finally, Paul gave 1 last example of his weakness which dated back to the very beginning of his ministry. After meeting Jesus on the Damascus Road, Paul was blinded and taken into town. There he met a disciple named Ananias who restored his eyesight. Paul began preaching in the city, to the surprise and disdain of the local Jews and the city guard. They sought to seize and even kill him, but Paul recalled how the disciples lowered him out of a window in the wall by night so that he could escape (Acts 9:19-25).

Paul was susceptible to pain, hunger, and even death. He wasn't exempt from peril and persecution. But in his frailty and weakness, Paul boasted of the Lord's great strength. While the false prophets bragged about themselves and what they'd achieved, Paul highlighted what God had done for him - how the Lord had delivered him time and time again.

## CONCLUSION

Who of us have endured the things that Paul endured for the cause of Christ? I certainly haven't. I've never been beaten, imprisoned, or threatened with death. I've never walked in a near and perpetual state of danger. In fact, most of my Christian life has been rather comfortable. Don't get me wrong... I thank God for my safety and security. But sometimes I wonder if my faith might be stronger and my service more deliberate under heavy persecution.

To this point, Paul has given a pretty convincing defense of himself and his ministry. But he isn't done yet! Next week we will read even more evidence of his righteous character and his divine calling. Until then, may God richly bless and keep you.

# Paul Concludes His Defense

Originally Preached on 3/17/2024

*But the Lord said to him [Ananias], "Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;" - Acts 9:15*

Good morning everyone. As we have read over the past few weeks, starting back in chapter 10, Paul has been making a strong defense of himself, his own integrity, authority, and authenticity as an apostle of Christ. He has been differentiating himself in various ways from the self-proclaimed "apostles" who were leading the Corinthian church astray. Here are just a few of the points he's made thus far:

He approaches Christian ministry as a spiritual battle, not a physical one.  
 He strives to behave in the meekness and gentleness of Christ, not in weakness.  
 He does not boast in things he is not responsible for, nor does he seek men's recognition.  
 He has been called personally as an apostle by Jesus and is not inferior to any other apostles.  
 He chooses to preach the gospel without putting undue or excessive burden on the churches.  
 He is not fooled by the deceptive tactics of false teachers (who take after Satan himself).  
 He chastises the Corinthian church for tolerating abusive spiritual leadership.  
 He recalls numerous sufferings that he has endured for the sake of Christ and His church.  
 He boasts in his weakness, telling how God has delivered him from numerous dangers and threats.

Today's message is titled "Paul Concludes His Defense". We will discuss a few final arguments that Paul makes in defense of himself and his ministry. Remember, his purpose for giving this extensive apology is to regain the Corinthians' trust, in hopes that they might repent of their waywardness and turn back to God.

## I. PAUL'S MIRACULOUS VISION (2 Cor. 12:1-6)

Paul stated that he did not find boasting to be profitable or beneficial, but in this case it was necessary. With that in mind, he moved on to another issue - visions and revelations from the Lord. Apparently, the false prophets in Corinth claimed to receive miraculous visions and revelations from God that Paul did not receive.

In response, Paul described an event that had occurred 14 years earlier, when he was caught up to heaven (the first heaven is the sky, the second heaven is outer space, and the third heaven is where God abides). He was uncertain if he had been taken there bodily or if it was an out of body experience. Either way, while he was there he heard inexpressible words that were not to be spoken among men. Paul modestly described this miracle as taking place to an unnamed "man in Christ", but almost all reputable scholars agree that he was talking about himself. Paul didn't want to be revered or respected on the basis of unverifiable claims, but rather based on things that people saw and heard firsthand from him.

We could spend a lot of time on this passage, and the implications it has toward the modern Charismatic Movement. Suffice it to say that - though he had experienced something amazing - Paul didn't disclose what he heard, nor did he describe what he had seen in heaven. In fact, he wrote that it was forbidden for him to do so. This sentiment stands in stark contrast to those who frequently share and elaborate on visions and revelations that they claim to have received from God (outside of the Bible, by the way). As contemporary Christians, we need to affirm the sufficiency of Scripture (Jude 1:3) and recognize complete and full revelation of God in Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3). There is no new revelation, but only ongoing illumination of that which the Lord has already spoken (John 14:26, 16:13).

## II. PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

Though he did not boast about them, Paul asserted that he did receive visions and revelations from God. What's more, He reasoned that because of the surpassing greatness of these revelations, he'd been given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from exalting himself. He depicted this thorn as "a messenger from Satan" that tormented him. Theologians have long debated the exact nature of this "thorn". I personally believe it was poor eyesight, but there are many other strong possibilities. Whatever it was, God allowed it in order to keep Paul humble.

Paul recollected praying on 3 separate occasions and asking God to remove the thorn. However, the Lord left it in place and replied, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Therefore, Paul exclaimed that he would boast in his weakness so that the power of Christ might dwell in him. He expressed his contentment in weakness, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, and in difficulties for Christ's sake. He concluded that when he was weak, the Lord made him strong.

Beloved, we all face various pains and afflictions. We suffer physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Like Paul, we sometimes pray that God would remove the burdens from our lives and heal us, comfort us, and/or restore us. But whether He does or does not, we should always walk with the confidence that His grace is sufficient for us. Our hurts are not due to a lack of faith, but rather are an opportunity for God's strength to be displayed in our weakness.

## III. A SUMMATION OF PAUL'S DEFENSE (2 Cor. 12:11-18)

Paul declared that he felt rather foolish having to defend himself so vigorously, yet the doubts and unfounded criticisms of the Corinthian church compelled him to do so. Rather than rebelling against him, they should have been commending him. Paul recalled exhibiting the wonders and signs of a true apostle when he had been present among them. Had they forgotten? Although he was a "nobody", Jesus had personally appointed him to that office and, as such, he was not inferior to even the most eminent apostles. Paul asked the Corinthians how he had treated them in any lesser way than the other churches (as he'd been accused of doing)? He asked for their forgiveness if he'd offended them for preaching the gospel in Corinth without charge.

Paul announced his plans to visit Corinth for a third time in the very near future. He stated that he was not coming for their money or resources, but for them. Just as in his previous visits, he would not be a financial burden to them. Paul explained that it is not the child's job to provide for the parent, but the parent's to provide for the child. Picturing himself as their parent, he wrote that he'd gladly expend himself for their sake. That said, his sacrificial love for them shouldn't diminish the love they returned to him. Finally, restating the ridiculous charge that he was a "crafty fellow" and a deceiver, Paul asked the Corinthians how he had taken advantage of them. He asked if any of the people he'd sent to them, such as Titus, had taken advantage of them. Of course neither he or they had done so. On the contrary had acted with the utmost integrity, righteousness, and compassion.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the false apostles in Corinth who slandered Paul and cast derision upon him claimed to receive remarkable revelations and visions from God which they openly boasted about and discussed. Paul responded that he received visions and revelations also, but didn't publicly disclose them or arrogantly seek acclaim for having them. In fact, God had given him a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble, so that he would only boast in his weakness and be content in his sufferings. Paul had performed miracles in the Corinthians' presence as proof of his apostleship, had shown them sacrificial love, and neither he nor his colleagues had placed any burden on them or taken advantage of them in any way. What else could he say?

And so, Paul ended his defense. He had argued his case brilliantly, upheld his character, and decisively distinguished himself from the false prophets in Corinth. Now the ball was in their court. Would the Corinthians recognize Paul's authenticity and respect his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ or would they continue following the charlatans who were leading their church?

# Examine Yourself

Originally Preached on 3/24/2024

*Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the Lord. - Lamentations 3:40*

I believe that every sermon should end with some sort of invitation. It saddens me to know that many churches today no longer offer a formal invitation at the end of their worship services. I realize that most Sundays no one comes forward, nor do I expect them too. That said, I think it's important that we give the congregation a few moments to respond to the message. We never know what might happen, who might step out, and what life-changing decisions might be made.

In today's message, the 45th and final sermon in our series through 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul extends a closing invitation. He has extensively defended his character and apostleship, and has exposed the Corinthians' obstinance and sinfulness. Now he challenges them to humbly submit themselves to the Lord and respond in obedience to Him.

## I. FEARFUL EXPECTATIONS (2 Cor. 12:19-21)

Having spent the last few chapters making his personal defense, Paul explained that he wasn't as concerned about what the Corinthians thought of him as he was that they acknowledged and abided by the truth of Christ. He said that he wasn't defending himself to them per se, but rather in the sight of God that they might be built up. Paul referred to the Corinthians as his "beloved", clearly indicating his love and affection for them. His desire was their renewal and restoration, not their applause.

Paul worried that he might not find the Corinthians walking in faithful obedience to God when he arrived for his third visit. He was concerned that there would be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, and disturbances. This is what he had experienced during his previous, tearful visit. In fact, he had addressed some of these issues earlier in 1 Corinthians. Paul feared that if he returned and found them still practicing immorality he'd be humiliated and embarrassed. He worried that he'd mourn yet again over those who were engaged in blatant and unrepentant sin - impurity, immorality, and sensuality.

## II. COMING IN BOLDNESS (2 Cor. 13:1-4)

Paul stated that he'd be making his third visit soon. He quoted the law of Moses saying that every fact is confirmed by the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). Perhaps he was using this verse figuratively to suggest that his 3rd visit would be sufficient to determine definitively where the Corinthians stood in relationship to God. Were they the faithful, obedient believers that he'd seen during his first visit or the wayward, immoral rebels that he'd seen during his second visit?

Paul set expectations by writing that he was planning to come this time in boldness. He was going to hold the Corinthians accountable for their conduct, confront any unrepentant sinners,

and would not spare anyone. They wanted proof of Paul's apostleship and evidence that he wasn't the weak, unimpressive person that he'd been depicted as being by their false teachers. Thus, Paul intended to demonstrably show them the strength of Christ. He elaborated that Jesus was crucified in His weakness, but now lived by the power of God. In like fashion, Paul and his colleagues might have appeared weak in their sufferings, but they actually lived in God's almighty strength which was and would be directed toward the Corinthians.

### III. TEST YOURSELVES (2 Cor. 13:5-10)

As he came to the conclusion of this letter, Paul called the Corinthians to action. He urged them to test themselves to see if they were truly in the faith. In other words, was their profession of faith genuine, were they really saved, and were they genuinely committed to Christ? If they were saved, did they have unconfessed sin that was disrupting their fellowship with God and hindering their effectiveness? Paul trusted that, after reading his lengthy defense, the Corinthian church would recognize that he and his fellow missionaries were true Christians, worthy to be revered.

Paul's prayer was that they would quit doing things that were wrong and instead do things that were right, regardless of whether Paul and his team appeared approved in their sight or not. Paul stood for the truth and nothing else. He rejoiced when the Corinthians were strong and prayed that they would be made complete. Paul's desperate plea was that the Corinthians would repent of their apostasy, put away their false teachers, and turn back to the Lord.

Paul explained that he had made his defense, laid out his case against the false apostles, and called the church to repentance in this letter in order that they might respond obediently before he arrived in person. Although Paul possessed the God-given authority to address them with severity during his next visit (for their edification, not for their destruction) and was fully prepared to do so, he didn't necessarily want to. He hoped they'd examine themselves individually and corporately and get themselves and their church right with the Lord before he showed up.

### IV. CLOSING REMARKS (2 Cor. 13:11-14)

If the entire book of 2 Corinthians is a single letter, then the final verses of chapter 13 are the valediction of that letter. If, however, it is 2 or more letters that have been combined into a single book, then the closing verses might be the valediction of 1 of those individual letters or a collective valediction that ties the combined letters together with a single closing. Either way, let's consider what they say.

Paul closed by exhorting the Corinthians to rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, and live in peace. He prayed that the God of love and peace would be with them. He told them to greet one another and sent greetings from all the saints. Finally, he evoked the Trinity with a final blessing on the Corinthians, stating, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all."



## CONCLUSION

We did it! After almost a full year of study, we've finally come to the end of our sermon series on Paul's letters to Corinth. We've discovered that the Corinthian church was fraught with problems and was truly a "Messed Up Church". Located in a city known for prostitution, idolatry, and sexual immorality, the Corinthian church struggled to maintain purity and obedience to the Lord.

In Paul's first letter, he warned them to abstain from sexual immorality and to avoid such people who practiced it. In his second letter, Paul again addressed and gave instructions for dealing with sexual immorality along with a host of other issues and concerns that were plaguing the church and rendering it ineffective. In Paul's third letter, written while the church was in full blown rebellion against him and far from God, he expressed his grave sorrow for their waywardness, contrasted himself sharply with their false leaders, and earnestly called the church to repentance. In his fourth letter, having received news of their renewal and restoration, Paul shared the comfort he felt knowing they'd turned back to God, gave a further description of his ministry, and reminded them of and urged them to rekindle their earlier virtue and generosity.

In the end, every church is flawed to some extent. We are all "messed up" churches, filled with "messed up" people who lived "messed up" lives. That said, we can all relate to the Corinthians and their brokenness, and can learn from their many missteps. My prayer is that our church, both as a congregation and as individual members, will walk in faithful obedience to and in intimate fellowship with the Lord. Perhaps we can avoid some of the pitfalls the Corinthians stumbled into.

Despite their frequent compromise, carnal worldliness, and propensity to stray from God, Paul sincerely loved the Corinthian church. He honestly identified and confronted their sin, urged them to examine themselves and repent, mourned over their sinful condition, and rejoiced when they eventually responded. Paul boldly contended for them and didn't give up on them. His patience with and affection for the Corinthians is a reflection of Christ's love and long suffering for us. Though we rebel against Jesus again and again, still He patiently waits for us, standing ready to forgive our sins, should we simply turn to Him in confession and repentance.

## Timeline of Paul's Travels and Letters to Corinth

All dates are approximate

- 51 A.D. Paul arrived in Corinth for the first time near the end of his 2nd missionary journey. He remained in the city for about 18 months, during which time he established the Corinthian church.
- 52 or 53 A.D. Paul wrote and sent his first letter to the Corinthians. This letter is lost, but is referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:9. Among other things, it warned them not to associate with immoral people. It also likely detailed Paul's upcoming plans to visit Corinth twice during his 3rd missionary journey. In response to receiving this letter, the Corinthians sent their own letter to Paul which contained several questions on a variety of topics.
- 54 A.D. After arriving in Ephesus during his 3rd missionary journey, Paul received a troublesome report from Corinth as well as their inquisitive letter. In response to their many questions and the grave concerns he'd been made aware of, Paul wrote and sent his second letter to the Corinthian church. This instructive letter is the book of 1 Corinthians in the Bible. It also detailed his revised travel plans, seeing that his stay in Ephesus had stretched longer than he'd anticipated.
- 55 A.D. While still in Ephesus, Paul received word that the church in Corinth had been infiltrated and led astray by false teachers. In order to see this for himself, Paul made an emergency trip directly to Corinth which is not mentioned in Acts. This was his second visit. It was brief and unfruitful. After returning to Ephesus to continue his work, Paul wrote and sent his third letter to Corinth. It is referred to as his "tearful letter" (2 Corinthians 2:4). Some believe this letter is lost, but others (myself included) believe it is found in 2 Corinthians chapters 10-13. In this letter Paul vigorously defended himself and his ministry, rebuked the false teachers that had taken control, and called the Corinthian church to repent.
- 56 A.D. After arriving in Macedonia during his 3rd missionary journey, Paul received news that the Corinthians had repented, turned back to God, and put away their false leaders. Paul wrote and sent his fourth letter to them, which among things, expressed his comfort in their renewal. Some believe this letter is the book of 2 Corinthians in its entirety, while others (myself included) believe it is only chapters 1-9. It also instructed them to prepare for the "collection for the saints" missions offering.
- 57 A.D. Paul arrived in Corinth for the third time during his 3rd missionary journey. He stayed there briefly, collecting the missions offering, before retracing his steps back through Macedonia and Asia on route to Jerusalem.