

Stay the Course!

A series of sermons on 1 Corinthians

Pastor Bill Johnson

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Table of Contents

Preface	iv
1. Stay the Course - Introductory Thoughts	1
2. Divided We Fail	6
3. Follow the Leader	12
4. Something for Everybody	19
5. Misunderstanding	26
6. According To His Own Labor	34
7. A Little Less Talk!	40
8. The Problem With Tolerance	46
9. Gaining By Losing	53
10. "Were"	59
11. Why I've Changed My Mind About Corinth	65
12. What Do We Worship?	71
13. I Want My Rights!	78
14. Imitate Me!	85

Preface

These sermons were preached at Friendship Bible Church in Randolph, Ohio during the year 2012. The order in which they appear in this book is the order in which they were delivered.

Chapter 1. Stay the Course - Introductory Thoughts

READ - *1 Corinthians 1:1-9*

TEXT - *To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: (1 Corinthians 1:2 NKJV)*

THEME - Two things that help us stay on track for God - focus on our calling and on our Savior.

Introduction:

This morning, we begin a new series of studies in *1 Corinthians*.

During the last 5 years, we have primarily followed the approach of selecting a book of the Bible and working our way through that book. To date, we have dealt with *John, 1 Timothy, Acts, and Nehemiah*. (At least on Sunday mornings... we also covered *Genesis* to a fair degree in the adult Sunday School class before we started the Adult Electives.) We have also, from time to time, chosen to teach topical series which don't follow a specific book from beginning to end, but rather follow a topic throughout the Bible. Such was the series on the Parables of Jesus, and more recently, on Digging Deeper into various topics and doctrines.

Note

REMINDER - Sunday morning worship is only one source of teaching here at FBC. You ought to participate in some of the small group studies as well - Men's and Women's Bible studies, which also work through the various books of the Bible... and the adult electives taught during Sunday School are wonderful. You can see the various topics being offered in the bulletin each week. PARTICIPATE.

Well, let's turn our attention now to the book of *1 Corinthians*. It is a letter Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, approximately 56 AD. It is one of at least 3 letters Paul wrote to this church, 2 of which we have in our Bibles, and at least one of which has been lost. (cf. *1 Corinthians 5:9*)

This letter was written by the Apostle Paul *to the church of God which is at Corinth (vs. 2)*.

QUOTE (Ryrie) - "The City of Corinth. Located on the narrow isthmus between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, Corinth was a port city and wealthy commercial center. Ships wanting to avoid the dangerous trip around the southern tip of Greece were dragged across that isthmus. The city boasted an outdoor theater that accommodated 20000 people; athletic games second only to the Olympics; a Greek, Roman, and Oriental population; and the great temple of Aphrodite with its 1000 prostitutes."

Corinth was a city with problems... a sinful place... the Las Vegas of its day... a place whose very name was synonymous with immorality and sin.

QUOTE (Ryrie) - "The immoral condition of Corinth is vividly seen in the fact that the Greek term KORINTHIADZOMAI (literally, to act the Corinthian) came to mean "to practice fornication." There were taverns on the south side of the marketplace, and many drinking vessels have been dug up from those liquor lockers. Corinth was noted for everything sinful."

To this city Paul came during his second missionary journey about 50 A.D. He preached the gospel to these Corinthians and some were saved, and a church was formed.

READ - *Acts 18:1-18*.

Let me summarize:

He came to Corinth and met up with Aquila and Priscilla, with whom he lived and worked (they were tentmakers, like him) for a while. He preached in the synagogue for a while, but then the opposition became so great that he had to move next door to the house of Justus, where he began focusing on the Gentiles, as the Jews had largely rejected the gospel. He was there for at least 18 months and people were saved and the church grew. One of the people saved during this time was Sosthenes (cf. *Acts 18:17*), and he is possibly the one mentioned here in vs. 1.

There were a couple of things that occasioned Paul writing *1 Corinthians*. He had heard disturbing news that the church was having problems. This letter was meant, in part, to correct those problems. He had also received a letter or letters from some members of the church in which they had asked questions concerning the faith, and which he then proceeded to answer in this letter.

What were the problems in the church at Corinth? DIVISION... CLIQUES (cf. *1:11*), IMMORALITY (cf. *chapters 5-6*), and CONFUSION ABOUT WORSHIP, to name just a few.

Now don't misunderstand - the church at Corinth was also a very good church! Notice Paul's praise in vs. 4-7. It was a gifted and serving church.

But in some areas it had gotten off course, and so Paul had to deal with those problems.

What questions did the Corinthians ask of Paul? Questions about marriage, food, worship, and the resurrection, for example.

And so, there is a lot in this letter! It ought to keep us busy for a while.

And it ought to help us Stay on Course, for that is the primary emphasis, I think, in the letter. As we study *1 Corinthians* we may find areas where we are similarly in need of correction. And if not, we'll certainly find areas where we need to be watchful and guard against getting off course.

The first 9 verses of the letter constitute Paul's introductory comments. As I read through these verses I was struck by two words or thoughts which serve as a foundation for everything else he's going to teach in the book. Let me spend what time I have remaining considering those two thoughts:

Our Calling

Did you notice the prevalence of the word "called" or "calling" in these 9 verses?

It is used 3 times. Paul said that he was *called to be an apostle* (vs 1). He said of believers that they are *called to be saints* (vs. 2), and that they are all *called into the fellowship of His Son* (vs. 9)

1. Christians are called into fellowship with Christ (vs. 9)

I remember when that happened for me. I was 12, and came to understand that I was a sinner in need of a Savior. I sat in the pews of this very church building and heard the gospel message preached and knew, without a shadow of doubt, that it was speaking to me. I was lost and needed to be saved. I not only heard the preacher preaching, but heard and felt the Holy Spirit tugging... convicting... encouraging... and CALLING me to respond.

If you are saved today, it is because you had a similar experience. Nobody is saved at birth... rather all are lost. (cf. *Romans 3:23*) If you are saved today it's because there was a day when you realized you were lost, and knew that God was calling you to be saved!

Now some will get all balled up thinking about the doctrine of election when we think about our "calling" to salvation. There is no doubt that's part of it. But just as Paul said we are *called into fellowship*

with Christ (vs. 9), he also pointed out that we are those who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord (vs. 2).

And it shall come to pass That whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved. (Acts 2:21 NKJV)

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. (Acts 22:16 NKJV)

Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)

ILLUS - I love the description C.S. Lewis gave of his conversion experience. He had fought against it, and was resisting God's call to fellowship with His son - "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him of whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 [May 22] I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England. I did not then see what is now the most shining and obvious thing; the Divine humility which will accept a convert even on such terms. The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the high gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape? ... The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compassion is our liberation." (C. S. Lewis, as quoted in Paul F. Ford's Yours, Jack (HarperOne, 2008), p. 9; submitted by Kevin Miller, executive vice president, Christianity Today International)

I see both God calling and C.S. Lewis calling there, don't you?

When I was 12, I felt the call of God. When I was 12, I called upon the name of the Lord. Both happened... both had to happen, or I would still be lost.

So, Christian, we are CALLED INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST... into salvation through Him... into communion with Him... into relationship with Him... into family with Him.

2. Christians are called to be SAINTS. (vs. 2)

Interesting word... SAINT. It is from the Greek HAGIOI, which means "set apart for God's service"

There are those (Catholics in particular) who believe there is a separate class of people to whom this word applies... individuals so called because of some higher level of virtue and accomplishment... but there is no such teaching in the Bible. ALL BELIEVERS IN JESUS CHRIST are called saints in the Bible. Paul used this term to mean ALL CHRISTIANS:

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: (Philippians 1:1 NKJV)

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Colossians 1:2 NKJV)

And so, all of us are saints, and are called to be saints. All of us therefore are called to be SET APART FOR GOD'S SERVICE. This word goes beyond relationship. It goes beyond salvation, or the placing of a person into the family of God.

We are SEPARATED FROM our past lives of sin and SEPARATED TO our new life in Christ. We'll see more of this as we get into this book, but basically it's talking about our progressive sanctification... our becoming more like Christ every day... our becoming holy!

It's quite popular today to hear that Christianity is simply a relationship with Christ, and that it's not a bunch of rules and regulations for us to follow. Well, it's true that the call into fellowship with Christ is a call into relationship with Him. But it's also true that the call to be SAINTS... to be HOLY... is a call to do as He wants us to do. It is a call to FOLLOW HIS COMMANDMENTS and LIVE AS HE WANTS US TO LIVE.

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. (John 14:15 NKJV)

And so, we ARE called into fellowship with Christ. And we are ALSO CALLED to be SAINTS.

3. Christians are called into MINISTRY (vs. 1)

One of the things we'll cover in detail when we get to *chapters 11-14* is the matter of spiritual gifts... the fact that each believer... each Christian... each SAINT... is gifted for the purpose of serving Christ's people in Christ's church.

Paul emphasizes his gift of apostleship in *vs. 1*. He does this in other letters, too, establishing his credentials and authority to speak as an apostle. We'll see later on that his authority was in question at Corinth. This is more clearly seen in *2 Corinthians*, but Paul apparently had to defend his credentials before the Corinthians often.

And while there are no apostles today, as that gift was restricted to a unique group of men tasked with the completion of the New Testament and the birth of the church... while no apostles exist today, Paul's reminder that he was *called to be an apostle (vs. 1)* is a reminder that we are all CALLED TO MINISTRY... called to SERVE in some capacity.

Now think for a minute about these three CALLS mentioned here: The call to fellowship (salvation), the call to be SAINTS (holiness), and the call to SERVE.

The Corinthians were messed up in a lot of areas, and I think Paul may have been saying right off the bat that if they would just remember their calling... concentrate on their calling... rejoice in their call to salvation and work at their call to sainthood and focus on their call to service... it would keep them from straying off course... it would help them get back on course... it would help them to STAY THE COURSE.

And so, one of the concepts that seems foundational, at least in these introductory comments by Paul, is to remember our CALLING.

Think about it, my brother... my sister. You are CALLED into fellowship with Christ. You are CALLED to be a SAINT... to be separated from sin and separated to God... to be HOLY. You are CALLED to a life of SERVICE for Him.

I think our lives would be revolutionized if we got hold of the CALLING that is ours.

Our Savior

Let me just briefly mention a second foundational concept seen here - our SAVIOR.

Now I made much of the fact that the word CALL or CALLING or CALLED appeared 3 times in these 9 verses. Look at the section again and let me ask, how many times does the name Jesus, or Jesus Christ appear?

9 times. (SCAN THROUGH AND READ EACH OCCURRENCE)

9 times Jesus is mentioned here... in 9 verses. Could it be that Paul was reminding them of where their focus needed to be?

Could he have been saying, "You're getting off course here... you ought to be concentrating on Jesus Christ?" Could he have been saying, "STAY THE COURSE - KEEP YOUR EYES ON JESUS?"

In all the problems and issues and questions that he will address in the coming chapters, the ultimate answer is to keep our eyes on Jesus Christ. Don't concentrate on human leaders or cliques in the church - concentrate on Christ. Keep your eyes off the immorality that is rampant in Corinth and keep them on Christ.

I like the way Derek Prime, in his book entitled "Opening Up 1 Corinthians" puts it:

QUOTE (Derek Prime, Opening Up 1 Corinthians) - "The thing for which to watch is the way in which Paul consistently relates every subject and problem to the centrality of the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Most of the problems and difficulties of the Corinthian church arose from their losing sight of him and his Headship. The enemy of our souls encourages that same peril today."

Conclusion:

How should we, as a church, or as individual believers, get back on course if we're off?

What if we've allowed a critical or divisive spirit to take hold in our heart? How do we get rid of it and get back into a spirit of unity with our brothers and sister?

And what if immorality has become a problem? What if we find ourselves off course and wandering where we know we ought not? Is there a way back to purity and right relationships?

What is the answer if we find ourselves off course and want to get back on course? What is the answer if we want to guard against getting off course in the first place? HOW DO WE STAY THE COURSE?

May I suggest that it starts with a focus on our SAVIOR, and on our CALLING. Both are foundational truths which will help us STAY THE COURSE.

Invitation:

Are your eyes on your Savior? How is your focus, this morning? Is He central in your life? The focus of your life?

You know you've been called into fellowship with Him... into a relationship with Him... into His family. Have you answered the call? Have you called out to Him and asked for the gift of salvation He so freely offers?

And you've been called to holiness and service. Are those areas you need to talk with Him about this morning?

We'll sing a hymn of invitation and give you the opportunity to respond. We'll be glad to pray with you, and answer your questions as best we can. He is calling... it is up to you to respond.

Chapter 2. Divided We Fail

READ - *1 Corinthians 1:10-31*

TEXT - *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10 NKJV)*

THEME - When churches struggle with a divisive spirit, the solution is to focus on the message of the cross.

Introduction:

ILLUS - An amusing news story from Wales told of a feud in a church looking for a new pastor. It read: "Yesterday the two opposition groups both sent ministers to the pulpit. Both spoke simultaneously, each trying to shout above the other. Both called for hymns, and the congregation sang two—each side trying to drown out the other. Then the groups began shouting at each other. Bibles were raised in anger. The Sunday morning service turned into a bedlam. Through it all, the two preachers continued trying to out shout each other with their sermons. Eventually a deacon called a policeman. Two came in and began shouting for the congregation to be quiet. They advised the forty persons in the church to return home. The rivals filed out, still arguing. Last night one of the group called a "let's-be-friends" meeting. It broke up in argument. (Source Unknown)

That story was presented as true. I have no trouble believing it, do you? It's far from uncommon to hear about churches being divided, or Christians bickering.

ILLUS - Christians are often likened to an army: we sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" and read, "Put on the whole armor of God." Imagine Christ reviewing the troops, who are supposed to be fresh and ready for battle. But some have fairly recent wounds, nicks in their armor, arms in slings, casts, etc. He asks, "What's the matter here? Why are they wounded already?" "Oh, they've been fighting in the barracks again." (Source unknown)

It is not unusual to hear of churches bickering... of division within a church.

We noted in our introductory remarks last week that the church at Corinth was in some ways a truly great church... gifted... serving... people were being saved and disciplined. We also noted, however, that it was a troubled church.

And division was one of the root problems in Corinth. Perhaps it was THE root problem. After all... of all the things Paul could have started out with, he started with this - division. Paul touches on it throughout the book, but the subject is addressed first in our text for today.

The Reality of Division

Notice that Paul says two main things: It ought not to be... I hear that it is! "Division should not be a problem in the church, Corinthians, but I hear that division IS a problem in the church." cf. *vss. 10-11*

Now we know that unity... singleness of mind and heart, is always the desired state (*vs. 10*). You see it in Paul's use of the word "brethren" - the church is a family... we are brothers and sisters. And you see it in the earnestness with which he begins his sentence - "I PLEAD WITH YOU".

And this is certainly not the only place in the Bible where we see unity described as the desired state:

"with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:2-3)

“Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.” (John 17:11)

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:20–23)

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27)

There is simply no place for division in the local church. We as believers should SPEAK the same thing (vs. 10)... we should be *perfectly joined together*. That phrase pictures the stitching up of a wound or the repair of a rent piece of cloth. We should be of *the same mind and in the same judgment*. In other words, we should have the same internal beliefs, which result in the same outward result. We should all believe together and strive together. Think alike and work alike.

ILLUS - In ancient times, there were no diesel powered ships like the Costa Concordia which recently wrecked off the coast of Italy. But there were Roman galleons which were powered by the united effort of many men, all rowing together. That's a picture of the desired state.

THAT THERE BE NO DIVISIONS (vs. 10) - that is the way it should be.

But...

IT HAS BEEN DECLARED TO ME... THAT THERE ARE DIVISIONS (vs. 11). It shouldn't be, but it is.

Now, perhaps we should define the term - “division” = Gr. SCHISMATA from which we get “schism”. Used to describe factious political parties. e.g. Pharisees vs. Sadducees (*Acts 23:7 (NKJV) And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.*)

Factiousness... schisms... a concept that we see nightly on the news and which is thrust upon us here in America every election season. Party politics. This divided spirit was a major problem in the Corinthian Church, as we will see several times in the book (cf. 11:18-19 where it affects the Lord's table)

Now just as the Bible is clear that UNITY is the desired state, it is also clear that DISUNITY and DIVISION is to be avoided.

It is a work of the flesh - *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21 NKJV)*

It is an indication of immaturity in our walk with Christ... a sign of CARNALITY, or living according to the flesh. We'll see it more when we get to chapter 3. READ - *1 Corinthians 3:1-4*

So... Paul says, there ought not be division in the church... but I hear that there IS division in the church.

Now let me make just a few more comments about this spirit of divisiveness which pervaded the church at Corinth:

Notice the description in vs. 12. All had their favorite preacher, apparently. Some (probably those saved under his ministry) favored Paul. Some (probably those who preferred eloquent preaching style) favored

Apollos, who was a great speaker. Some (probably Jews, primarily) favored Cephas, or Peter, who was the apostle to the Jews. Some, perhaps the most over-pious of all, took what they perceived as the high road and said, "I don't favor any of those guys... only Jesus for me!"

I'm not sure there's a lot of value in dissecting these individual positions any further, but they are interesting examples of what happens, even in our churches today. Divisions form... CLIQUES form based on pet doctrinal positions... pet preferences... pet leadership or preaching styles...

As we progress through the book of *1 Corinthians* we will see other factors that led to division and cliquiness in this church. One source summed up the various reasons for divisions in the church:

These divisions were based on:

1. believers' personal preference for certain leadership skills (rhetoric)
2. believers' pride and jealousy over spiritual gifts
3. believers' recognition of economic categories (rich and poor)
4. believers' prejudice over social rank (slave and free)
5. believers' racial pride (Jew and Gentile)
6. believers' jealousy or pride over marital status (married and unmarried)
7. believers' pride over intellectual prowess (first century educational elitism, sophists)

(Bob Utley)

I guess my point is that the things that caused division then, still cause division today. And as they were made aware of these issues, they needed to address them... root them out... get rid of them. And if we learn of the existence of such issues here, church, let us exercise the same due diligence. Do such forms of division exist here at FBC? Even to the tiniest degree? WE MUST ROOT THEM OUT IF SO!

Well... we are talking about the REALITY of division. "It ought not to be," Paul said, "but it is." I'll move off this point in a minute, but before I do let me share one last observation.

Notice Paul's words in *vs. 11 - IT HAS BEEN DECLARED TO ME...* The world sees and hears all this.

News gets out when Christians don't get along... when a church is divided... when CLIQUES characterize our Christian life.

IT HAS BEEN DECLARED TO ME... The lost see and hear all this.

QUOTE - The public takes notice of all this and not only derides us, but becomes hardened against all religion. When we try to persuade them, they see so many factions that they do not know which to join—and think it better not to join any of them. Thus thousands grow in contempt of all religion by our divisions.' (Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*)

God help us. What was true when Baxter wrote that in the 17th century is just as true today. The world sees us divided and laughs. The lost see us divided and turn away from the hope of salvation. While the church bickers over which preacher is best... over which leadership style is best... over who is most gifted... over nonsense issues, the world plunges willy nilly into hell!

IT HAS BEEN DECLARED TO ME... News gets out... our lost loved ones hear it... our lost neighbors see it...

ILLUS - I've shared it with you before, and will no doubt share it with you again. It is good to learn from our failings, is it not? I spoke with a man here on this platform a couple of years ago. He was a member of a neighboring church, and had wanted to see the building here, and so I was showing him around. He stood here and looked out over the pews where you are sitting and said something I'll never forget. "The only thing I ever heard about this church was that all they do is fight." I'll never forget that. May NONE OF US ever forget that.

Well, there was a reality of division in Corinth. It shouldn't have been there... but it was there.

The Cure for Division

The Bible never gives us a problem without a solution. And there is a key thought Paul shares that will help us combat division. The solution, or cure for division, if you will.

The message of the cross

Paul's preaching style was not what he wanted remembered. He didn't want people remembering anything about him, really, and goes out of his way to point out that glory is for God and God alone (cf. vs. 31).

Now, He didn't want them remembering HIM... He wanted them remembering the message he preached - the cross of Christ.

cf. vs. 17,18,21-24

The message... OUR message, must always be the message of the cross. Concentrate on that, Corinthians... focus on that... church, and it will cure divisiveness.

The message of the cross is, as one man put it, "God's powerful instrument of salvation; the highest exhibition of God's power."

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. (Romans 1:16)

Our message here at FBC is... MUST BE... the "message of the cross," and that message does not derive its power or effectiveness in any way from the one who delivers it, but rather from the One Who is the subject of it. To believe it is to be saved. To not believe it is to be perishing.

It matters not my eloquence, or Phil's eloquence, or anybody else's eloquence. It's not about our words, but His.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 NKJV)

ILLUS - That message was preached by little kids at the start of a football game recently with more power than any preacher. It is the message of the cross!

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14 ESV)

That's the message of the cross - that Jesus died in your place on that cross... paid the price for your sins on that cross... cancelled all your debt on that cross... wiped your record clean on that cross....

It's not conservative or liberal,
However they're defined;

It's not about interpretation,
Or the judgment of the mind;

It's the opposite of politics,
Power or prestige;
It's about a simple message,
And whether we believe.

We can water down theology,
And preach a word to suit our needs;
We can justify sweet subtle lies,
That are wrapped in noble deeds;

We can alter our convictions,
To adapt to social whims;
But we cannot change the gospel,
Or the truth contained within.

Chorus:
It's still the cross,
It's still the blood of Calvary;
That cleanses sins,
And sets the captives free.
It's still the name,
The name of Jesus,
That has power to save the lost;
It's still the cross.

It will ALWAYS BE THE CROSS.

Conclusion:

To the extent that I or anybody else here has ever preached any other message from this pulpit... to the extent that we have been divided, rather than united... to the extent that we have ever pushed you away because of our arrogant factiousness - forgive. And please hear now if you have never heard before.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18 NKJV)

My invitation this morning is twofold:

1. If division... factiousness... cliques... exist here, let us repent of it church. If there is even a root of it, let us remove it. If there is even a hint of it... let us make our way to the front of the church this morning, kneel before our brothers and sisters and our God and ask forgiveness.
2. If you have not yet responded to the message of the cross, will you do it today?

The cross upon which Jesus died,
Is a shelter in which you can hide;
And its grace so free is sufficient for thee,
And deep is its fountain as wide as the sea

There's room at the cross for you,
There's room at the cross for you,
Tho millions have come, There's still room for one
Yes, there's room at the cross for you.
(Ira Staphill, 1946)

Chapter 3. Follow the Leader

READ - *1 Corinthians 1:10-31*

TEXT - *Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:12 NKJV)*

THEME - People follow leaders, and families follow fathers.

Introduction:

We continue today in our study of *1 Corinthians*, and for the third time, now, we will turn our attention to *chapter 1*. In the previous two messages, we have learned that Paul is dealing with some problems in the good church at Corinth, and one of those problems consumes the majority of *chapters 1-4* - division, or sectarianism, or (to use a word that might seem more down to earth to us today) cliques.

The last time we looked into this, we learned that such division simply ought not to be in the church, but it sadly sometimes is! Unity might be the desired state, but as "in the flesh" "carnal" Christians, we don't always act out the desired state here on this earth, and so divisions sometimes occur. We concentrated on *vs. 10* the last time where Paul said, (*Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10 NKJV)*) As we reread that verse this morning, we are reminded of Paul's passionate plea for unity in the body of Christ. He pleads for "no divisions," "perfectly joined together," "one mind," and "the same judgment."

I won't re-preach that sermon this morning.

But I WILL draw your attention to a verse we noticed Paul's argument, *verse 12*. As we looked at that verse in the previous message, we understood it to provide an example of the very division Paul was arguing against.

Well, I'd like to look at that same verse this morning in a different light. For I suggest that it teaches something else, as well. It speaks to us of the subject "Following the Leader."

Four thoughts have come to my mind as I pondered that topic. Let me share them with you briefly this morning.

Following a leader can be a bad thing.

Certainly that's Paul's primary meaning here, isn't it? "If you Corinthians are dividing up into little groups where one group has Paul as its champion, and another has Apollos, and another Cephas... well - don't do that. That's bad." So in that sense, following a leader can be a bad thing.

Let me suggest an example of when "following a leader" is a bad thing:

ILLUS - I know somebody who attended a church pastored by a particularly charismatic (in the good sense) preacher. That pastor resigned and went to another church. My friend left the church and followed him. After he had served there for a few years, he resigned and went to another church. My friend left the church and followed him. He eventually retired, and my friend was left hanging.

Now I believe Paul would say that that is the kind of "following a leader" that is a bad thing.

God raises up leaders and sets them aside as He wills. But we are to serve in His church regardless of who is in leadership.

Here's another example of the wrong kind of following:

ILLUS - When I was a fresh out of Bible college and enjoying the rush of being brand new to ministry, I served for three years as an assistant Pastor. My pastor took me around to visit some of his friends in the ministry. Most were kind and supportive and offered me great advice as I started out. I remember one particular pastor, though, who scowled across his desk at me as my pastor introduced me. Then he said, "Come close... lean in." I leaned as far across the desk as I could, and he leaned across toward me, until our faces were almost touching across the desk and he said, with as much menace as you can imagine, "If you ever pull an Absalom on him, I will personally find you and beat you half to death!"

He was, of course, referring to the story of David's son, Absalom, who stood in the gate of the city and stole the hearts of the people away from David, so that he won a following and led a rebellion which threatened to undo the kingdom. In the years that have passed since my office encounter, I have come to understand that preacher's sentiment. "Absaloms" are disgusting, and all too prevalent in our world.

Well, those Israelites who were sucked in by Absalom's duplicity WERE simply "following a leader," weren't they? But that kind of "following a leader" is, I would suggest, a bad thing!

Because leadership is established by God. Our adversary the devil loves to stir things up and encourage that that leadership be challenged. Most of us who have lived long as faithful church-going Christians can think of "Absaloms" who have risen up to challenge God's leadership in a church. It happens all the time.

But it certainly ought not.

Now I don't say these things, this morning, because they necessarily apply here. I suppose there could be an Absalom, or Absaloms, in our midst, but if so I'm unaware of it. God took care of the first Absalom, and it wasn't pretty. I'm sure He will protect us from any that might try their hand here. But I know of none and don't touch on this topic because of any such knowledge. Rather, simply because it's a thought that comes to mind from this text, and which we should consider.

Following a leader can be a bad thing.

Following a leader can be a good thing.

Paul spends a tremendous amount of time, I think, making our first point - Following a leader can be a bad thing. But then we come to *1 Corinthians 4:14-16 (NKJV)* - *I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. 15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me.*

Well wait a minute! Which is it? In *1:12* he seems to be saying that to "follow Paul" is a bad thing, but then here he asks that they do it. Isn't that what "imitate me" means?

He'll say it again in *1 Corinthians 11:1 (NKJV)* *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

And again, to the Philippians - *Philippians 3:17 (NKJV)* *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

And again, to the Thessalonians - *1 Thessalonians 1:6 (NKJV)* *And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,*

2 Thessalonians 3:9 (NKJV) *not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.*

The writer to the Hebrews will say it very strongly - *Hebrews 13:7 (NKJV)* *Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.*

So, although "following a leader" can be a bad thing, clearly it can also be a good thing... something we are even encouraged and commanded to do.

After all, God GAVE leaders to the church, as a gift, and as a help. READ - Ephesians 4:11-16

And so... "following a leader" can be a good thing.

1. The new Christian, who does not yet have a firm grasp of the Scriptures, needs to follow the leader.
2. The tossed Christian, who has been dragged through multiple denominations and variants of Christianity, such that they know not what they believe - needs to follow the leader,

Now, I can think of at least one question that arises from this, can't you? HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO TO FOLLOW? There are many out there seeking a following. Who has it right?

Paul answers that one for us quite clearly.

We read it earlier in *1 Corinthians 11:1 (NKJV) Imitate me, just AS I ALSO IMITATE CHRIST.*

Our ultimate and true leader is Jesus Christ. Anybody who would lead in the church, or lead other believers, must first be following Christ. If you look at the head of the line and see Jesus, jump in line and follow. All of us need to be followers in such a case. If you look at the head of the line and see somebody leading his or her own parade, well, "I think I'll get off this train at the next stop!"

SO... following a leader can be a good thing.

"Following leaders" is a reality.

It's interesting, isn't it, that with our supposedly advanced sensibilities in 21st century America, we still have this innate desire to follow a leader.

But it's true - we admire leaders... we desire leaders... we follow leaders...

Presidential elections are such a big deal because we DESIRE leaders, and want to follow them.

It's true in nearly every area of life. Church... family... politics... business... sports... military campaigns... you name it, leadership is a trait we long for, and which when seen, we follow.

ILLUS - I had a book in my library entitled "Why Men Hate Going To Church." I say HAD rather than HAVE because I can't seem to find it. Perhaps I loaned it to one of you? I recall the premise of the book, though, which was that "Men follow men." The author explained that ALL people, but especially MEN, are impressed with leadership. Men, especially, follow other men who exhibit strong leadership skills. Men are less likely to follow an ideal, or a concept. Men follow other men.

And so, "Following leaders" is a REALITY.

"Following leaders" is a convicting reality.

Now, if your eyes are glazed over with the previous three thoughts, let me assure you that we've finally gotten to the main point this morning. Wake up... snap out of it... listen up, for this is what we need to specifically apply from these thoughts this morning - "Following leaders" is a CONVICTING reality.

Now obviously we could make some application from the first two thoughts this morning.

- Be careful who you follow, might be an application.

- Don't resist leadership, is certainly one application.

Those would be applications for those of us who are FOLLOWING the leader. There is also application to those who are at the head of that line... to those who are LEADING the followers.

Be careful how you lead!

Pastor's need to think of the ramifications! Leadership Team - THINK OF THE RAMIFICATIONS. All who are in positions of leadership need to see here the call to lead faithfully... to lead humbly... to lead with a servant heart... but most of all, simply to LEAD, for people are following!

Let me draw this to a close, though, by applying these thoughts to an area of leadership that is crucial... critical... vital. I'm talking about the leadership of men / fathers in the home.

It's Red Heart Sunday... a day we carve out of the middle of winter to brighten the dreariness of February and enjoy a splash of joy and fun in the midst of the stark tundra of Ohio winter. It's also a day we usually emphasize family. Some may have wondered what this text has to do with family, but I think it has everything to do with family, for it gets to the very heart of the matter. God has established leadership in each home, and this text reminds the leaders in the home to LEAD, for some are FOLLOWING!

Let me talk for a second to the dads among us.

Dad, you are the LEADER in your home. It doesn't matter if you accept that role or not (Bill Cosby in his book, "Fatherhood" says, "I'm not the boss in my home. I've seen the boss's job, and I don't want it!") - it is yours, according to God. It doesn't matter if you're any good at it or not, it is yours, according to God. It doesn't matter whether anybody seems to be following your lead - YOU ARE THE LEADER IN YOUR HOME. And whether they look like it or not... whether they say so or not... your family is following.

So LEAD, dads.

The Bible is full of examples of fathers leading:

ILLUS - Abraham - For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. (Genesis 18:19 KJV)

ILLUS - Manoah, father of Samson - knew it was his job to raise his son for God - Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born. (Judges 13:8 KJV)

ILLUS - David gave godly advice (often) to his sons. We certainly see that in Proverbs, where Solomon said, *For I was my father's son, Tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: Keep my commandments, and live.* (Proverbs 4:3-4 KJV)

ILLUS - The Philippian jailor was responsible for his entire family coming to faith in Christ - *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.* (Acts 16:31)

ILLUS - Cornelius made sure his entire family heard and responded to the gospel - *Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.* (Acts 10:31)

We could go on, but you get the point, don't you dads? It's your job! You are the leader that your family is following.

ILLUS - Joshua - And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods

of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15 NKJV)

It's not the Sunday School teachers' job to teach your kids about Jesus Christ - it's yours! It's not the pastor's job to teach your kids about Jesus Christ - it's yours! It's not the junior church workers' job to teach your kids about Jesus Christ - it's yours! It's not the VBS workers' job to teach your kids about Jesus Christ - it's YOURS DAD!

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4 NKJV) (OR, as some translations render it - in the DISCIPLINE and INSTRUCTION of the Lord.)

Do your kids KNOW your faith, Dad? Do they SEE it? Do they KNOW that you pray? Do they SEE you reading your Bible? Have they ever seen you turn off the TV because some junk is on there that you know, as their father, they should not be watching? Do they KNOW that in this house, WE SERVE GOD? Do they hear the truths of the Bible fall from your lips? Do they KNOW without shadow of doubt that you are a man of God? Have they ever heard you say NO to something, asked WHY, and heard you say that as a Christian we have to live to a higher standard? Do they know that your home is a *Joshua 24:15* home?

ILLUS - Christian author and speaker Dennis Rainey recounts a story of visiting a clothing store with his 13-year-old daughter. While he was waiting inside the store for his daughter to pick out a sweater, Rainey noticed a life-sized poster of a young man who was completely nude. When Rainey asked to speak to the store's manager, the following conversation ensued:

I shared with him that I had six children and was a good customer; then I said very kindly, "This picture ... I'm sorry, but it's just indecent." I thought I'd get agreement.

Instead he quipped, "I beg to differ with you, sir. By whose standards?"

A little stunned by his response, I replied with measured firmness, "By any standard of real morality ... Sir, if that picture is not indecent, then I'd like you to get in a similar pose to that guy in the picture."

He looked at the picture, looked at my daughter, then back at me ... There was a moment of silence, full of anticipation. Then he shook his head and said, "Huh-uh."

I smiled and said, "You know, it's a good thing you didn't drop your pants, because you could have been arrested for indecent exposure."

Then he replied, "If you think that's bad, you should see our catalog."

So I went over and opened the catalog. One photo showed four teenage girls in bed with a boy ... I pushed the catalog back and said, "I'd like you take my name and phone number. I'd like someone from your corporate office to give me a call."

To which he politely said, "Sir, I can take your name and address, but

they're not interested. They really don't care what you think."

My response was kind but firm: "I just want you to know I'm only one customer. I'm just a daddy of six kids, but I have a lot of friends. And I want you to know that wherever I go, I'm going to use this episode as an illustration of a company that doesn't care about the future of our young people, their morality, or the future of our nation."

Dennis Rainey concluded this story with a challenge:

One of the greatest lies of our day is that one man, one husband, or one dad can't make a difference. As a single man, you can protect the innocence of a single woman you are dating by being a noble man of character ... As a husband and father, you are the warrior who has been charged with the duty of pushing back against the evil that seeks to prey on your wife, daughters, and sons. Stepping up to courageous manhood starts here. If you don't step up, who will?

(Dennis Rainey, *Stepping Up (Family Life, 2011)*, pp. 105-106)

Can you tell them how you were saved? Do they know your testimony? Can you tell them how they can be saved? Do you know the gospel well enough to lead your family to Christ? Do you know the Romans Road? Do you know the ABCs of salvation? Can you... have you, shared these things with your kids? When your sons and daughters come smack up against the realities of living in this fallen world, do you know enough Bible to help them? To instruct them? To help them choose the ways of God rather than the ways of this world?

Now, I humbly confess I don't say these things this morning because I'm some shining example. My kids are here this morning and could testify that I did few of these things well. My kids are saved and serving God today by God's grace, who blessed in spite of my shortcomings. And dad, don't get discouraged and think you have to be perfect at these things... I certainly wasn't, and am not now. But I believe God blesses our effort... and multiplies are stumbling tries... if we will just step up and LEAD.

Oh how we need a generation of fathers who will rise up and say, as Joshua did, *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!*

No president is going to save our kids. No political party is going to save our kids. No grass roots movement of men is going to save our kids. No talk show host is going to save our kids!

Dads... to a large extent, it's up to us. Oh how we need dads who will LEAD... because so many are following.... Does that convict you? It should... it certainly convicts me. "Following a leader" is a CONVICTING reality.

Conclusion:

Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:12 NKJV)

This text does warn us against division, sectarianism, and cliques in the church.

But it also teaches some vital truth about "following a leader." It reminds us that it can be a bad thing if done wrongly, and it can be a good thing if done rightly. And it reminds us that "following a leader" is not only a reality, but a CONVICTING reality to those tasked with leadership.

And in spite of the fact that it has application to all areas of leadership, I hope fathers are the ones listening hardest this morning.

ILLUS - Timothy Dalrymple was the NCAA's top-ranked gymnast as a sophomore at Stanford until a broken neck ended his career. In God's providence, that disaster opened up opportunities for him to deepen his faith and also earn a Ph.D. at Harvard.

While lying on his back, looking up at the ceiling, Timothy had plenty of time to think.

He says that even as a child "I had a philosophical bent and spent a lot of time thinking about all sorts of ultimate questions, especially the question of whether there is some sort of existence beyond death. I don't know which one I found more terrifying, that there would be some existence or that there would not."

Yet, when asked what helped him to grow in his faith, philosophical questions gave way to a personal relationship and example.

"The example of my father," Dalrymple replied, "not only a pastor but a genuinely loving, faithful, righteous person, helped. I saw in his life something undeniably true that I couldn't explain away."

(Marvin Olasky, "Rising from a Fall," World (3-12-11); submitted by Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky)

Dads... we need you to step up. Your kids need you to step up. You make a difference.

Rise up, O men of God!
Have done with lesser things.
Give heart and mind and soul and strength
to serve the King of kings.

Chapter 4. Something for Everybody

READ - *1 Corinthians 2:1-16*

TEXT - *"But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9 NKJV)*

THEME - There is something for everybody, whether lost or saved, in the message we preach.

Introduction:

In the year he was elected president, Jimmy Carter was one of three men invited to speak to the 17,000 delegates at the Southern Baptist Convention. Each had a five-minute time limit. The first of the three presenters was the eloquent evangelist, Billy Graham. The speaker following Graham was a truck driver. The man was not well educated, and seated beside the next U.S. president, the truck driver shared that he had never given a speech in his life. Nervously he confessed, "I don't think I can live through it. I just can't do it."

After Billy Graham gave his powerful talk, the truck driver rose to speak and stood silently before the audience. Taking a glass of water handed to him, he mumbled into the microphone.

"I was always drunk, and didn't have any friends. The only people I knew were men like me who hung around the bars in the town where I lived."

The truck driver went on to describe how someone told him about Christ. Once becoming a Christian, he wanted to tell others about the Lord. Spending time in Bible study and with other Christian men prepared him for witnessing. Since he felt comfortable in barrooms, he decided to talk to people there. The bartender wasn't sympathetic, telling the new convert he was bad for business and a nuisance.

Not discouraged, the truck driver kept on with his mission, and in time the people at the bar began asking questions. He said, "At first they treated me like a joke, but I kept up with the questions and when I couldn't answer one, I went and got the answer and came back with it. Fourteen of my friends became Christians."

Carter writes, "The truck driver's speech, of course, was the highlight of the convention. I don't believe anyone who was there will ever forget that five-minute fumbling statement—or remember what I or even Billy Graham had to say."

(Jimmy Carter, *Sources of Strength, Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith* (Times Books, 1997), pp. 71-72; submitted by Ted De Hass, Bedford, Iowa)

Paul has been reminding the Corinthians to knock off the sectarianism... quit chasing after their favorite preachers... do away with division and bickering in the church.

But as we come to *chapter 2*, he points out that each of those different preachers might perhaps have brought something different to the table. Paul's simple gospel... Peter's historic Judaism... Apollos masterful manipulation of the deep truths... if viewed TOGETHER, they were all important. None more important than the others, but all important.

Now Paul is saying a lot in *chapter 2*. We are in deep waters here. But one thing that jumped out at me, and the thing I want us to focus on this morning, is this thought - there is SOMETHING FOR EVERYBODY in our message.

Specifically, there is something for the lost soul, and there is something for the maturing believer.

There is something for the lost soul.

cf. *vss. 1-5*

The key phrase here is "*when I came to you*" (*vs. 1*) In the first 5 verses Paul is describing his approach when he first arrived in Corinth... in other words when it was a brand new mission field and he was first taking the gospel to them.

In other words... before they were saved... when they were still lost...

Now we've already learned in *chapter 1* that there were some in Corinth who were critical of Paul, and preferred the eloquence of Apollos. And here in *chapter 2*, Paul admits right off the bat that he didn't come with eloquence (*vs. 1*). "Nope... those of you who question my preaching ability... you are absolutely correct. I didn't come into Corinth flashing my verbal skills." It was not my intent to dazzle you with a show.

Skip down a couple of verses and we see him denigrating himself yet further. Not only did he come into Corinth with admittedly imperfect speaking skills, but he apparently felt a bit inadequate in some other areas. Notice *vss. 3-4* - where he described himself as weak, fearful, trembling, and lacking in persuasive skill! Now we know that Paul was not a particularly impressive physical specimen... that he was battered and bloodied from stonings and beatings... that he had some physical issue that he referred to in *2 Corinthians 12:7* as a "thorn in the flesh." Perhaps these physical encumbrances were why he felt weak. We also know from our reading in *Acts 17-18*, that Paul had a less than stellar time in Athens - the city he preached to just before coming to Corinth. He had tried to go head to head with the debaters and scholars and philosophers in that city and had left with few converts. When we studied *Acts* we noted that some believe Paul might have considered his time in Athens a failure and a blown opportunity. Perhaps that was why he came to Corinth then fearful and trembling. It was another city that prided itself on its "elitism" and "intellectualism" and he might have been afraid of blowing it again.

So he didn't come into town flaming success in his wake behind him... nor did he come into town with such a glowing record of recent accomplishment that people were desperate to hear what he had to say. He came weak... fearful... trembling... and lacking in the very skills one would think a prerequisite for the job!

Doesn't sound like much of a resume, does it?

Imagine trying to get a job (FLESH THIS OUT) by telling the employer you aren't any good... your relevant skillset is unimpressive... your health is pretty bad... and your confidence level low...

But Paul was making a point with this, and that point is that none of it matters. When he first went to the Corinthians they were lost people... unsaved... unaware of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and there was only one thing they needed. Notice how Paul describes that one need in *vs. 2*. They needed to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They needed to know there was a Person named Jesus who had died for them! They needed to know the PERSON and WORK of the SAVIOR. And nothing else was even germane.

Now it's possible, this morning, that in a crowd of this size every single person here has come to know Jesus. You have been born again. You know what that means. You know it has taken place in your life and you are confident that you are a saved child of the King. If you were to die in your sleep tonight you know absolutely, unequivocally, that you will wake up in heaven in the presence of Jesus Christ. It's POSSIBLE that all are in that wondrous state.

But it's also highly unlikely. In a crowd of this size, there are more than likely some who are like these Corinthians were when Paul first limped into town - lost... without hope... and headed for hell.

If you are in that number, then there is only one thing you need to hear and respond to - Jesus Christ and Him crucified!

READ - *1 Corinthians 15:1-8* In the NKJV I'm preaching from this morning, verse 3 says *I delivered to you, first of all, that which I also received...* In some other translations, that is rendered, *I delivered to you, as a matter of FIRST IMPORTANCE!*

Let me tell you the only thing you need to know - Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Get this and you are on your way. Miss this and spend forever in hell.

There is something for the maturing believer.

cf. vs. 6-13

A key phrase in unpacking this section is seen in vs. 6 - *"However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature..."*

While *Jesus Christ and Him crucified* is of FIRST IMPORTANCE, it is certainly not the end of the story. As Paul Harvey would say, there is more - there is the "rest of the story." There is more to the wisdom God has for us than we can ever cram into our pea sized brains. It is the wisdom of God that has been hidden from the beginning of time... from eternity past. (vs. 8) It is wisdom that no human could have seen, or heard, or imagined! (vs. 9) It is the deep things of God! (vs. 10) It is the very *mind of Christ* (vs. 16).

Now before he even gets to describing what those *deep things of God* are, he makes it clear who can know about them - *those who are mature* (vs. 6).

ILLUS - My daughter Amy is here this morning. So is my son Joshua. Amy has grown up into a fine woman who loves the Lord. She leads our worship team. She is also laboring through a masters program in nursing at the University of Cincinnati. Joshua has grown into a fine young man, who loves the Lord, chose a godly wife as a mate, and serves here teaching our youth and working in our mens' ministries. I am proud of my children, and how they have grown to adulthood. As Brother Phil pointed out last week... "they're not perfect"... but I'm proud of how they've GROWN UP. IMAGINE, if Amy and Josh were, at this point in their lives, still wearing diapers... still sucking on bottles of milk... still unable to articulate a simple sentence... and still lying in a crib. None would look with pride... rather with pity... for pitiful they would be.

Believer in Jesus Christ - it is just as sad an image when one is born again into the family of God, and never grows a wit beyond that point... never progresses in his / her knowledge of the Bible... never experiences the joys of a deeper walk with God... sucks on milk until the day they die!

"But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Hebrews 5:14, NKJV)

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection (i.e. MATURITY), not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God," (Hebrews 6:1, NKJV)

We've been talking about those verses in our Men's Bible Study on Tuesday evenings. They remind us, don't they, that the way we grow up in Christ... the way we progress in maturity... is by EXERCISING our spiritual muscles (*Hebrews 5:14*)... it is by moving beyond the fundamentals of salvation and baptism and into the deeper things of God (*Hebrews 6:1*).

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—” (*Ephesians 4:11–15, NKJV*)

Why has God put me in this pulpit? Why has God now raised up Phil Ross and added him to our pastoral team? According to *Ephesians* we are gifts... gifts to the church... with the purpose of teaching... equipping... building up the church SO THAT those in our keeping *MAY GROW UP in all things into Him who is the head - Christ!*

We all need to be growing up.... maturing in our walk with God. God has given us everything we need to make that happen.

And Paul said here to these Corinthians, who were clamoring for deeper truths... who wanted to hear more - "THERE IS PLENTY MORE HERE, when you're old enough... mature enough... to hear it."

Conclusion:

These Corinthians were divided. Some clamored for the simple gospel... some for the deeper truths of Scripture. Some preferred the focused approach of Paul and some the more eloquent expositions of Apollos.

I think Paul was saying to them here that there is something for everybody in the gospel. For those who are lost, there is the simple and foundational truth of "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And for those who knew Christ... and who were maturing in their faith and walk with God... their was an inexhaustible pool of truth and knowledge from which they could draw. There is, indeed, something for everybody in the gospel... in the Word of God.

Well, there are many more thoughts we could discuss from this text this morning. It is a deep well and we could no doubt preach multiple sermons from it. But, let me make just 3 simple statements in closing:

1. We cannot do it alone - we need the Spirit.

I haven't mentioned the Holy Spirit in this message, but if you're paying attention to the text at all you're wondering why I haven't. For He is mentioned throughout this passage. He is KEY to people understanding the message of Christ and Him crucified in the first 5 verses. He is the One who reveals the deep things of God and helps us understand the mystery of the gospel.

You will never be saved unless the Holy Spirit works in your heart. And you will never reach anybody for Christ without the Holy Spirit's assistance. And you will not grow a wit in your knowledge of the deep things of God without the Holy Spirit's teaching and illuminating and revealing.

Read this passage again when you get home today. See if you don't see that truth clearly. We cannot understand on our own. CANNOT is the truth taught in *vs. 14 ... nor CAN he know them...*

‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the LORD of hosts.” (*Zechariah 4:6, NKJV*)

Do you see that truth in Paul's words to the Corinthians here? It's an application we dare not miss!

WE NEED THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES AS CHRISTIANS... WE NEED HIM IN THE MINISTRY OF THIS CHURCH! Oh how we need to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives... in our church. Oh how we need to **SUBMIT** to His leading.

Come as a wisdom to children
Come as new sight to the blind
Come, Lord, as strength to my weakness
Take me soul, body and mind
Come as a rest to the weary
Come as a balm to the sore
Come as a dew to my dryness
Fill me with joy evermore
Come Holy Spirit, I need you now
Come, Sweet Spirit, I pray
Come in your strength and your power
Come in your own gentle way

Come like a spring in the desert
Come to the withered of soul
O, let your sweet healing power
Touch me and make me whole
Come Holy Spirit, I need you now
Come, Sweet Spirit, I pray
Come in your strength and your power
Come in your own gentle way

2. We need to preach the "rest of the story" sometimes.

Our church needs to have something for everybody - and that is why we strive to offer Bible teaching on all levels. It's also why if you are a maturing believer, you need to take advantage of it.

Oh if we could only get hold of all that God has for us! Salvation is just the start! It's the matter of **FIRST IMPORTANCE** but it's nowhere near the end of the story. Read *vss. 7-13* again when you get home today. Read it over and over and over until it sinks in. Read it until you see that God has things for us that are beyond human imagining... things that He wants us to know and learn and understand that are only knowable and learnable and understandable with the supernatural help of the Spirit of God... **DEEP THINGS**. Imagine all that God has for us! If the amazing truth of salvation is **JUST THE BEGINNING**, what must be there for the maturing believer?

READ, Christian. READ READ READ. Attend the Bible studies... be faithful to every service... find a Sunday School class and immerse yourself in the teaching. **DIG DEEP. FILL YOUR MIND AND HEART** with the truths of God.

"But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9, NKJV)

3. We need to preach the "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" **ALL THE TIME**.

Our church needs to have something for everybody - and that means we need to reach those who know nothing about it - we need to share the news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified **CONSTANTLY**, for there are those who have not gotten past that point!

In every message, I try to bring out Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He is in every word of the Bible. I want to ensure that if somebody walks through these doors and listens to me one time, they will hear about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I must not neglect the deep things - I love the deep things - I want to speak of the deep things - but the deepest and most important is always the first and most important - Jesus Christ and Him Crucified!

Now I know there are some who don't want to hear the gospel in every message. They believe they're beyond that and zone out when they hear a simple gospel presentation. They consider themselves "maturing Christians." But may I humbly suggest that such a person has a lot more maturing to do.

When we progress toward the end of *1 Corinthians*, we'll eventually get to *chapter 15* and we'll see Paul reminding the Corinthians that *SOME HAVE NOT THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD*. Look around, Christian - not everybody is in the family yet... there are those among us who haven't understood yet - who are looking to us with hopeful eyes that we can explain the truth to them in a way they can understand - who **NEED YET TO HEAR OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED**.

Sunday School teachers - you must include it in every single lesson. Junior Church workers - tell those little ones about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Bible study leaders - **TELL IT TELL IT TELL IT!**

"Why do we need to tell it every single time, preacher?"

Because in any group gathered together, there will be almost certainly be people who need to hear the simple gospel.

- a. In any group, there may be those who are hearing it for the first time. What a privilege, Sunday School teachers and Jr. Church workers, to share it with a child who has not heard it before!
- b. In any group, there may be those who have heard it and heard it and heard it, but not yet acted on it. I am amazed at how many I come into contact with who have no clear testimony of their salvation, and yet think they are safe... think they are in the fold. When I ask, "Tell me about your salvation... tell me how you came to know Jesus" and get the oft-repeated answer "Well, I've always been in church..." or "I've always known Him..." or "I've tried to live a good life..." then I cannot help but think to myself that **THEY NEED TO HEAR IT AGAIN**.

ILLUS - When Thoreau, the naturalist, was close to death, he was visited by a very pious aunt who asked, "Henry, have you made your peace with God?" "I didn't know," was Thoreau's answer, "that we had ever quarreled." And in his answer he revealed his profound spiritual ignorance. Too many people are like him. They are utterly unconscious of the fact that they have sinned against God and so have "quarreled" with Him, and are really lost and separated from God. The first step in coming to Christ is to realize one is a sinner, a lost sinner. Thoreau's answer revealed that he still was a lost man: he didn't know he was lost and so he had never come to Christ to get saved. (Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).)

Your testimony needs to be that of the hymnwriter:

I was once a sinner, but I came
Pardon to receive from my Lord:
This was freely given, and I found
That He always kept His word.

I think the saddest case of all is this one - the person who has sat under the sound of the gospel for extended periods... heard it proclaimed perhaps hundreds of times... and yet it doesn't get in!

And he / she remains lost. Oh church, pray that the Holy Spirit of God will open their minds and hearts. And together, let us keep reminding... keep proclaiming... Jesus Christ and Him crucified until they ALL get it!

- c. And in any group there may be those who are hearing it for the very last time.

ILLUS - A few weeks ago God sent a young man named Paul Marks to our church. Most of you know the story. He was a guest of our little sister Maddie Richards, and they sat on the front row here while missionary Jerry Harmon preached. None of us knew Paul. None of us had much chance to speak to Paul for he got up and left during the invitation. But he was here, seated on the front row of this church on that day. It was his last Sunday on earth, for a couple days later the Lord took him out of this world.

He had one last shot to hear and act on the gospel.

We had one and only one chance to share it!

God brought him here... sat him down on the front row of this little church... for those few minutes on that Sunday morning, God put his soul in our hands!

God has thundered that reality to me ever since. In any group there may be those who are hearing it for the very last time.

I think Paul's message to the Corinthians in this chapter was, "There is something for everybody in the message we preach. Stop dividing and bickering and listen - wherever you are in your journey with God, there is something for you."

Chapter 5. Misunderstanding

READ - *1 Corinthians 3:1-23*

TEXT - "*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*" (*1 Corinthians 3:6, NKJV*)

THEME -The Corinthians needed a clear understanding of true spirituality, and of the nature of leadership in the church, and of the coming judgment seat of Christ.

Introduction:

I usually preach somewhere between 30-45 minutes per sermon. Some of you may think that's nuts, and may be convinced that I drone on for hours, but it is a fact, nonetheless. I can prove it, because we have been for sometime now recording the sermons and posting them online. The time is clearly displayed, and that keeps me honest.

Some pastors preach shorter sermons... some longer.

The Apostle Paul, I would suggest, was in the latter camp.

READ *Acts 20:7-9*

Well... we are now on our fifth message from *1 Corinthians*, and we're still on the same topic that we first started with. Paul has been going on for 3 chapters now, and we'll soon see that he's not done yet, and continues into chapter 4.

Now, I confess that I had read *1 Corinthians* many many times down through the years, and I was aware of the fact that division in the church was the very first topic that the Apostle Paul dealt with, but I never really paid attention to the vast amount of real estate he gives to this topic in the book... to the amount of TIME he spends on it...

Now we could laugh this off... we could just say, "Well, that Paul is just a long winded preacher." We could zone out and wait until he says something else that interests us, like some people do during sermons. We might even feel like shouting, "Paul! Why are you spending so much time on this. We get it, Paul, you don't like division in the church. We understand that. But let's move on to something else."

But that would be a mistake. Because he spends time on this topic for a reason. It's important.

Paul had a lot of different topics to deal with in this church. We've said before that in *1 Corinthians* Paul is doing two things - he is dealing with issues that he's heard are problematic in the church, and he's answering a series of questions that the church had asked him about. Some of these questions were about difficult things. And we're going to see when we get to *chapter 5* that there were some very serious problems that needed addressed in the church at Corinth. But the fact is he chose to deal with division first, and he chose to give it four long chapters... he chose to spend a majority of time, right up front on that particular topic.

And so, we are forced to conclude, the Apostle Paul considered this the most pressing issue... and the thing that needed to be dealt with FIRST. It gives us an indication, does it not, of the danger of division and favoritism and celebrity worship and schisms and cliques in a local church!

So let us not grow weary with the subject... let's continue to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us about this matter. Because it is clearly a root issue that we need to be concerned about.

Well, he continues on now in *chapter 3*, and the topic is still basically division in the local church. He's still dealing with the fact that some of them favored Apollos, some of them favored Paul and some of

them favored Peter... the same familiar topics that we've been looking at. But here in *chapter 3*, there are a couple of things we need to take note of. And to help us follow the thought, this morning, let's use the word MISUNDERSTANDING. For I think Paul is using that thought... he is saying, "You Corinthians are goofed up and divided over these things because you MISUNDERSTAND some things."

Specifically, they had a misunderstanding about spirituality, and they had a misunderstanding about leaders, and they had a misunderstanding about consequences. So let's spend the rest of our time this morning speaking to those three areas of misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding Spirituality

cf. *vss. 1-4*

Now the implication from these verses is that the Corinthians THOUGHT themselves to be spiritual. Especially those who were clamoring for the deeper things of God... the ones who thought Paul's simple gospel message was too elementary for them...

But Paul starts right off slamming them to the ground over that thought. "You might have thought yourselves spiritual, but that's not the way I recall it (*vs. 1*). Note the words he uses to describe them. "BABES" "CARNAL" "BEHAVING LIKE MERE MEN" The first clearly says they are immature, and the second and third clearly say that though these are Christian people, they are living more like the world than like mature Christians.

"I couldn't give you deep truths because you weren't ready for it," Paul said - a thought which they probably would have nodded in agreement with - "Well, of course not, Paul, because we were newly saved baby believers!" "BUT EVEN NOW, YOU'RE NOT READY!" he said. I doubt they were pleased to hear THAT thought, because they thought they were... they thought they had progressed... they thought themselves spiritual...

Notice that Paul said their DIVISION was what marked them as carnal... (*vs. 4 - when one says, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, ARE YOU NOT CARNAL?*)

And so, apparently, while an emphasis on personalities, or celebrity preachers, might have made them think they "sounded mature and spiritual, in reality, it demonstrated the exact opposite.

You know, it's funny, isn't it? Spirituality is much like humility. It's one of those things where just when you think you have it, you've lost it.

My mind goes a couple of different directions when I think about these things:

1. One thought that comes to my mind is that we are never out of danger of falling prey to the devil's traps. (This situation was striking those who THOUGHT they were spiritual... not the new baby Christians.)

QUOTE (Derek Prime, Opening Up 1 Corinthians) - Part of the devil's strategy is to encourage us to make a bad thing of something good and he achieves a great deal of success in this if we are not careful and watchful.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8, NKJV)

"lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Corinthians 2:11, NKJV)

Don't let such a thought bring fear, Christian. We need not fear Satan for he is a defeated and miserable and pitiful foe. We will eventually watch him fall into the lake of fire.

resist the devil and he will FLEE. (James 4:7)_ - Doesn't sound like somebody we need fear, huh? Greater is He that is in you (i.e. my Jesus) than he that is in the world (i.e. the devil) (1 John 4:4)

No... don't let these thoughts cause fear, but rather let it remind us to be vigilant, as Peter said... let it keep us humble and help us to avoid becoming cocky and having a self-proclaimed spirituality as these Corinthians were in danger of having... and let it drive us to our knees in prayer.

QUOTE - The devil trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.

2. Another thought that comes to my mind is that sanctification is a process

... and we're not there yet... the process is not yet complete in any of us... when it comes to our sanctification, we are WORKS IN PROGRESS, and we will be until the day Christ takes us home.

He's still workin' on me,
To make me what I ought to be.
It took Him just a week to make the moon and the stars,
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.
How loving and patient He must be,
He's still workin' on me!
(Joel Hemphill)

I'm sure you remember what I've taught before - that there is a three-fold nature to our salvation which can be described by the three words PENALTY, POWER, and PRESENCE.

READ - *1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; Titus 2:11-13*

a. When you trusted Christ, you were immediately and forever saved from the PENALTY of sin.

There is now NO CONDEMNATION to them which are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1)

The Christians' sins (past, present and future) were paid for on the cross... judged there once and for all in their entirety... never to require judgment again.

Jesus took upon himself the penalty for your sins on the cross, so you don't have to. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, you can have your sins forgiven and forgotten forever by simply trusting in Him... in His finished work there.

(BTW - I'd love to talk with you more about that if you don't understand what I mean by it. Nothing else I'm talking about today will make a modicum of sense to you if you don't first get this part down - Jesus died for you, and you must repent and believe so that sacrifice will count for you.)

b. When you trusted Christ, you received the promise that one day you would be saved from the very PRESENCE of sin in your life. (But that part doesn't take place until we get to heaven!)

c. When you trusted Christ, you began a lifelong journey of wrestling with and progressing toward salvation from the POWER of sin.

This process is referred to as SANCTIFICATION in the Bible. It is a process that starts the moment we trust Christ, and continues until we stand in His presence. It is a process that is never finished on this earth.

SO DON'T GET COCKY, CHRISTIAN. NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE AND HOW SPIRITUAL YOU THINK YOU ARE, YOU'RE NOT ALL THAT! If you're still breathing on this earth, then you are still a sinner, and you are still struggling must like the rest of us!

ILLUS - In Don Richard's Men's Bible Study recently, a discussion broke out concerning eternal security. I relayed a conversation with a friend who believed that a Christian can lose salvation once they've received it (not Bible, but that's what he believed). He asked me, "What about if I sin right before I die?" My response to him was, YOU WILL, for we are completely and totally immersed in sin. Now this caused a lively debate in the Bible study. Our newest missionary, Jerry Harmon was with us in that study, and he said, "if I win somebody to Christ right before I die, I'd like to think that wasn't a sin." Me too... but I know myself. I've never won somebody to Christ without some stupid proud thought clouding the joy of it. I've never preached a sermon without some self-congratulation. Maybe you're better than me, but the fact is, I can't get away from my sin. It's everywhere... it surrounds me...

What do you think Isaiah meant by "*all our RIGHTEOUSNESSES are like filthy rags*" (like DIRT) (Isaiah 64:6)

Why did David say, in *Psalm 51 - My sin is ever before me*?

Why did Paul say, in *Romans 7:14 - "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin."*

Why did he say, "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*" (Romans 7:18, NKJV)

When we think of this... when we see how needy we are... and how helpless... and how even at our best completely undone... HOW DO WE NOT THANK GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS AND HIS GRACE... grace that sent Jesus Christ to deliver us from this enslavement... grace that not only saved us from the PENALTY of sin, and will eventually save us from the very PRESENCE Of sin, and is currently working every moment in our lives through the process of sanctification to save us little by little from sins POWER over us!

Hallelujah! How do we not say with the hymn writers:

Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be.... Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.... Grace, Grace God's grace, grace that was greater than all my sin! PRAISE GOD!

And so... the division within the church at Corinth demonstrated a misunderstanding of SPIRITUALITY... a failure to recognize that their very preoccupation with their own self-proclaimed spirituality was, itself, an indication that they were not spiritual at all, but rather carnal... living like the world...

Paul went on, then, to discuss another misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding Leaders

cf. vss. 5-9

"Who is Paul, anyway?" "Who is Apollos?" These must have seemed odd questions to the Corinthians. But Paul was basically pointing out a fundamental misunderstanding about leaders in the church. He was pointing out that they simply didn't understand what men like Paul and Apollos were about.

We have been talking a lot about leadership here at FBC. We have, since we organized Friendship Bible Church, been working toward the day when we have a plurality of leadership here... when we follow to the best of our ability the Biblical example of an elder led congregation. We took a major step forward in that direction with the appointment of Phil Ross to our pastoral team. But we continue to work at it... pray about it... and seek God's direction in the establishment of leadership here.

BTW - Shameless plug - We are starting something new (PUSH LTI)

Now that I've said all that, though, let me say that I think we overuse the word "leader" entirely. As a matter of fact, I'm concerned that we have a grave misunderstanding of church work when we give much emphasis to the word "leader." Oh, it's Biblical, I know, (cf. *Hebrews 11 - they that rule over you...*, *2 Peter - taking the OVERSIGHT thereof...*, *Romans 12:8 - he who leads, with diligence...*) but I think we overuse it. Perhaps we, like the Corinthians, misunderstand the nature of leadership in the church.

Well... this section certainly gives perspective to that discussion.

Consider how Paul describes himself... and Apollos, in this section. He says they were "ministers" (*vs. 5*)... he says they each had an assigned task, given to them by God (*vss. 5-6*)... he says that his work and Apollos' work are equal (one), with neither being more important than the other (*vs. 8*). He says plainly that he and Apollos were NOTHING (*vs. 7*). Let that sink into your mind for a minute. Paul is basically saying, "I am nothing, and neither is Apollos."

Every bit of this description oozes humility and leans away from what we think of in terms of LEADERS. These men were SERVANTS FIRST. They led by SERVING. The word "ministers" in *vs. 5* is DIAKONOI, from which we get our word DEACON. It means table waiter... servant. That's how Paul viewed himself and all other "leaders" in the church.

You know, Jesus said one time, "*But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.*" (*Matthew 23:11, NKJV*)

Those who are called to lead in the local church are called to a life of slavery... service....

Those who are called to lead in the local church need to feel like Paul did in *vs. 7 - I am not anything... it's all about God.*

Now, as Paul hammers on this point, he breaks it down into a few interesting thoughts:

1. God uses people in his plan to reach the world, but God and God alone gives the increase. He alone makes things grow. (*vss. 6-7*)

Boy, doesn't this lift a huge weight off your shoulders about serving the Lord? This concept is true no matter what role you play in the church, or what God asks you to do in your walk with Him. He gives you a task to do... but He is responsible for the results! You need not fret over whether people listen, preacher - just preach! Leave the results to God. You need not worry about whether those little kids respond to the gospel Sunday School teacher - just teach! Leave the results to God.

What do you feel the tug of the Holy Spirit about? What service do you hear God calling you to? Whatever it is, the devil will try to convince you that you will fail at it... that you don't have what it takes to succeed... anything to keep you from doing it. But God is not interested in your SUCCESS, He simply wants your FAITHFULNESS... and He will then bring the results... make things grow.

ILLUS - I love the line from the movie *Miracle*, where the coach of the 1980 Olympic hockey team is angry with the captain of his team who is complaining about the performance of a teammate: "You worry about your own game... there's more than enough there to keep you busy."

All we need worry about is our own game... our own gifts... the task or tasks God has given us to do. He asks for FAITHFULNESS in these things, and lifts the concern about SUCCESS from us and places it on Himself.

We labor at our tasks - some plant and some water (*cf. vss. 6-8*) - and GOD MAKES THINGS GROW!

2. God uses people in His plan, and each has an assigned task to do.

Somebody had to plant (Paul). Somebody had to water (Apollos). Both tasks were assigned by God, and neither was more or less important than the other.

It's interesting, isn't it, that in all this discussion about division, Paul never once shows the slightest hint of jealousy toward Apollos. The devil wanted to pit these servants against each other, but Paul was having none of that. The carnal Christians in Corinth were pawns in the devil's strategy to drive a wedge into the church and divide them - but Paul knew better.

QUOTE (Derek Prime, Opening Up 1 Corinthians) - Paul did not regard Apollos as a rival because he knew that both he and Apollos were 'only servants' (v. 5), a title in which he delighted (Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23, 25). Paul saw service as a privilege, part of God's grace to him (v. 10). The necessity for both planting and watering (v. 6) emphasizes that Christian service involves partnership, not rivalry.

We'll talk about this a lot when we get to the latter half of this book, but God's plan in the local church is all about division of labor... each one having gifts and exercising them faithfully for the furtherance of the gospel in the local church. Paul is just beginning to touch on the concept here, and will develop it more fully later on when we get to *chapter 12*.

For now, let's just see the stake he's driving in the ground - God uses each of us according to the gifts He gives us... according to the tasks He assigns us... and no task is more or less important than the other... each task is vital to Him accomplishing His work in our lives of MAKING US GROW.

3. God uses people in His plan, and they are GIFTS to each of us.

Take note of vs. 5-10, and count how many times the concept of GOD GIVING appears. ... *the Lord GAVE...* (vs. 5); *God GAVE the increase* (vs. 6); *God who GIVES the increase* (vs. 7); *the grace of God which was GIVEN to me* (vs. 10)

Especially in vs. 5, I see the fact that God GAVE the gift to the servant, and God also GAVE the servant to the church! This is a concept seen in *Ephesians 4:11-12 - God GAVE various servants to the church...*

Now let's be frank - not everybody who strides into this pulpit feels like a gift. I'm certain there are days you have a hard time thinking of me as a gift (probably more often than not!). And there will be guest speakers... missionaries... etc., who may not tickle your fancy so much as you would like, and who may cause you to forget that God GAVE THEM TO YOU. They are GOD'S GIFT TO YOU.

When I listen to other preachers, I do my level best to concentrate fully on what they say... I BORE A HOLE in them, as another preacher once said. I listen on purpose, believing that God is speaking and has sent that message to me - there is something there that God wants me to hear - His gift to me. Now I admit, there've been times I felt like a preacher friend who once confided, "I've never failed to get something out of every sermon I've heard. I've had a few close calls, though!"

But this passage is not just about preachers - it's about servants of God... and those come in all flavors... and every one of them is a gift from a loving God to His church... a gift that He is using in some way to MAKE THINGS GROW!

As our church grows (and we pray it continues to grow, for that is the whole point seen in this passage isn't it - God making things GROW?) - we will have more and more interpersonal conflict - more and more temptation to division - more and more personalities that don't quite gel with one another.

We have some of that now. We haven't really had such issues over the last 5 years... but the devil is working a bit now and we see some peeking out.

Something that might help you if you're struggling with such conflict with a brother or sister here is to remember that they are a gift to you. Really. Even though you might want to slap them sometimes - a GIFT... from GOD... to YOU... to help you GROW!

In our men's ministries we are prone to quoting from *Proverbs 27:17* - *Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.*

But how does iron sharpen iron? Well, if you're the piece of iron it's undoubtedly painful... harsh... a grind!

ILLUS - I once spoke to a man who I knew to have struggled with a person in his church. I asked how they were getting along and he pointed out that the conflict was under control. He had come to accept that God had given that person into his life as sandpaper, to sand down his rough edges. What a mature way to look at it! Even those who act like jerks sometimes are STILL gifts from God to help make things GROW!

BTW it does not work the other way. He was mature for seeing that other people sometimes function as sandpaper in his life. But if you're the one who IS the sandpaper... and you think God has somehow appointed you to that task... well you misunderstand. God can and does use even our sin and failings for His glory. But there is no such thing as the gift of causing friction. If you are sowing discord... if you are causing friction everywhere you go, then you need to repent of it. Immediately. It's not a gift, it's a sin.

Well, you get the picture, so I won't beat it to death. God uses servants in His plan - and those servants are GIFTS. Let us be thankful to God for the GIFTS He gives.

Paul is saying to these Corinthians, "The reason we're still talking about division 3 chapters into this letter is because you have some misunderstandings - you misunderstand spirituality, and you misunderstand leaders. And not only that - you also misunderstand something else:"

Misunderstanding Consequences

cf. vss. 9-17

I'm going to save this one for next time, but I wanted to mention it so you can be reading ahead and thinking about it a bit. I encourage you to meditate on these verses over the coming week.

Ask yourself, "What did Paul mean when he said, *"let each one take heed HOW he builds..."* (vs. 10)

What did he mean when he said, *"each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it"* (vs. 13)

What did he mean when he said, *"the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is"* (vs. 13)?

What did he mean when he said, *"If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss"* (vs. 14)?

What did he mean when he said, *"If anyone's work... endures, he will receive a reward"* (vs. 14)?

What did he mean when he said, *"If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him"* (vs. 17)?

All thought provoking questions, huh? And all point to the fact that there are consequences to our service... consequences that the Corinthians apparently weren't thinking through. How we serve... our faithfulness to our assigned tasks... are things that have consequences! There is coming a day... THE DAY! (vs. 14)

But we'll save that for next time... think and pray about it this coming week...

Conclusion:

Well, I'm done. And I'll conclude by saying this:

I try to organize sermons around a central theme. Today, the theme I came up with is this - The Corinthians needed a clear understanding of true spirituality, and of the nature of leadership in the church, and of the coming judgment seat of Christ.

That was their challenge. It is also ours.

Chapter 6. According To His Own Labor

READ - *1 Corinthians 3:8-23*

TEXT - "Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor." (*1 Corinthians 3:8, NKJV*)

THEME - The judgment seat of Christ is coming, and we should ensure we are ready to stand before Him.

Introduction:

Last week, we began looking at this chapter, and we determined that we could use the word "misunderstanding" to guide our thoughts. Paul was saying that the Corinthians were suffering problems with division and sectarianism at least in part because they misunderstood. We learned from *1 Corinthians 3:1-4* that they misunderstood the nature of spirituality. And we learned from *1 Corinthians 3:5-7* that they misunderstood the nature of leadership in the church.

As we move on to the rest of the chapter, we will see that they also misunderstood the consequences of all this - that there is coming a day when all these things will be judged by God.

Now, the gist of this is that we need to talk about something that might be a bit uncomfortable this morning. We need to talk about the Judgment Seat of Christ. And before we can do that, I need to explain a bit about what that is.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is described several places in the Bible:

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (*2 Corinthians 5:10, NKJV*)

"But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." (*Romans 14:10, NKJV*)

It is also described here, in our text:

Verse 8 describes a time of receiving reward based on labor - when is that? The Judgment Seat of Christ. *Verse 13* describes "the Day" - a time when works will become clear... will be revealed... will be tested by fire - when is that? Well, that refers to the "Day of the Lord" and is used in Scripture as a general reference to Christ's return, but the context here requires a narrower interpretation... here it refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is one of the things that will occur when Christ returns. *Verse 14* speaks of future rewards and *verse 15* of future loss - when is that? The Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Judgment Seat of Christ is one of several judgments described in the Bible. It specifically applies to those who are saved. There is another judgment, far worse I might add, which applies only to those who are unsaved - the great White Throne judgment. We need to understand both.

So, let me start by sharing a brief prophetic timeline of God's calendar, as revealed in the Bible:

1. The Rapture - Next event on the timeline. It is described in *1 Thessalonians 4* and pictured in *Revelation 4:1*. Jesus will catch all believers up (the word "rapture" means "caught up"), and we will meet Him in the air. Those who have died already will rise first, and those who are alive will join them.
2. The Tribulation - 7 years of judgment such as this world has never seen. Referred to as the "time of Jacob's trouble, it is seen by many as a final and tremendous judgment on Israel. It is described in *Daniel*

and Revelation. It is during this 7 year period that a powerful, Satan-influenced individual, referred in Scripture as "the antichrist" will appear and rule. Thankfully, because the church will have been raptured away prior to the start of this, none of us who believe need fear it. The 7 year clock starts at the moment of the rapture.

3. The Second Coming of Christ in Glory - at the conclusion of the tribulation, Christ will return to earth. The antichrist will be defeated at a terrible battle - the battle of Armageddon. Christ will establish a literal kingdom on earth, centered in Jerusalem, from which He will reign for 1000 years. At the beginning of this time, Satan will be bound. These events are described in *Revelation 19-20*.
4. The Millennial Reign - the 1000 year literal earthly reign of Christ on earth - a time of peace - the time when the lion will lay down with the lamb - when all will know the Messiah rules from Jerusalem. At the conclusion of the 1000 years, Satan will be loosed and will rampage across the earth in one final attempt to gather the lost against Christ. He will fail, Christ will defeat Him finally, and Satan will be cast into hell forever. This is seen in *Revelation 21*
5. The new heaven and new earth - the old will be undone, and replaced with the new. And Christ and His followers will enjoy the new heaven and new earth forever and ever and ever. See *Revelation 21-22*.

Got that? Rapture... tribulation... second coming in glory... Millennial Reign of Christ... New Heavens and New Earth... eternity with Christ.

I hear you, "Cool stuff, preacher... but I thought you were talking about the judgments, and I didn't hear any mention of any such... where does the judgment seat of Christ fit in?"

Glad you asked. Remember I said that all Christians will be "caught up" in the rapture, and that immediately thereafter the 7 year tribulation period begins on earth? Well, while that hell is happening on earth, we who were raptured will be taking our turns before the Judgment Seat of Christ. And that Great White Throne judgment that the lost will participate in? It takes place at the end of the Millennium, and before the creation of the new heavens and new earth.

These are huge topics and worthy of much greater attention. You've no doubt got more questions now than when I started, but we'll have to leave it at that today. I just want to ensure you have a basic understanding that there is this future judgment, the Judgment Seat of Christ... that it is for believers... and that it is coming soon. Real soon. We speak often of the fact that the rapture is the next element on the prophetic time table... that there is nothing that needs fulfilled before it can take place... that it is IMMINENT. Well, if that is true, and the Judgment Seat of Christ takes place immediately thereafter - then it, too, is IMMINENT. We might well find ourselves caught up to meet Jesus before the end of this sermon... we might well find ourselves before the Judgment Seat of Christ, then, before this sermon is done!

QUOTE - "According to the word of God, the testimony of the son of God, and the corroborative and unbroken testimony of the apostles, there is not the thickness of tissue paper between us who are Christians and the judgment seat of Christ." (I. M. Haldeman)

Back to our text, then, which gives some great insight into the Judgment Seat of Christ. Notice:

Judgment is INDIVIDUAL

cf. vs. 8 - each one... according to his own labor.

cf. vs. 13 - each one's work will become clear...

EACH ONE will deal with the judgment seat of Christ. It is individual. Nobody will stand with you. We will, alone, stand and give an account to our Lord.

Now let's be clear - this judgment is a judgment for SERVICE, and not for SIN. Jesus took care of the sin question on the cross (cf. Hebrews 10:12 where Christ's sacrifice is referred to as *one sacrifice for sins forever*) For the believer in Jesus Christ... that question is settled once and for all.

Romans 8:1; John 5:24

And let's also be clear about something else - there is no amount of service (i.e. good works or good deeds) that can get you to heaven in the first place. If any of us had it in us to be good enough... to do enough... to live righteous enough lives, to gain entrance to heaven, Jesus would not have needed to die. But none of us are capable of that, and therefore He did have to die. It was the only way. We couldn't do it, so He had to.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9, NKJV)

"not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:5, NKJV)

I hope I'm making those two points clear, because we need to understand that the judgment seat of Christ has NOTHING to do with salvation. It pertains only to those who have already been saved by trusting in Christ. It pertains only to the life those already-saved individuals have lived SINCE they trusted Christ.

And let's be clear about one final thing - even though you can't BECOME a Christian by doing good works, if you ARE a Christian, you WILL ENGAGE IN good works. In other words, serving God is not a CAUSE of salvation, but it is an EFFECT of it.

And that's where the Judgment Seat of Christ comes in. We will not there be judged for sin, for Jesus took care of that on the cross. But we will be judged for our service for God after we became Christians.

Now I realize that people have differing views on this truth, but there are some things we cannot deny without denying Scripture. There is a judgment seat of Christ. It is for ALL of us (cf. *2 Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 14:10*). So the WHOLE MASS OF BELIEVERS is included. It is also for EACH of us (cf. *2 Corinthians 3:8,13*).

It is an individual judgment where each one of us will have some alone time with the Savior... a time when we will account for *our own labor* (vs. 8) and our *work* (vs. 13).

Christian... does this not give you pause? Does it not cause you to stop what you're doing and consider what that day will be like for you? It is a sobering thought, is it not?

QUOTE - "Unsupported by friend, wife, or attorney, each of us must one day stand before Jehovah's awful throne ." (Leonard Ravenhill)

QUOTE - "There are few doctrines of greater importance to the child of God than the doctrine of the judgment seat of Christ." (J. Dwight Pentecost)

QUOTE - "nothing has contributed more powerfully to wean me from all that held me down to earth than the thought constantly dwelt on of death and the last account." (St. Augustine)

The Judgment Seat of Christ is first of all an individual judgment, meaning that I, alone, will stand before my Lord and Savior and give an accounting. So will you, and you, and everyone who names the name of Christ. I see no exceptions listed in the Bible.

This truth should prompt us to greater faithfulness, should it not? It should motivate us to stay the course. It should focus our minds and our efforts on the things that we can account for happily, rather than those we will need to hang our head over.

QUOTE - "Throughout the Christian church as we know it today, all sense of accountability to God seems to have been lost. (A.W. Tozer)

That is a tragedy... and is due at least in part, to the fact we ignore the plain teaching of the Bible on the judgment seat of Christ!

Judgment, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, is INDIVIDUAL. I must give an account. Say it with me, Christian, "I must give an account."

Judgment is QUALITATIVE.

cf. *vss. 12-15*

Now in my study of this passage I found a lot of differences of opinion as to what the gold, silver, wood, hay, etc. represented.

QUOTE - The materials used in the building may be interpreted in at least four ways: (a) The gold, silver, costly stones refer to the enduring quality of the builder's work; and the wood, hay, or straw suggest work that is temporary and valueless. This view is supported by "work" (v. 13) and "what he has built" (v. 14). (b) The three expensive materials suggest sound doctrine which the builder "builds" into people's lives, and the three valueless materials are false doctrines. (c) The first three materials refer to the worker's worthy motives, and the other three point to his unworthy motives (cf. 4:5). (d) The "gold, silver, costly stones" refer to believers who constitute the church (this is supported by similar uses of the metaphor in Eph. 2:22; 2 Tim. 2:20; and 1 Peter 2:5), and the "wood, hay, or straw" represent unregenerate people present in the church (chorton, rendered "hay" in 1 Cor. 3:12, is used of unbelievers in James 1:10, where the NIV renders it "wild flower"). (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), 1 Co 3:12.)

I think Carl G. Johnson, in his book entitled "The Account Which We Must Give" nails it:

QUOTE - "There is a distinct contrast in the materials: gold, silver, precious stones, or would, hay, stubble. The gold, silver, and precious stones speak figuratively: of that which is permanent, in contrast to that which is perishing, represented by the woods, hay, and stubble; of worthiness, in contrast to worthlessness; of quality in contrast to quantity; of the spirit in contrast to the flesh; in living for eternity in contrast to living only for time; of that which is done in the will of God in contrast to that which is done in the will of man; of that which is done for the glory of God in contrast to that which is done for the glory of man." (Carl G. Johnson, The Account Which We Must Give)

The things we spend our time on in this life fall into two categories (and only two) - those things that matter to the kingdom of God, and those things that do not. At the Judgment Seat of Christ, that is what gets sorted out. And all those things that fall into the latter category will be burned up like straw.

Again, I must ask Christian, does this not give you pause? It certainly does for me. I find myself looking at the way I spend my time... what I dedicate my talent and treasure to. I find myself thinking of a day when I will stand before my Savior holding the things I've focused on in this life, and watching as He takes them from me and throws them into the fire. I find myself wondering whether anything will stand that test. Don't you?

Charles Luther put it well in his time honored hymn:

"Must I go, and empty handed,
Thus my dear Redeemer meet?
Not one day of service give Him,
Lay no trophy at His feet?

Not at death I shrink or falter,

For my Savior saves me now;
But to meet Him empty handed,
Thought of that now clouds my brow.

-- Charles Luther

The Lanny Wolfe Trio used to sing a song called "Only One Life." I don't remember all of it, but I do remember this part - "Only one life, so soon it will pass. Only what's done for Christ now will last."

And so the judgment is QUALITATIVE. We will be judged for the quality of our service since we were saved.

Now before I move away from this point, let me clarify something. Look carefully at vs. 8 - *each one will receive his own reward ACCORDING TO HIS OWN LABOR*. It's vital that we see something here - the reward is not based on SUCCESS, nor is any loss of reward based on LACK OF SUCCESS. The reward is based on LABOR, not the RESULTS of that labor! As we have seen many times before, God wants our FAITHFULNESS and He takes care of the RESULTS. (Remember vs. 7? And remember Jesus' words - It shall be said to him, "Well done, thou good and (not successful, but) faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mt 25:23).

Judgment means REWARD or LOSS.

cf. vs. 14-15

Now I think we've covered this several times in the previous points, but I'll just mention it briefly. The judgment seat of Christ will be a time for both reward, and loss of reward.

The reward is something over and above personal salvation (cf. vs. 14-15).

And the loss is the same - it is not salvation, but something else. Most likely, the loss is simply loss of potential rewards... loss of what might have been gained by faithful service.

Now I've heard it taught, and perhaps you have too, that the Judgment Seat of Christ is only a happy time... a time where all will receive reward. And I tend to agree that there will be some level of reward for all genuine believers. It's simply not possible to live a completely unregenerate life when you're a believer. Jesus will find something praiseworthy in the laziest and most unproductive of Christians. Just flip ahead a chapter and notice *1 Corinthians 4:5* - "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." (NKJV) (The KJV renders that last part, *every man shall have praise of God* and the ESV - *each one will receive his commendation from God*.)

But we cannot water down the truth, and every passage that discusses the Judgment Seat of Christ implies not only reward, but also loss of reward in some cases. *1 Corinthians 3:15* states it plainly. *2 Corinthians 5:10* clearly says that we will receive either "good or bad" at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And *Romans 14:10* implies that the same.

I won't hammer that one anymore, for it's pretty clear from the Scripture.

Conclusion:

So what shall we say, brothers and sisters, to these things? How shall we respond to the impending Judgment Seat of Christ?

Will you let me share a few thoughts that came to my mind as I pondered? A few applications?

1. In light of the judgment seat of Christ, DON'T waste the time that remains.

Some of us have more time than others before we face God.

QUOTE - "I am increasingly aware that the years that lie ahead are fewer than the years that have gone before." (Jean Luc Picard, STTNG)

But whatever time we have, we can use it for Him. We can avoid the temptations to slow down as we near the finish line... we can suck it up for another push... We can finish well, regardless of how well we've run to date.

2. In light of the judgment Seat of Christ, DON'T hide your talents in the earth.

What has God given you to do? What gifts? What talents? Using them for Him and His kingdom will result in gold, silver, and precious stones! But not using them... hiding them in the earth, as Jesus described it in His parable of the talents, will yield only wood, hay, and stubble.

Remember... it's not the talent, itself, that matters, but the faithful exercise of it. Your talent might not be flashy... your gifts might not be public.... God decides what gifts He gives to each of us, and does not hold us the least accountable for gifts and talents He has not given. He just wants our faithful use of those He HAS given.

ILLUS - This past Wednesday, in prayer meeting, a member shared a praise during our prayer request time. During a particularly difficult week recently, when she was greatly discouraged by the difficulties she was encountering, she walked to her mailbox and found a card from somebody here at the church. Just a card... just a word of encouragement... but it was a word from God that blessed her soul and pulled her out of her discouragement, and she wanted to praise God for it. Now I don't know who sent that card (although I have a pretty good idea), but at the judgment seat of Christ, that simple act will be pure gold.

3. In light of the judgment seat of Christ, DO strive for the reward!

There is a prize to be won! Salvation is glorious, but if I'm understanding these verses, there is even more! I don't know what the rewards are, but I want some! You do, too!

"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it." (1 Corinthians 9:24, NKJV)

4. In light of the judgment seat of Christ, DO allow the thought of the coming "Day" to keep you focused.

I don't believe for a minute that the Holy Spirit told us of the judgment seat of Christ in the Bible so that we would FEAR... no, rather so we would FOCUS.

ILLUS - I was recently fascinated by something Byron Ferguson said. If you don't know who that is, Byron is an archer who does exhibition shooting... trick shots. In one episode of a shooting program called "Impossible Shots" he shot a BB off a golf tee with an arrow, and never touched the golf tee. Byron regularly shoots nickles, dimes, and even aspirins out of the air with his bow and arrow. How does he accomplish these feats? He says he simply focuses on the center of the target. No matter the size of the target, the center is the same size. Focus on the center.

Oh Christian, if we will but keep our hearts and minds focused on soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ... focused on serving Him faithfully while we can, we will hit the target...

QUOTE - Prepare your heart for your departure. If you are wise, you will expect it every hour. (Saint Isaac the Syrian, seventh century mystic)

Chapter 7. A Little Less Talk!

READ - *1 Corinthians 4*

TEXT - "For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power." (*1 Corinthians 4:20, NKJV*)

THEME - We need to concentrate less on talk and more on walk.

Introduction:

For nearly 2 months we've been listening to Paul talk about the problem of division in the church at Corinth. This morning, as we close out *chapter 4*, we'll hear him wrap up his thoughts on that subject, and when we move into *chapter 5*, we'll find him on an entirely different and thought provoking issue (READ - *1 Corinthians 5:1*).

ILLUS - Legal programs have always been popular on TV. Our legal system has been the subject of many a good book. We are often fascinated by the arguments and methods used by attorneys to defend their clients. One particularly interesting part of the courtroom drama is when each attorney is given the opportunity at the conclusion of a trial to present closing arguments. It always seems to be the high point, as everything that has been said before in the trial is summarized... sorted through... restated in such a way as to make maximum impact.

Well, here in *chapter 4* Paul is drawing all his arguments up in a summation. So, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, listen now to Paul's closing arguments in this matter of division at Corinth:

As would be expected in a closing statement, there is no new evidence presented here - just reminders of what he has said before - restated and summarized:

Closing Argument # 1 - Think rightly about your leaders

(They are SERVANTS and STEWARDS, and God's primary requirement of (expectation of) them is FAITHFULNESS.)

vss. 1-3

Now he's saying the same things he did in early chapters, but with a bit of a clarifying twist.

1. Leaders are servants!

When he said that before he used the word from which we get our English word DEACON... a word which means "table waiter." Now, though, he uses a different word, which literally means "under rower" and pictures the man pulling at an oar in a Roman gallion. Where the previous word emphasized the SERVICE aspect of leadership in the local church, this word reminds us that the servant is SUBORDINATE TO and RESPONSIBLE TO another.

We are ROWING UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE MASTER. And we are responsible to Him for how we row.

2. Leaders are stewards!

Now I've always loved this word in the Bible for some reason. A steward is somebody who manages... somebody who has been entrusted with something not his, and who is expected to manage it for the one who entrusted it in the first place.

ILLUS - We usually think of it in respect to finances. We know that the Bible teaches that everything belongs to God, and you and I have just been entrusted with certain things for a while. We are stewards (i.e. managers) of what He has placed in our hands. It is all His.

ILLUS - If you are a Lord of the Rings fan, you'll remember that in the mythical land of Gondor, the king was not on the throne, but there was a STEWARD (Denethor) who was entrusted with the kingdom until the king returned. "As steward of the land, Denethor had the power of the king but without the title and without the full measure of honor. He was able to make decisions and to pass judgment. He received the respect and admiration of the people of the land. His primary task was to do whatever was best for the land in the absence of its rightful ruler. In all he did he was to remember his position—to remember that he was not, and never would be, the king. As a constant reminder of his temporary position he was forbidden to rule from the king's throne. [Tolkien writes:] Awe fell upon him as he looked down that avenue of kings long dead. At the far end upon a dais of many steps was set a throne under a canopy of marble shaped like a crowned helm; behind it was carved upon the wall and set with gems an image of a tree in flower. But the throne was empty. At the foot of the dais, upon the lowest step which was broad and deep, there was a stone chair, black and unadorned, and on it sat an old man gazing at his lap. That man, of course, was the steward. Where the king was allowed the full honor of sitting upon the throne, surrounded by splendor, the steward was consigned to rule from a plain, unadorned chair that sat at the foot of the throne."

Paul says here that a leader in the church has been entrusted with the good news and is therefore responsible to manage it well, it is a stewardship. We dare not put church leaders on a throne - they are not the king - they are but stewards entrusted by the King.

And what is it that marks a steward as a good steward rather than a bad one?

Where we might judge their speaking style, or leadership style, or charisma, or administrative gifts, or personality, or even their appearance - God's requirement is much more straightforward - He is looking for FAITHFULNESS (vs. 2).

May God help us always and ever to be found FAITHFUL.

Closing Argument # 2 - Neither YOUR opinion, nor MY opinion carry the slightest weight.

What matters... and ONLY what matters... is God's opinion.

(vss. 3-5)

Now Paul is obviously revisiting his previous warnings about the judgment seat of Christ, here in vs. 5. But he adds something interesting. He reminds us that none of us are qualified to judge in these matters, anyway.

He points out that THEIR judgment is irrelevant to him. (vs. 3)

Sounds a bit arrogant, doesn't it? "I'm not the slightest bit interested in what you think of me." Isn't that basically what he's saying in this verse? "As a matter of fact, I'm not remotely concerned about what any 'human court' might think or judge."

Before we judge him too harshly for these words, let's keep reading, because he's not done. He goes on to say he doesn't even consider his own judgment in the matter to be sound (vs. 4).

An alternative translation I found that helps - *To me for my part (though capable of being found faithful) it is a very small matter that I should be approved of by man's judgment; yea, I do not even assume the*

right of judgment and approving myself—but He that has the right, and is able to judge on my case (the Dijudicator), is the Lord.

Basically, what Paul was saying here is that YOU are not qualified to judge me, and NEITHER AM I. "My conscience is clear, but my conscience is not a reliable guide" and so I cannot even reliably judge my own performance.

Only God's judgment in the matter matters!

I love the famous words of Teddy Roosevelt.

QUOTE - "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

Paul knew that there would always be those who would critique his service... criticize his efforts... and set themselves up as judges of his apostleship. He also knew that they were irrelevant, for his judge would also be theirs!

Closing Argument # 3 - You're not all that! You're not there yet!

(vss. 6-13)

Now this is an interesting passage, filled with meaning, but I think I'm summing up Paul's argument accurately. "Get down off your high horses, you who want to judge the performance of others... you who want to divide the church up along party lines based on your favorite leaders... stick a pin in your over-inflated selves and climb down off your pedestals. The battle is not over yet... the race is not run to completion yet... YOU'RE NOT THERE YET!"

Verses 8-10 are interesting in that they appear to be dripping with irony and sarcasm. "I'm still struggling through my faith here, but you brilliant Corinthians are already at the finish line!" "We apostles are still in the bowels of the gallion pulling at the oars, but you Corinthians are already enthroned and exalted!"

Such sarcasm and irony were no doubt meant to deflate overinflated egos, and remind those with such an arrogant attitude that they had a ways to go yet.

And I love the little comment Paul tosses into his argument here - one of those little asides where he cracks open his heart for a second and lets us peek inside - *indeed I could wish that you did reign, that we also might reign with you!* (vs. 8) My heart is no different than yours. I'd love to be at the finish line. I wish you were already there, because then I would be too!

BUT... no matter what you think of yourself, you're not all that. And no matter where you think you are in your journey, you're not at the finish line yet. Good reminders, all.

"Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14, NKJV)

Now there is an important principle here, that we would all do well to remember. The cross **MUST** come before the crown! You can't short circuit that process. The apostles were following that process, but the Corinthians were trying to bypass it.

And there are a couple of statements he tosses into the mix here that are wonderful and thought provoking. We could, and probably should, make entire sermons from each. But for sake of time I'll just mention them and encourage you to spend some time with your Bibles this week and think through these important statements:

1. *Learn... not to think beyond what is written. (vs. 6)*

What a great and overriding principal he so casually mentions in those words! **WHAT IS WRITTEN** is what matters! Not your opinion or mine. Not the leadings of your conscience, nor of mine. **WHAT IS WRITTEN!**

In that simple little phrase which we might easily skim past in our reading we see Paul's reminder of the centrality of the Bible in our lives.

At least one translation renders it "LIVE ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE."

Amen. You know, I can't honestly read the Bible and get an overinflated view of myself. I come away from scripture reminded of just how needy I am... just how much I need Jesus... just how amazing is the grace that would save a wretch like me! Oh brother... sister... don't skim past that simple reminder here - learn not to think beyond what is written. LIVE ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE.

2. *What do you have that you did not receive? (vs. 7)*

Pastor Phil spoke briefly on Spiritual Disciplines in LTI last Wednesday evening. He mentioned the discipline of STUDY - reading and spending time in the Bible - a vital discipline every believer should seek to cultivate... a discipline that is vital if we are to ever "*learn not to think beyond what is written.*" But he also spoke of the discipline of meditation. We would do well to learn to dwell on a passage of scripture... carry it with us throughout the day... MEDITATE on it. And may I suggest a verse for you to meditate on, brothers and sisters? May I suggest vs. 7? (READ IT)

Who differentiates you from anybody else? God and God alone made you what you are. Meditate on that a while.

What gift or giftedness is in you that did not come as a gift from God? Meditate on that a while.

And notice Paul's conclusion - how can you possibly boast, then, in such evidences of God's grace in your life? How indeed. **WHAT DO YOU HAVE THAT YOU DID NOT RECEIVE?**

Eugene Peterson paraphrases this verse - "*For who do you know that really knows you, knows your heart? And even if they did, is there anything they would discover in you that you could take credit for? Isn't everything you have and everything you are sheer gifts from God? So what's the point of all this comparing and competing?*" (1 Corinthians 4:7, *The Message*)

Closing Argument # 4 - Never forget your roots. Go back to the beginning - often.

(vss. 14-17)

It's funny, isn't it, that after 4 long chapters railing against the follies of following men, Paul now asks them to follow his example... to imitate him.

But there is no arrogance or glory-seeking in the statement. He was not trying to secure a following. He was simply, again, revealing his heart and reminding the Corinthians that he cared about them. He had won them to Christ! Who could care about them more than the one who was a spiritual father to them!

QUOTE - Many ministers might address, advise, and instruct the Corinthians, but only one had planted the seed that brought them life. More than any guardian Paul had their interests at heart. (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), 1 Co 4:14–17.)

ILLUS - The first assignment for those participating in LTI is to write out your testimony and share it with the class. We think it foundational to be able to articulate how you came to Christ... how you met Him... where it all started for you in your Christian walk!

Oh Christian, never forget your roots. Don't let the wonderful truth of what Jesus did on the cross become unimportant in your mind. Never tire of rejoicing in the simple joy of knowing you were:

Born of the spirit, with life from above,
Into God's family divine.
Justified fully by Calvary's love!
Oh what a standing is mine!
And the transaction so quickly was made
When at the cross I believed.
Riches eternal and blessings supernal
From His precious hand I received.

Do remember how you came to Christ? Do you remember who God used to bring you to Him? Never forget. Never forget. Call that person if they're still around, and thank them.

Never forget your roots... how you came to the Lord... who He used to bring you into the family.

Closing Argument # 5 - Less talk, more walk.

(vss. 18-20)

Well, it's time to move on. Paul has wrung everything he can out of this long section dealing with the problems of division in the church at Corinth. He has flogged it for all its worth, and he will now, finally, in *1 Corinthians 5:1* change the subject.

I like how he can't quite leave it alone, though. "I'll be coming to see you shortly (vss. 18-19), and we can continue this discussion, then."

I especially like how he sums everything up in these verses:

"But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power." (1 Corinthians 4:19, NKJV)

Or, as another translation clarifies it:

"But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power." (1 Corinthians 4:19, ESV)

I entitled this morning's message "A Little Less Talk" because that's what I see here as his final argument in the matter. You Corinthians need to talk less and walk more! Your lips need to take a backseat to your lifestyle. Your words need to be overshadowed by your walk.

It's a warning that someone whose ministry is primarily verbal, such as myself, needs to pay special attention to. But it doesn't stop with preachers. ALL OF US ought to pay attention to these words - it's not about what you SAY... it's all about how you LIVE. "*For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.*" (1 Corinthians 4:20, NKJV)

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. (1 Thessalonians 1:5 NKJV)

For the kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power. (1 Corinthians 4:20 NLT)

And that about sums it up! It's not about the words you speak, but about the life you live. The kingdom of God is to be LIVED, not just discussed! Is your Christianity just words, or can people see it in your life? Quit talkin! Get busy walkin! That, I think, is Paul's final word on the matter of division in the church.

Conclusion:

Paul planned to visit Corinth "shortly" (*vs. 19*), and he wondered what he would find when he arrived. Would his beloved church be united... *perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10)*? Or would divisions still plague the believers at Corinth? He would know soon, for he was already making preparations for the trip.

It's a reminder to Friendship Bible Church, isn't it? Jesus is making final trip preparations as well. He'll be here soon. I wonder where He'll find this church *perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10)*? Will he find us walking the walk or just talking the talk?

When I attended Midwestern Baptist College in Michigan, we recited the Midwestern creed everyday in chapel services:

"I believe in the inspiration of the Bible, and in the deity of Jesus Christ, God's Son, in Whom we have salvation from sin by grace through faith. I believe that the Holy Spirit indwells every believer, and gives guidance and power as we surrender to the lordship of Christ. I believe that God has given to the church the responsibility to evangelize the world, through the preaching of the gospel, and personal soul winning. I will seek to live today, as to be ready to meet Him at His coming."

Are we seeking to live today, so as to be ready to meet Him at His coming?

"I'll be there shortly, and then I'll know whether your walk matches your talk."

Chapter 8. The Problem With Tolerance

READ - *1 Corinthians 5:1-13*

TEXT - *And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. (1 Corinthians 5:2 NKJV)*

THEME - In the church, and in our lives as believers, we need to repent of sin and purge it from our midst.

Introduction:

ILLUS - Imagine that you are sitting on your front porch one afternoon, and see the Fedex man drive up. It's always fun to get a package delivered to you, so you sit up and watch to see what's coming. You see him rummaging around in the back of the truck until he locates a large and interesting looking package. You expect to see him cart it to your door, but instead, he pulls out a box cutter and opens it up. He peers into the depths of the box, and takes out something. You hear him mutter something that sounds like, "No... they wouldn't want that." He takes the object from the box and pitches it back into the truck. Then he digs a little deeper into the box, and exclaims "Absolutely not... that might offend them," and pulls something else out and throws it back in the truck. He continues rooting around in the box, pulling out item after item, voicing objections about each, until he finally seems satisfied. He tapes the box back together, and walks over to deliver it to you... now mostly empty of whatever was supposed to be in it. I wonder, what would you think of the FedEx man? Would you thank him for delivering you the nearly empty box? Or would you rather call the sheriff and have him arrested for robbing you of what was rightly yours?

You know, there are some things in the Bible that we don't necessarily want to talk about, or that are difficult for us to talk about, or that might seem painful to talk about. But it is not my job as pastor to shield you from things that might be unpleasant in Scripture. Rather, it is my job to faithfully deliver the word of God to you.

"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2 Timothy 4:2, NKJV)

I've struggled this week as I've studied this passage. I know it is a topic that might be painful for some. I know it is a topic that might be offensive to some. I know, though, that it is a topic that we must confront, because it is in the package - it is in the Bible. God said it! I must preach it! We must live it!

Now, I came up with several different ideas for outlines. But in the end, I decided it would be best to just let the text speak, and so I want us to just break it up exactly as it is broken up here and look at it as it is presented here, and in the order in which it is presented here.

There are four paragraphs in this chapter. In the first paragraph, verses 1-5, notice that Paul mentions a serious problem and its solution. The second paragraph spans verses 6-8 and in them he gives both a reminder and a warning. Finally, verses 9-13 contain two paragraphs, where he issues a clarification and finally sums up his argument.

That's exactly how I'd like to look at it this morning.

A serious problem and its solution

(cf. vss. 1-5)

In the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul has been concentrating on the topic of division in the local church. We come to 5:1 and we find an abrupt change in topic.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife! (1 Corinthians 5:1 NKJV)

Now the first four chapters, where he talked about division, sprang out of the fact that a report had come to him from some member of the church. *1 Corinthians 1:11* tells us these were people from Chloe's household. We don't know who Chloe was, but we believe that she and her family were members of the church.

It's possible that this particular report also came from Chloe's family. But the way, Paul words it in verse 1 seems to suggest that this situation was not just something that was being quietly reported to him, but rather something that was well known. Some translations actually translate verse 1 as "it is commonly reported." In other words it's in the wild. It's on YouTube. It's gone viral. Everywhere I go I'm hearing that the situation is taking place.

The exact charge was that someone, a member of the church at Corinth, was engaged in an "incestuous affair with his stepmother". (It is generally believed that had this been the man's actual mother, Paul would have said so. Therefore, it must have been his stepmother.)

Now after all we know about the city of Corinth, and it's promiscuous ways, this might not seem like that big of a deal. But the fact is this behavior was not only against the law of God and the law of Moses for the Jews, but it was also against the law in Roman society. So, by any standard that you wished to apply, this behavior was unacceptable and sinful.

"The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover; it is your father's nakedness." (Leviticus 18:8, NKJV)

"If a man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel." (Deuteronomy 22:22, NKJV)

So, from any way you wanted to look at it, this was a serious charge.

Now a couple of details jumped out at me from this text:

- The sin was well-known to the outside world. It was "commonly reported".
- The sin was apparently ongoing.

It was not something that had happened in the past, and had just now come to light as a past sin. It was occurring and being allowed to occur now. Notice the word "has," present tense, in verse 1.

- The husband was apparently still around.

Although many commentators seem to believe that the husband was already dead, I actually believe he was still alive, and base this on *2 Corinthians 7:12*.

Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you. (2 Corinthians 7:12 NKJV)

So, to sum it up, in the church at Corinth there was a man who was having an affair with his father's wife. The father was still apparently alive, and this affair was something that was ongoing... Well known... Even openly known in Gentile or pagan society. And so before the world, this sin was being tolerated in this church.

Frankly, this flabbergasted Paul. He said in verse 1, that "such sexual immorality was not even named among the Gentiles". He was saying that their behavior was something that you wouldn't even see among the unsaved.

QUOTE - It was shameful that the church's standards had not only come down to the low standards of the world around them but even lower. (Derek Prime, *Opening Up 1 Corinthians* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 44.)

Sad.

Even sadder: as flabbergasted as he was by the behavior itself, I think Paul might have been even more flabbergasted by the response that the church had had toward this sin.

And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. (1 Corinthians 5:2 NKJV)

They were "puffed up" (proud!). Verse 6 says that they were "glorying" in this (bragging!). Now, doesn't that make you wonder? Doesn't that make you ask yourself "why in the world would they be puffed up about this thing"... how could they be "glorying" in something like this?

In thinking about this, I can come up with three possible reasons why they might be "proud" about a sin like this in their midst.

1. One possibility is that they were proud of their "tolerance" of other people. If that's the case this would be very similar to many churches in our society today, which proudly proclaim that they're tolerant of all lifestyles and behaviors, whether the Bible proclaims that behavior is something that is sinful or not.

But, we are never to be tolerant of sin. We love sinners, but hate sin. We do everything we can to evangelize and win sinners, and, God helping us, we strive as believers to live holy and pure lives as much as is humanly possible.

Sin is not to be tolerated. We are to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." Jesus said "be therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." That's the standard!

2. Another possibility, and maybe this is somewhat redundant with the first, is that these Corinthians were proud of their liberty in Christ. In other words they thought this was a matter of "we're under grace but not under law," and therefore they were allowing it to occur, and proudly so. In other words it was an example of "we are under grace not under law" run amuck.

QUOTE - "Your boasting is not good" This comment helps interpret the attitude of the Corinthian church. They were claiming a freedom and license based on the gospel. They wanted to flaunt their new freedom instead of providing a gospel witness to their community. (Utley)

Paul dealt with this nonsense in his letter to the Romans.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:1-4, NKJV)

The fact that we are under grace and not under law, does not in any way give us license to violate the moral law of God. Christians are under obligation to live as much as is possible according to the standard that God has laid down in the 10 Commandments.

3. A third possibility, and one that seems favored by several commentators, is that what Paul was saying was "you guys are proud of your gifted teachers, and divided over things like which teacher is best, when this kind of garbage is occurring in your midst." In this view, then, he was referring back to their pride as discussed in chapters 1-4.

QUOTE - puffed up—with your own wisdom and knowledge, and the eloquence of your favorite teachers: at a time when ye ought to be “mourning” at the scandal caused to religion by the incest. (Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 1 Co 5:2.)

QUOTE - Your glorying in your own attainments and those of your favorite teachers (1Co 3:21; 4:19; 5:2), while all the while ye connive at such a scandal, is quite unseemly. (Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 1 Co 5:6.)

So, there are three possible reasons why they would be proud over of this terrible situation. Perhaps you can think of more.

But regardless of WHY it was so, their response to this sin had been, that they were puffed up. They were proud. They were glorying in it, which would indicate they were actually bragging about it! Amazing! But notice that Paul says they should have mourned. I thought about preaching an entire sermon on that little phrase, “you have not rather mourned”. For it tells us very plainly, what their response should have been.

“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26, NKJV)

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:1–2, NKJV)

So, their correct response should have been mourning, and sorrow, that such a thing would occur in the midst of the church... That a brother in Christ was so enslaved to sin in his life.

But Paul doesn't stop there, and says that their response should've extended to removing this man from the midst of their church. *“That he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you” (vs. 2)* was the ultimate response that Paul indicated should have taken place. This referred to church discipline, excommunication from at least the Lord's Supper, and perhaps from all fellowship with the church.

Paul goes further than just merely suggesting that they put him out of the church, but actually commands them to do so in verses 3-5, invoking his authority as an apostle in doing so. He tells them to *deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (vs. 5)* In other words, remove him from the protection of the church and put him into the world under the influence of Satan.

ILLUS - Do you remember the story of Achan in the Old Testament? Joshua had led the Israelites in a great victory over Jericho. The walls had come a-tumblin' down, and that great fortress of a city had been defeated. Then the Israelites went out against the tiny little insignificant town of Ai. (Think Randolph) And they got their lunch handed to them. These proud warriors who had just defeated Jericho ran like girls before the men of Ai. Joshua fell on his face before God and asked “WHY?” Notice God's answer to Joshua in *Joshua 7:10-13 - So the LORD said to Joshua: “Get up! Why do you lie thus on your face? 11 Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. For they have even taken some of the accursed things, and have both stolen and deceived; and they have also put it among their own stuff. 12 Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they have become doomed to destruction. Neither will I be with you anymore, unless you destroy the accursed from among you. 13 Get up, sanctify the people, and say, ‘Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD God of Israel: “There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.”*

You see, one man, Achan, had disobeyed God. God had said that Jericho was to be destroyed, and nothing to be taken as spoil. Achan disobeyed and took some of the spoil from Jericho. That one little sin affected

not only Achan, but everybody, and resulted in God allowing their defeat at Ai. You can read about the rest of the story of Achan in *Joshua 6-7*.

And so, Paul is saying here, there is sin in the camp, and it needs to be dealt with. Being puffed up and proud of your tolerance, or your liberty in Christ or your tremendous knowledge, is ridiculous. You need to get the sin out of the camp. You need to exercise discipline in this matter. Paul is teaching, perhaps as clearly as anywhere we find in the New Testament, the importance of practicing church discipline.

Now Jesus himself, in *Matthew 18:15-20*, gives us the formula that we use in practicing church discipline. For sake of time, this morning, I'm not going to go into detail on just how it is to be practiced, and what steps are involved. I'll let you read that on your own. It's pretty clear.

But I dare not leave the subject, though, before making sure we understand the PURPOSE of church discipline. Church discipline is not meant to hurt people. It is not meant to punish people. It is meant to help people.

Remember... never forget... write it on your soul in letters of fire - GOD LOVES YOU. God is love. He is light. In Him is NO DARKNESS at all. God is PERFECTLY (and you need to meditate on that word PERFECTLY for a while) just. He NEVER does anything to hurt or hinder or harm you in anyway.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV)

And so, the PURPOSE of church discipline is ALWAYS the restoration of the sinner. The problem with TOLERATING the sin, is it confirms the sinner in his position, and leaves him there. It does nothing to help him out of that sin. I like how MacArthur puts it:

QUOTE - the unrepentant person may suffer greatly under God's judgment, but will not be an evil influence in the church; and he will more likely be saved under that judgment than if tolerated and excepted in the church. (MacArthur Study Bible)

That's the goal - his restoration... his repentance... his walk with God.

Paul will return to this topic, and even to this very incident, in *2 Corinthians*. In that letter he will stress that with the repentance of the sinner, the purpose of discipline has been fulfilled, and the person should be welcomed back into fellowship. Notice:

"But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." (2 Corinthians 2:5–11, NKJV)

A reminder and a warning.

(cf. vs. 6-8)

ILLUS - I remember a sermon preached at the Arlington Memorial Baptist Church in Akron by Rev. Don Davies. I don't remember if this was his text or not but it might've been. As he took to the pulpit I noticed that on a small table next to the pulpit he had a large mass of something white. He made no mention of this, but as he proceeded to preach to us about the effect of sin in the life of the church, all of us began eventually to notice that that white mass was growing in size. It turned out to be bread dough, and it rose throughout his sermon until by the end of the sermon it had gone over the edges of the table and was

dropping in large chunks onto the floor. I'm sure the janitor was pleased. I'm also sure that very few people in attendance that they will forget the picture. It's the same picture Paul is painting here.

Sin is like yeast. A little bit of it permeates and grows and influences. As a matter of fact just about every place where yeast, (or leaven, to use the Biblical term) is mentioned in the Bible, it is a picture of sin. That's not true of every reference to leaven, for there are couple of places where Jesus used it in different ways, but as a general rule leaven in the Bible is a picture of sin.

QUOTE - a little yeast soon permeates the whole batch of dough. A small sickness can eventually kill a body. The need for church discipline is based on the same principle. (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-), 1 Co 5:6.

PAUL'S WARNING - If left alone, a single tolerated sin can and will permeate and poison the entire church.

So, in order to prevent the sin of this one man, from permeating the church, infecting the church, and causing harm to others in the church, he needed to be removed from their midst.

A clarification and a summary

(cf. vss. 9-13)

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. (1 Corinthians 5:9 NKJV)

Paul had written a previous letter to the Corinthian church, which we no longer have access to. But in that letter he had addressed separation from unconfessed sin, and the Corinthians had apparently misunderstood what he was talking about, and thought he was talking about separating from lost people, or the sinful world. But that was not his point at all. So, he clarified that now.

Let me see if I can paraphrase his thoughts a little bit from this passage.

We are supposed to go into the lost world, and preach the gospel, and win them to Jesus. (cf. *Matthew 28:18f; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8*) We can't do that if we don't go to them. So Paul's teaching on separation from unconfessed sin was not meant to keep us away from the world, but to ensure purity within the church.

The lost are outside, according to verse 12. The saved are inside. Paul's consideration here in this matter of church discipline is only with those who are inside. Those who are part of the church. Those who are outside, are under the judgment of God, and Paul is content to leave them to his judgment. (by the way, this passage clarifies for us that the woman in question was an unsaved person. There is no mention of discipline toward her at all, because she was not inside, but rather outside. She was lost.)

QUOTE - "Those on the outside are for God to judge and believers to evangelize." (MacArthur Study Bible)

One last comment from this section which is important to notice. He has been dealing with very specific and serious sin - incest... Sexual sin. But notice that in this section he adds several other sins to the list, and adds even more sins to the list the second time around!

So, Paul was not just saying here that church discipline, or keeping the church pure, is something that applies to the area of sexual sin. He was saying it applies to sin. Period.

Conclusion:

Well, this has not been an easy passage to talk about. And I thank you for your patience and attention as we've labored through it this morning. But it is important that we preach the whole truth from the word

of God, and that we shy away from none of it. I want to make certain that I as your pastor, deliver the package, whole, and with everything in it that God intended you to receive.

I have tried to be faithful to that, this morning.

But in closing, we need to ask ourselves, what does this mean to us? How do we apply these hard truths, both in our church, and in our hearts?

Some thoughts:

As a church, we need to work at keeping ourselves pure. We need to faithfully practice church discipline, if needed. In 5 years here, we have not had to do it, and I hope we never do. But the leadership must be willing to be obedient in this, and the church body needs to support the leadership if it ever comes up.

As individual believers, we need to work at keeping ourselves pure. Let us not put our brothers and sisters in this position... let us work every day of our lives to be clean and pure before God... and when we sin, and we will, let us keep short accounts with God. *If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. (1 Corinthians 11:31) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)*

Finally... We need to remember that EVERYTHING God does is meant to draw us closer to Him. When He demands a sinning member be removed from fellowship and thrown out into the world, it is so, like the prodigal son, he will come to his senses and return to a right walk with God. It is for his good... everything God does is for our good.

He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die in your place on the cross. In doing so He demonstrated just how serious He is about drawing you to Him. He will stop at nothing to win your heart. He loves you. He gave His Son for you. He will woo you every minute of your life if need be to get you to turn to Him. If that means disciplining you for a bit to get your attention, He will do it.

Chapter 9. Gaining By Losing

READ - *1 Corinthians 6:1-8*

TEXT - *Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? (1 Corinthians 6:7)*

THEME - Christians should be willing to suffer personal loss that others might come to Christ... that others might be saved.

Introduction:

ILLUS - During the Revolutionary War there lived in Pennsylvania a pastor by the name of Peter Miller. Although Miller was greatly loved by everyone in the community, there was one man who lived near the church who hated him and had earned an unenviable reputation for his abuse of the minister. This man was not only a hater of the church, but it also turned out that he was a traitor to his country, and was convicted of treason and sentenced to death.

The trial was conducted in Philadelphia, and no sooner did Miller hear of it than he set out on foot to visit General Washington and interceded for the man's life. But Washington told him, "I'm sorry that I cannot grant your request for your friend."

"Friend!" Miller cried. "Why, that man is the worst enemy I have in the world!"

"What?" the general exclaimed in surprise. "Have you walked sixty miles to save the life of an enemy? That, in my judgment, puts the matter in a different light. I will grant him a pardon for your sake."

The pardon was made out and signed by General Washington, and Miller proceeded at once on foot to a place fifteen miles distant where the execution was scheduled to take place that afternoon. He arrived just as the man was being carried to the scaffold, and when he saw Miller hurrying toward the place, remarked, "There is old Peter Miller. He has walked all the way from Ephrata to have his revenge gratified today by seeing me hung." But scarcely had he spoken the words when Miller pushed his way through to the condemned man and handed him the pardon that saved his life. (Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).

What effect do you think such a thing would have on the pardoned man?

In *chapter 6* we come to some important truth about how we handle wrongs done us... how we respond when people treat us wrongly or unfairly. The Corinthians had chosen an approach, and Paul spends some time in the first 8 verses pointing out the flaws in their approach. Their approach when wronged was apparently to take the other party to court! SUE!

But Paul does not agree with that approach, and in some very strong terms he condemns it here. Let's notice what he says:

What kind of testimony is this?

Paul starts out with another expression of incredulity. "Dare any of you?" If he had issued a statement rather than a question, it would have been "How dare you!"

Paul couldn't be much clearer than he is in these verses. Christians ought not to be taking each other to court over trivial matters! Consider the language he uses:

How dare you? (vs. 1)

I say this to your shame. (vs. 5)

How can it be? (vs. 5 - my paraphrase)

... it is an utter failure for you... (vs. 7)

you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren! (vs. 8)

So, Paul is not happy that such a thing is occurring. And he issues strong words condemning it, here.

If you're new to FBC, let me encourage you to check out the various church websites and tools that are available to you. The Constitution and Bylaws, containing our statement of faith, is always available online. I mention it now because we have a clause in our statement of faith which deals with this very issue.

WE BELIEVE that Christians are prohibited from bringing civil lawsuits against other Christians or the church to resolve personal disputes. (1 Corinthians 6:18, Ephesians 4:31-32)

It's interesting that we used the words "civil lawsuits" and "personal disputes" in that statement, and it fits nicely with Paul's teaching here, for it seems that Paul was not prohibiting ANY use of the legal system amongst Christians. The word "matter" in *vs. 1* appears to refer to civil issues, matters of minor import. Most sources I consulted seemed to agree it did not refer to the more serious area of criminal law. And so, on the one hand we don't want to go too far with this, but we also don't want to miss his point - Christians ought not to be taking every little dispute before the courts of the world.

And that last phrase - "before the courts of the world" gets to one of Paul's concerns. I think he was reminding the Corinthians that this was a matter of their testimony before the world!

Twice he says, *... before the unrighteous... (vs. 1), ... before unbelievers! (vs. 6)*

QUOTE - The church at Corinth was rapidly losing its testimony in the city. Not only did the unsaved know about the immorality in the assembly, but they were also aware of the lawsuits involving members of the church. (Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996))

In *chapter 5* we learned of gross sin that was not only taking place within the church, but was tolerated and even celebrated there. Such a thing was ruining the testimony of the church before the world. But here now we see that it doesn't take gross sin to ruin the testimony of the church. Bickering believers can do that just fine!

... before the unrighteous... before unbelievers!

QUOTE - Better to be cheated and wronged than to bring the name of the Lord Jesus into disrepute. (Derek Prime)

ILLUS - The following story from author Leonard Sweet highlights the importance of valuing our relationships with other people:

Tom Wiles served a stint as university chaplain at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona. A few years ago, he picked me up at the Phoenix airport in his new Ford pickup and whisked me away to keynote a leadership conference at the university. Since I was still mourning the trade-in of my Dodge truck, we immediately bonded, sharing truck stories and laughing at the bumper-sticker truism: "Nothing is more beautiful than a man and his truck."

As I climbed into his 2002 Ranger for the ride back to the airport a day later, I noticed two big scrapes by the passenger door. "What happened here?" I asked. "My neighbor's basketball post fell and left those dents and white scars," Tom replied with a downcast voice.

"You're kidding! How awful," I commiserated. "This truck is so new I can smell it." "What's even worse is my neighbor doesn't feel responsible for the damage." Rising to my newfound friend's defense, I said, "Did you contact your insurance company? How are you going to get him to pay for it?"

"This has been a real spiritual journey for me," Tom replied. "After a lot of soul-searching and discussions with my wife about hiring an attorney, it came down to this: I can either be in the right, or I can be in a relationship with my neighbor. Since my neighbor will probably be with me longer than this truck, I decided that I'd rather be in a relationship than be right. Besides, trucks are meant to be banged up, so I got mine initiated into the real world a bit earlier than I expected."

Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question...Into the Mystery* (Waterbrook Press, 2004), p. 91-92; submitted by Michael Batdorf, Harrisburg, Illinois

QUOTE - Paul was not worried about believers being treated unfairly, but about exposing Christian problems before unbelievers. The Spirit, not pagan law, is the key to interpersonal relationships in the church. Evangelism is more important than personal justice! (Robert James Dr. Utley, vol. Volume 6, *Paul's Letters to a Troubled Church: I and II Corinthians, Study Guide Commentary Series* (Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, 2002), 69.)

QUOTE - To take the problems of Christians and discuss them before the "unjust" and "unbelievers" was to weaken the testimony of the Gospel. (Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996), 1 Co 6:1.)

I wonder, church, do we care more about the testimony of the Lord's church than about our own personal injustices? I wonder, is it important to us to see our neighbor saved?

Don't you know who you are?

Paul uses that phrase "Don't you know?" 6 times in *I Corinthians*. And each time he is reminding them of something that should have been clearly known to them... something that he had previously taught them.

Don't you know that the saints will judge the world? ... the world will be judged by you... (vs. 2)

Do you not know that we shall judge angels? (vs. 3)

Paul had apparently taught these truths enough that he considered it obvious... something they should have been well aware of as believers.

Do YOU know, church, that we will judge the world? That we will judge angels?

The Bible does refer to a judgment yet to come for angels:

“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;” (Jude 6 NKJV)

“For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;” (2 Peter 2:4 NKJV)

And the Bible does indicate that the saints... the saved... will somehow participate in that judgment, as well as the judgment of the world:

“until the Ancient of Days came, and a judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom.” (Daniel 7:22, NKJV)

“So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matthew 19:28, NKJV) “that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”” (Luke 22:30, NKJV) (NOTE - Those two verses seem specific to the 12 apostles)

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Revelation 3:21, NKJV)

These verses raise a lot of questions, don't they? But in spite of the questions they bring to mind, they tell us something clearly - we will somehow be involved in the judgment of far greater disputes than those the Corinthians were struggling with, and those we struggle with in our churches today. Paul was simply making the point that those tasked with judging the world shouldn't have to go outside their own courtroom to find judges competent to handle their own little disputes!

ILLUS - Currently, there is a TV program entitled "Who do you think you are?" It traces the genealogies of various celebrities.

Paul is basically asking these Corinthians, "Who do you think you are?" OR, more to the point, "Don't you KNOW who you are?"

And his "don't you know who you are" argument comes to a head, I think, in vs. 4, where he basically says that the least qualified believer is better equipped than the most qualified unbeliever to judge issues between church members.

QUOTE - This is a difficult verse to translate, as suggested by the widely varying Eng. renderings. But the basic meaning is clear: when Christians have earthly quarrels and disputes among themselves, it is inconceivable that they would turn to those least qualified (unbelievers) to resolve the matter. The most legally untrained believers, who know the Word of God and are obedient to the Spirit, are far more competent to settle disagreements between believers than the most experienced unbeliever, void of God's truth and Spirit.

You can win a battle and still lose the war!

The first half of verse 7 is interesting - *Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you...*

Notice he doesn't call it SIN. He calls it FAILURE.

"Whether you win in the secular courts or not, you've LOST!"

"Whether you succeed in your claims against fellow believers or not, you've FAILED!"

QUOTE - Sometimes it's worse to win a fight than to lose. (Billy Holiday, U.S. jazz singer (1915–1959))

Jesus said we should forgive our brothers who trespass against us. (Lord's Prayer)

He said, 38 *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'* 39 *But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.* (Matthew 5:38–42 NKJV)

Paul was reminding the Corinthians that they might win a bit in court, but in their walk with God... in their obedience to Christ... they were losing big. They might win the battle, but they were losing the war.

Conclusion:

And so, Paul argues in this section that the practice - apparently commonplace at Corinth - of believers taking their personal disputes to the court of the unbelievers, was to be avoided.

Such a practice marred their testimony. It made a mockery of the fact these were believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, and more than competent to handle their own affairs. And even if it resulted in what appeared to be victory, because it was disobedience to Christ's teachings, it was ultimately a defeat.

That brings us to what I think are perhaps Paul's strongest arguments - the two piercing questions he asked - *Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?* (vs. 7)

Christians should simply care more about the gospel... about reaching others... about the cause of Christ... about the testimony of the church, than they do their own petty issues.

QUOTE - Those related by faith needed to settle their disputes like brothers, not adversaries (cf. Gen. 13:7-9). (John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-)

ILLUS - Abram and Lot - *"And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land. So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."*" (Genesis 13:7–9, NKJV)

Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? (vs. 7)

Christians have been forgiven EVERYTHING, and so should be examples of forgiving ANYTHING.

READ - *Matthew 18:21-35*

Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? (vs. 7)

Oh how easy to forget all we've been forgiven!

ILLUS - I read a story about when Moravian missionaries first went to the Eskimos. They wanted to explain the concept of forgiveness, but they could not find a word in their language for it. So, they had

to compound one. It turned out to be: Issumagijoujungnainermik. It is a formidable-looking assembly of letters, but an expression that has a beautiful connotation for those who understand it. It means: “Not-being-able-to-think-about-it-anymore.” (Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).)

Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? (vs. 7)

ILLUS - During the Korean war, a South Korean Christian, a civilian, was arrested by the communists and ordered shot. But when the young communist leader learned that the prisoner was in charge of an orphanage caring for small children, he decided to spare him and kill his son instead. So they shot the nineteen-year-old boy in the presence of his father. Later the fortunes of war changed, and the young communist leader was captured by the United Nations forces, tried, and condemned to death. But before the sentence could be carried out, the Christian whose boy had been killed pleaded for the life of the killer. He declared that he was young, that he really did not know what he was doing. “Give him to me,” said the father, “and I’ll train him.” The United Nations forces granted the request, and that father took the murderer of his boy into his own home and cared for him. Today the young communist is a Christian pastor. (Paul Lee Tan, Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996).)

I wonder how many have been saved by Christians, such as that South Korean believer, truly living their faith... to the point of personal inconvenience and loss? And I wonder how many will be in hell because what they see in Christians is the opposite - bickering and fighting amongst each other over trivial issues.

QUOTE - One of the greatest tests of the degree of a person’s transformation into the likeness of Christ is his reaction to the one who does evil to him. (Herschel H. Hobbs, My Favorite Illustrations (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1990), 101.)

It's all through the Bible... shot through it's pages:

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18, NKJV)

“Do not say, “I will recompense evil”; Wait for the LORD, and He will save you.” (Proverbs 20:22, NKJV)

“Do not say, “I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work.”” (Proverbs 24:29, NKJV)

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.” (Romans 12:17, NKJV)

“not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.” (1 Peter 3:9, NKJV)

The Corinthians had it wrong on a variety of fronts. Let us learn from them that often it's better to accept wrong. Let us learn from them that often it's best to let ourselves be cheated. Let us learn from them that Christians should be willing to suffer personal loss that others might come to Christ... that others might be saved.

Chapter 10. "Were"

READ - *1 Corinthians 6:9-20*

TEXT - *And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11 NKJV)*

THEME - You are not what you once were, so live not as you once lived!

Introduction:

I have developed several complete sermons based on this passage this week, and couldn't get my heart around any of them. I just kept stopping and starting over again in my mind.

So... I've decided this morning to preach them all to you. Would you like that? No, I did not think so.

I think the problem has been, that there are several important words or phrases or thoughts that jump out at us from this passage.

For example, there is the word "homosexual" which jumps out at us. I'm sure all of you sat up a little straighter in your seats when you heard that word read from the pulpit, as did I when I was studying and preparing for today's message. Think of all the lies and misinformation that surrounds that particular word in our culture today! Think of the fact that there are many in our society who believe I should be thrown in jail for mentioning it in a negative way from the pulpit... even for simply reading this passage! I suppose it was partly because of these things that I found myself consumed this week with thoughts about how God would have me preach this message on homosexuality!

Another thought that leaps from this passage deals with the matter of our "liberty in Christ." As I pondered and prayed over these words this week, I couldn't help but notice how wonderfully Paul dealt with the confusion that exists around that issue. I came to believe that these verses might be one of the key passages in understanding the tension that exists in the Christian walk concerning this matter of our "liberty in Christ."

Just those two thoughts alone could be (and maybe should be) dealt with separately... separate sermons.

But, as I wrestled with those two key thoughts (and I do think they are key thoughts in this passage), I became increasingly convinced that neither of them is THE key thought in this message. There is another thought here, which I think surrounds and explains and acts as an umbrella over top of these two important issues, and even over the entire chapter.

So... here is how we'll tackle this passage this morning. We dare not ignore the word homosexual, which appears here. With it being such a prominent topic in America and our world, we must talk about it. So, we'll make that point number one. And there is enough confusion surrounding the liberty that we have in Christ, that I cannot, in good conscience skip that part of the text, either. So, we'll make that point number two. And in point number three, we'll talk about what I believe is the main thing in this chapter, and perhaps a key to understanding all that Paul is saying to us in *chapter 6* - we're not what we once were.

First, let's talk about homosexuality.

cf. *vss. 9-10*

We have been sold a bunch of lies when it comes to this matter of homosexuality. We have been told that homosexuality is a "choice" or a "lifestyle." It is, of course, both of those, but that's not all it is. We have

been told that those with homosexual tendencies are born with the tendency... that it is somehow genetic... that it's just the way some people are wired. That may be partially true, too, for after all sin is genetic... all sin is hereditary!

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (Romans 5:12 NKJV)

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18–19 NKJV)

ALL sin is hereditary, to a point. We all inherited the tendency to sin... our "sin nature." And as such, homosexuality, like any other sin, is hereditary in nature. But that, too, is only part of the truth.

The plain and simple truth of scripture is that homosexuality is sin. The sin of homosexuality is plainly discussed in these verses. There are two words used here, which taken together describe both sides of a homosexual relationship. And it is impossible to read this passage and believe that God is in any way condoning the activity. This passage plainly describes sinful activity. And homosexuality is described as sin everywhere it is mentioned in Scripture.

"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." (Leviticus 18:22, NKJV)

"If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them." (Leviticus 20:13, NKJV)

"knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine," (1 Timothy 1:9–10, NKJV)

ILLUS - In just over a month, now, a handful of us will travel, Lord willing, to Israel. This will mark my third trip to the Holy Land, and I can say that the first two times there were some sights that definitely stuck in my mind and affected my thinking as I read scripture. The garden tomb, for one, is just wonderful. To step into that tomb, which is believed by many to be the actual place the body of Christ was placed, and from which He burst forth in resurrection glory, is breathtaking. There is another sight that always speaks to my heart. Masada is a mountain that stands overlooking the southernmost point of the Dead Sea. Herod built a massive fortress on top of it. It is kind of like the Alamo is to us, in that it was the site of a valiant last stand by a band of Jewish zealots during the Maccabean period (i.e. the time between the Old and New Testaments, of which our Bible does not expressly speak). Where we say, "Remember the Alamo," the Israelis say, "Masada will never fall again." All fascinating stuff, and just amazing to see. But the part that always strikes me is not the mountain, but what you see when you look down from the mountain. From that height you can see the Dead Sea laid out below you like a map. You are looking at the location where Sodom and Gomorrah once existed. You are looking down at a spot which, prior to God's judgment of those two cities, is referred to in Scripture as lush and beautiful. *"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar."* (Genesis 13:10, NKJV) And as you look at it now, i.e. AFTER God's judgment fell and destroyed those two cities, there is not a DEADER spot on the face of this earth. It is stunning to see it, and compare it in your mind to that verse describing its prior lushness. It screams to you about God's attitude toward sin!

I share that illustration only to point out that homosexuality was part of the reason the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were so dramatically destroyed. I wouldn't be honest with my Bible if I said homosexuality was the only reason for that judgment. Nor would I be honest if I said it played no part. You are intelligent people. Read the account on your own in *Genesis 18-19* and see if you don't agree.

No, the Bible is clear. Homosexuality is a real issue described in real and clear terms. And it is always referred to as sin. Is it a choice? Of course... all sin is. Is it a tendency with which a person is born? Of course... all sin is. But the key point is, it is sin.

Now, let's stop here and make sure we are absolutely clear about a couple of things:

1. Paul is NOT saying in *vss. 9-10* that homosexuals don't *inherit the kingdom of God*.

He IS saying that SINNERS don't *inherit the kingdom of God*. His point is not to single out a particular sin as somehow worse than any others, but rather to point out that those who die as sinners die lost, go to hell, and miss out on the kingdom of God.

Look at the list of sins in *vs. 10!*

Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 NKJV)

Yep homosexuality IS in that list... so is a couple living together outside of marriage... so is the viewing of pornography... so is putting things ahead of God in your life (idolatry)... so is being discontented with what God has given you (covetous)... so is drunkenness... so is saying unkind things about others (revilers)... so is dishonesty and cheating (extortioners)! It's a pretty comprehensive list, and I doubt any of us escape finding ourselves somewhere in it some of the time.

Paul is reminding the Corinthians of what they were saved from. And some of them had been saved out of homosexuality. ALL had been saved out of sin.

2. REDEMPTION is the point here. *Such WERE some of you, but you were washed.... (vs. 11)* We'll come back to this verse in a minute, but we must notice it's import before leaving this first point.

God loves sinners (and that includes homosexuals). It is not inconsistent to recognize that God hates sin but loves the sinner. He loves sinners so much that He sent His Son to die in their place... to cover their sin... atone for their sin... pay the debt owed for their sin! God LOVES sinners... just like you... just like me... and just like homosexuals.

Such were some of you, Corinthians, but God saved you, redeemed you, washed you, set you apart for Him, and declared you forever and totally righteous!

Second, let's discuss our liberty in Christ.

cf. *vss. 12-20*

There is a common problem that runs throughout *chapter 6*. The Corinthian believers were not living like Christians, but rather like the world. They were, although saved, living as sinners. Whether we consider their bickering, squabbling, and taking each other to court (*vss. 1-8*), or the list of sinful behaviors that Paul applies to them in (*vss. 9-10*), the fact of their sinful lifestyles is evident. These were SAVED PEOPLE... people who had believed on and been saved by faith in Jesus Christ. But they were living like the lost world around them, dabbling in sin.

And apparently, they thought such was perfectly acceptable behavior. They had even come up with a way to back their thinking from the Bible!

All things are lawful for me... (vs. 12) was apparently a common saying that they were using to justify their behavior.

We wouldn't say, "All things are lawful for me" today. We would rather, say, "I have liberty in Christ" - a phrase heard often in evangelical churches.

But they were presuming upon their liberty in Christ. Paul did not deny their point. We DO have liberty in Christ. We ARE under grace, and not the law. Their argument was, "I'm saved... eternally secure... and nothing I now do in the flesh will send me to hell (all of which were true), so I'm free to do as I please. Technically, they were right.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ. (Romans 8:1)

Paul didn't deny the technical truth of their statements. But neither did he compliment them on it, for though it was technically true, it was still far from where they ought to have been.

Paul pointed out that there are other considerations to weigh against the "All things are lawful" or "I have liberty in Christ" argument:

1. Just because it's LEGAL doesn't mean it's GOOD... helpful... or profitable.
2. Just because it's LEGAL doesn't mean it's SAFE... for many things control and enslave us in the flesh.
Especially true of sexual sin. Notice it's one of only a couple things we are told to FLEE.
3. Just because it's LEGAL doesn't mean it GLORIFIES GOD.

Your body is meant for God - all three members of the Trinity, the Son, vs. 15... The Spirit, vs. 19... And the Father, vs. 20.

Consider the argument - how do I take this body, which belongs to God, and use it in a way that so displeases Him? These hands, feet, eyes, mouth, mind - they are the instruments Christ wants to use to reach my world (vs. 15). Is it right for me to use them instead for sinful purposes? This body is a temple... indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. (vs. 19) Is it right to drag the Spirit of God around to sinful places and activities? This body does not belong to me... it is God's! He bought it! He PAID A PRICE for it! It is meant to bring Him glory! (vs. 20)

So, although we have liberty in Christ, that truth must be weighed against the higher standard according to which Christians should live their lives.

READ - *1 Corinthians 10:31*

We've seen then, that there is a thought in this passage about homosexuality... but not just about homosexuality... rather SIN in general. We've seen, also, that there is a thought in this passage about our liberty in Christ... that while technically we have such glorious liberty, we ought to live to a higher standard.

Let's notice one last, and I think most important, thought.

Above all, let's remember that we are not what we once WERE.

I've come to believe that vs. 11 is the main thought of the passage:

And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:11 NKJV)

There are a lot of important phrases and thoughts and words in this passage. But I think there is one word here which is more important than all the rest put together. That is the little word "WERE". I see it mentioned 5 times in vs. 11,20 Notice that word... meditate on its import... it is, in the context of these verses, an absolutely WONDERFUL word.

A thought arises from that word which clarifies everything else Paul is saying in this chapter. You are not what you once were, so live not as you once lived!

In the first 8 verses we learned that Christians don't take Christians to court over trivial matters. Why not, Christian? Because you were changed, and your priorities have changed. The glory of God and the reputation of the church, and the evangelism of the lost are far more important to the believer than trivial petty issues. You are not what you once were, so live not as you once lived!

Christians have been saved from all kinds of things. The sin that so easily besets us is common to us all. But we strive to put away sin, and live for the glory of God. Why? Because we are not what we once were! How can we live as we once lived?

Christians CAN technically do anything they want to do, for we have liberty in Christ. But we DON'T! Why? Because we live now to a higher standard than the law... because we are not what we once were, and we therefore ought not live as we once lived!

I've been changed!
I've been newborn!
All my life has been rearranged.
What a difference it made
When the Lord came and stayed
In my life...
Oh yes, I've been changed!

If any man be in Christ... new...

"Oh Corinthians," Paul says. Look at what God has done for you! How can you not live to His glory now?

You WERE enslaved to all kinds of sins. You WERE lost and undone. You WERE sinners, with your eternal destiny set for hell. You WERE alienated from God... enemies of God... LOST FOREVER.

But then, Glory to God, you WERE washed.

"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit," (Titus 3:3-5, ESV)

And then, you WERE sanctified! You were set apart to be His special treasure... His adopted child.

And then, you WERE justified. You were declared to be forever and totally righteous... just... without sin in His eyes.

Oh the power in that little word "WERE"!

We are NOT what we once WERE, so let us not live as we once lived! Let us now live to a higher standard... let us now live up to what we ARE - blood bought, blood washed, holy, sanctified, and justified children of the King!

I believe Paul was teaching that if the Corinthians would live according to that truth, they would not be bickering and squabbling with each other... they would not be living according to the sins they were saved from... and they would not be making excuses to justify living a life that did not glorify the God Who saved them. They would live to a higher standard. They would live up to what they ARE, rather than what they WERE.

Conclusion:

Let me end with a question, this morning. What does that little word "WERE" mean to you?

Can you say that you WERE once a sinner, but no longer? Can you echo the hymnwriter's words:

I was once a sinner,
But I came,
Pardon to receive from my Lord.
This was freely given,
And I found,
That He always kept His word.

Do you know that there was a time when you WERE washed in the blood of the Lamb? Do you KNOW that there was a time when you WERE adopted into the family... set apart to God? Do you know that there was a time when you WERE justified... made clean and just and righteous by Jesus Christ?

If yes, then you can rejoice with the rest of us who WERE lost and are now found... who WERE on their way to hell, but now look forward to heaven and it's joys forever.

But if your answer is no, then I want to encourage you this morning... I want to share some wonderful news with you... I want to tell you that it's not too late for you!

God can save and clean up anybody. Look at that list in *vss. 9-10* again. You are in there. I am in there. Everybody who has ever been saved is in there. God saves sinners and He wants to save you. You don't have to stay where you are.

Is your burden heavy as you bear it all alone?
Does the road you travel harbor dangers yet unknown?
Are you growing weary in the struggle of it all?
Jesus will help you, when on His name you call.

He said, *"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."* (John 6:37, NKJV)

Oh that the Holy Spirit would help me convince you of the importance of this!

ILLUS - I have been a little down lately... the devil has been working on me mightily, as he often does with preachers. I thank God for those of you who pray for me, for without your prayers I would not stand. This past week I was sitting at my desk at work, and I was really in a funk... thumb-sucky... really and truly being oppressed by the enemy. And then I seemed to sense the Savior whisper in my ear, "Do you remember what day it is?" It was May 3rd - my 42nd spiritual birthday, and as I pondered the fact that I "WAS" lost, but no more, all those little frustrations disappeared into joy. In my mind's eye, I went back to the day I knelt right here and said, "Jesus, I am a sinner... but I've been told that you died on the cross to save sinners, and I want you to save me." He did. Praise the Lord.

Hear me this morning... hear God this morning. He is calling to sinners. No matter what the situation in your life, you can be WASHED cleaner than clean and whiter than snow... you can be SANCTIFIED and you can be JUSTIFIED.

Ask Him for it this morning. Join those of us who can say "We are not what we WERE..."

Chapter 11. Why I've Changed My Mind About Corinth

READ - *1 Corinthians 7*

TEXT - *Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: (1 Corinthians 7:1 NKJV)*

THEME -

Introduction:

We come now to a dividing point in our study in 1 Corinthians. Up until this point we've been looking at problem areas that Paul needed to address. These were problem areas that were either reported to Paul by people (for example Chloe), or problems that were commonly known to exist... Common knowledge issues.

We spent quite a bit of time in dealing with two of these issues. The first four chapters of the book deal with one of those issues - division in the local church. And we spent several messages looking at that problem. And the second one was the problem of open and blatant immorality within the church. That was Chapter 5.

In chapter 6, he dealt with another perhaps less stressful issue in the matter of taking one another to court. It kind of flows out of the division that was occurring in the church, with chapter 6 showing the extent to which they had gone in that, even to taking each other to court and dragging the dirty laundry of the church before the world.

But now we come to chapter 7, and the very first phrase marks a change in what's taking place here. Notice what verse 1 says - "Now concerning the things whereof you wrote to me." We come, then, to some issues which the Corinthian church had actually written to Paul about... They had written asking questions. Chapter 7 is, therefore, in its entirety a response to questions that had been posed to Paul by some members of the Corinthian church.

And all of the questions in this chapter had to deal with marriage and related issues.

For example, they apparently asked a question something like this, "is celibacy a requirement even within marriage?" I don't know if that's the exact question they asked, but his answer seems to deal with something similar to that. Perhaps their question was more like, "is it okay for sex to occur even within marriage?" Perhaps this stemmed from the fact that Paul had laid down regulations governing sexual relationships which were so foreign to the culture of Corinth that some people had gone even further and were either confused or overly zealous and implementing them even to the extent of requiring celibacy within a marriage relationship.

ILLUS - We have seen something similar to this in our day - all one has to do is go and tour one of the now vacant Shaker villages to see this exact same thought process, along with its logical conclusion.

So, in this section Paul answered a question which was apparently something like, "Can you clarify the rightness / wrongness of sex?" And he deals with that issue in *vss. 1-9*. In *vss. 10-24* he provides insight into the matter of divorce and remarriage, so perhaps they asked something about that. And in *vss. 25f* he discusses truths related to celibacy and singleness versus marriage, and so it seems they must have asked something related to that, as well.

So what did Paul say about these things:

- *"It is good for a man not to touch a woman." (vs. 1)*

Why I've Changed My Mind About Corinth

This may have been the actual question posed by the Corinthians. Some translations put it in quotes, indicating Paul was reciting their words back to them. Or, it may have been Paul's answer to their implied question - is sex permissible within marriage.

Paul says several things in response. Celibacy is a good state. That thought is seen throughout this passage, as Paul mentions his own singleness.

But not everybody can live a celibate life. One of the benefits of marriage is that it fulfills the need for sex, and Paul says that is perfectly fine. Sex outside of marriage is the problem (*vs. 2*) and marriage solves that problem.

Not only is sex acceptable and good (honorable, if you add in the teaching from *Hebrews 13:4*) within a marriage, but Paul goes so far as to make it an obligation. Each marriage partner can expect their needs to be met in the other. Abstinence for a period of time to devote each other to prayer and fasting is good, but only for a time. Each is to fulfill the others physical needs. (*vss. 3-5*)

- Is it better to remain single?

He definitely prefers singleness, as it is his choice and one that he believes has definite advantages. cf. *vss. 7-8*

Singleness is a gift, just as marriage is a gift. Did you catch that in *vs. 7*? Some are given the gift of singleness and Paul thanked God that he had that gift.

There are advantages to it. One source I consulted put it thusly:

QUOTE - "three reasons Paul thought remaining single was a superior choice: (a) an impending time of distress for Christians (*vv. 26-28*), (b) the imminent return of Christ (*vv. 29-31*), and (c) the opportunity for undistracted service for Christ (*vv. 32-35*).

But all this is only true if you have the GIFT of singleness (*vs. 7*). And how do you know if you have that gift? Well, Paul was a very practical man, and said simply that if you can't contain yourself sexually, then you DON'T HAVE THE GIFT. (cf. *vs. 9*) Such people should get married.

Not let me add something to Paul's comments here. Nowhere does Paul commend singleness as a more happy-go-lucky and fun loving lifestyle. In our day it's increasingly common for young people to choose to not marry because they want to have more personal freedom. The phrase "friends with benefits" has crept into our vernacular to describe such a lifestyle. But notice that NOTHING in this passage is about personal freedom, and the idea of "friends with benefits" is clearly described as sinful. No, Paul's interest in celibacy and singleness is all about devoting ourselves to more ably serve God. It is a critical distinction.

His views on singleness on perhaps summed up in *vs. 35*. It's not meant to be hardship, and will not be if it is your gift. It is meant to free one to better serve God - *that you may serve the Lord without distraction*.

- What about divorce?

This was a real issue then, just as it is now. Is divorce permissible? Does it make a difference whether an unequal yoke (i.e. one of the partners is an unbeliever) is involved? If divorce does occur, is remarriage permissible?

Paul's response to these apparent questions:

In every case, the desired state is to STAY PUT. Divorce is never the will of God. cf. (*vss. 10-11*) And once divorced, remarriage is unacceptable. (NOTE that most sources I consulted indicate that the first part of *vs. 11* equally applies to men as to women.

Why I've Changed My Mind About Corinth

"But what if I'm saved and my partner is not?" Well, if the unsaved member is not seeking a divorce, the saved should not either. (vss. 12-14) For the Christian, the solution to marital conflict should not be divorce. It should be that described in:

"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32, NKJV)

If the unsaved member seeks divorce and leaves, there is no further burden placed on the saved member. They are *not under bondage* (vs. 15) and can rest in the fact that *God has called us to peace*.

"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18)

And so, if possible, Christians should not seek divorce. There are going to be exceptions, and we know Jesus listed one such exception in His teaching on this subject in *Matthew 5:32*. But always, for the believer, divorce is a last resort. And if it does occur, Paul clearly states remarriage to anybody else is then not an option.

One reason Paul suggests a saved person should strive to remain married, even when their partner is unsaved, is that they are a sanctifying influence on their partner, and may even be the cause of their salvation. (vs. 16) Peter said something similar

"Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear." (1 Peter 3:1-2, NKJV)

ILLUS - I knew a lady named Helen in New Jersey who lived with an unsaved husband for something like 30 years (exact number escapes me), and lived to see him come to Christ, testifying as he did that her unfailing witness all those years was impossible to ignore.

Now let me say something to those who may already be affected by divorce or divorce and remarriage. Notice Paul's overriding words in vs. 15 - *God has called us to peace*. Also in vs. 35 - *And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you....* Paul provided instruction in these verses in direct answer to question posed by the believers in Corinth. These things are the desired state. They tell us God's will. If you can profit from them, wonderful. They are meant to provide help to those facing the issues, not to beat up those who've already fallen to a wrong choice. If that is you, I remind you of a story.

ILLUS - Father of the prodigal son - ran to meet Him. Longed to forgive Him.

"But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared." (Psalm 130:4, NKJV)

"You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin. Selah" (Psalm 85:2, NKJV)

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9, NKJV)

God is the God of forgiveness. It matters not what we have done. He loves you, and forgives you, and runs to meet you when you turn to Him.

Already divorced... already remarried? Then I would add, that you are also already forgiven. Rejoice and go on... serve God where you are.

So... sex within marriage, divorce and remarriage, celibacy vs. marriage - there's a lot to digest in this passage isn't there? And it's highly relevant to our day and age. I encourage you to study it more fully on your own.

But in the few minutes that remain, let me switch direction a bit. Because if you looked in your bulletin you noticed the title of the sermon, and perhaps you're wondering why I titled the sermon "Why I've Changed My Mind About Corinth." Well, let me explain.

You see, I started this study with a negative view toward the church at Corinth.

For as long as I can remember I've thought poorly of this church. I have said in sermons past that I could never understand why any church would be named after this one (and there are Corinth Bible Churches and Corinth Baptist Churches, and I'm sure others...)

All that negative thought of course stems from the problems that this church had. And we've talked about those, and don't need to hash them over anymore. Corinth, like any other church, had issues.

But I've been reading chapter 7 for a bit now, praying about what God would have me teach from it. And as I read, I became more and more aware of the first phrase - "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." (1 Corinthians 7:1 NKJV). And I came to see that there are some good things I can learn about the church at Corinth from that simple phrase.

And it's caused me to change my mind about this church.

Two reasons why:

I've changed my mind about Corinth because these Christians cared about the truth.

At least some of them did.

In a culture that taught exactly the opposite of every thing Paul was teaching in regards to these things, they wanted to know what was the right way that they should live.

When they asked these questions regarding sexuality and marriage and divorce, they certainly had to know that Paul's answer was going to be different than that of their culture and of their world.

And yet they were more concerned about God's answer than the world's answer.

Ponder that thought for a minute. And ask yourself, as I've been asking myself lately whether we are the same. When we are faced with decisions about life, when we are faced with situations where the world says one thing and in our heart we know that God says another, do we care to know what God says about it?

At least some of these Corinthian's did. And they are to be commended for that.

ILLUS - I've known more than one Christian who when faced with a difficult life choice, didn't want to hear what God had to say about it. Pastor Phil has shared an experience where he was forced to confront a brother who was sinning by having an affair... but who refused to hear what God had to say on the matter, preferring to listen to other voices.

ILLUS - Sadly, far too many people when confronted with life issues, will turn to friends who have already failed for advice. Having troubles in your marriage? It's amazing how many will turn to a friend whose marriage is already over... or failing... for help, rather than to God.

ILLUS - In our culture, too many revere worldly psychologists and counselors over God's counsel. Too many people will seek first the word of the world in dealing with problems. I'm not saying psychologists are always wrong. But they should not be our FIRST choice as believers.

"But seek FIRST the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33, NKJV)

ILLUS - Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, and Jehoram, son of Ahab, was king in Israel. Jehoram asked Jehoshaphat to join him in battle against the Moabites, and they sought the Lord's will before proceeding. But Jehoram's prophets were idol worshippers... they didn't know God, nor could they speak God's Word or God's truth, and Jehoshaphat wanted to know God's will before proceeding. *"But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD by him?" So one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah.""* (2 Kings 3:11, NKJV) "WHO CARES WHAT THESE WORLDLY GURUS SAY," SAID JEHOSEPHAT. I WANT TO KNOW GOD'S MIND ON THE MATTER!"

There were at least some in Corinth who wanted to know God's will... whose overriding concern was "what has God said about it"?

Oh that all of us would be so concerned to know the will of God.

We all ought to examine ourselves this morning and ask ourselves "are we like the Corinthians in this regard?" Do we want to know God's will in matters related to our lives and how we live? Is that an important thing to us?

"Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." (1 Corinthians 7:1 NKJV)

I've changed my mind about the Corinthians because they cared about the truth enough to take action to find it.

Perhaps this is redundant with the last point, but I think there is a distinction.

It's one thing to be concerned about God's will, and it's another to actually seek to find it. These Corinthians, at least some of them, were not satisfied to just wonder what God had to say. They actively sought answers to their questions. Somebody had to call a meeting and compile a list of questions. Somebody had to write those questions down. Somebody had to arrange for those questions to get to Paul. They had to DO something in order to obtain the answers they needed.

How many of us, will take the time to actively pick up our Bible and seek the answers to the questions in our lives? We are not like the Corinthians, in that we actually have the completed Word of God in our possession. We have no excuse. The answers that God has provided are on our bookshelves, and yet I wonder how often do we actually SEEK those answers?

If we would know God's will for lives, we must not only care about the truth, we must also care about the truth enough to take action to find out that truth, by GOING TO THE SOURCE OF THAT TRUTH.

Now, I know that you probably are thinking to yourself, "Here he goes again, the preacher is always trying to get us to read our Bibles." Well, AMEN. I AM always trying to get you to read your Bibles. Because nothing is more key to your success in the Christian life than that.

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:8, NKJV)

Some of you have never developed the habit of reading the Bible daily. What will you do when the hard questions come up? Some of you used to read faithfully, but have allowed other things to supersede that discipline in your life... you don't read it like you did. Same question - what will you do when the hard questions come up?

I've changed my mind about these Corinthians because they wanted to know the truth... and they SOUGHT the truth... and they went to the one whom they knew had the truth. In their case, it was the Apostle Paul. In our case, it is the BIBLE - the Word of God.

We need to read it, we need to listen to it preached, we need to faithfully attend church where it is taught and where we are fed on the Word of God. We need to seek the truth just as these Corinthians did.

THEN, when questions arise in our lives... hard questions, such as those faced in Corinth, we will have answers that will help us.

"Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me..." (1 Corinthians 7:1 NKJV)

Conclusion:

We've talked about a lot of things this morning. Some of those things may apply to you today:

Some here this morning may relate to the Corinthians' questions about marriage. Some may struggle with sexual temptation outside of marriage. Some may struggle with sexual tensions within their marriage. Some may wonder whether they will remain single all their lives. Some may find themselves in a difficult and troublesome marriage, and hear well-meaning friends and family members suggesting they chuck it in and take the divorce route. Some may be married to an unsaved partner and struggle in ways few would know or understand.

All of these seem like extremely complicated issues. And yet, the Corinthians knew there was a source of truth. It was not found in their world. It was not found in their culture. It was to be found in God and His Word.

And that, my friend, is the same place you'll find your answers, as well.

If you're one who has heard me ridicule the Church at Corinth in the past as a problem church, accept my apology today. For as I see them, in my mind's eye, asking questions about the influence of their world around them, wanting to know what God's will is about how they live their lives, and actively seeking out the truth of God's Word, I see something I want to emulate in my life.

ILLUS - I recall a poster that hung in the cubicle of one of my coworkers when I worked at Delphi in Warren. It was a large picture of Albert Einstein, and it had the following caption, "I want to know God's thoughts."

So did the Corinthians.

The question we must ask - Do I? Do you?

Chapter 12. What Do We Worship?

READ - *1 Corinthians 8:1-13*

TEXT - “yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.” (*1 Corinthians 8:6, NKJV*)

THEME - Idolatry is a problem now, as then, and we must see it so that we might flee it.

Introduction:

We come to yet another question that the Corinthians had asked Paul. Notice *vs. 4, concerning the eating of things offered to idols*. They had asked him, apparently, whether it was right or wrong to eat meat that had been offered to idols.

In the previous chapter, they had asked, and he had responded to questions related to marriage, singleness, sexuality, divorce and remarriage.

Here now, in *chapter 8* and continuing through *chapter 10*, Paul provides guidance on their question - is it right to eat meat offered to idols.

Now, I'm guessing that some of you are thinking along these lines right about now:

"Pastor, I can understand how the issues of division and disunity and sectarianism and clique-ishness that we learned about in the first 4 chapters apply to us today. And I can understand how the issues of immorality and church discipline described in *chapter 5* apply to us today. And I can understand how the issue of taking one another to court, and dragging the church's dirty laundry before the unsaved world (as described in *chapter 6*), is relevant to us today. And I can understand how the instruction from *chapter 7* related to marriage and singleness and sex and divorce and remarriage is particularly relevant today."

"But what I can't understand, pastor, is why we need to spend any time talking about "meat offered to idols" - a topic that is clearly irrelevant to our culture."

I'm curious - anybody thinking along those lines right about now?

Well, over the next couple weeks we'll dissect Paul's arguments, and we'll see a couple of themes come out. We'll learn that there is, technically, nothing wrong with eating meat offered to an idol. (He explains that here in *chapter 8*. And we'll learn that there is a very good reason NOT to eat meat offered to an idol. (Also *chapter 8*, and continued into *chapters 9-10*. And I think we'll find that in the end, his summation will be - don't do it. (*chapter 10:14f*))

That makes sense, in light of *Acts 15:29, 21:25* where the instruction carried forth from the Jerusalem Council specifically prohibited the eating of meat offered to idols.

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” (Acts 15:28–29, NKJV)

So... the question before us has to be, is the matter of "meat offered to idols" relevant to us today? And I say, emphatically, YES. And I'll explain why in the next couple weeks. Before we tackle that question, though, let's tackle an even more fundamental one that arises from the text: Is the worship of idols relevant to us, today?

We'll consider that under 2 main points:

Idolatry **WAS** a problem.

You don't have to read very far in your Bible before you encounter the issue of idolatry. An idol is, to most people, a false god... or an image of a false god worshipped as a god. It was a phenomenon seen throughout the ancient world.

H.L. Willmington, in his "Willmington's Book of Bible Lists" chronicles 21 specific idols mentioned in the Bible. Here are some from his list:

1. Asherah, or Ashtaroth, the chief goddess of Tyre, referred to as the lady of the sea. Gideon destroyed a statue of this consort of Baal, that had been worshiped by his own father. Judg. 6:24-32
2. Ashtoreth, a Canaanite goddess, another consort of Baal. The prophet Samuel led Israel in a great revival that resulted in the people giving up the sexual practices associated with the worship of Ashtoreth. 1 Sam. 7:3-4
3. Baal, the chief deity of Canaan. The struggle between Baal and Jehovah came to a dramatic head on Mount Carmel under Elijah. Jehu later dealt a severe blow to Baalism. 1 Kings 18:17-40; 2 Kings 10:28; 11:18
5. Dagon, the chief Philistine agriculture god and father of Baal. The Ark of the Covenant destroyed an idol of Dagon in its own temple. Later, Samson would destroy the temple of Dagon. 1 Sam. 5:1-7; Judg. 16:23-30
6. Diana, or Artemis, a grotesque, many-breasted Asiatic goddess, believed to be the nursing mother of other gods, men, animals, and even plants. Paul encountered Diana while in Ephesus. She is not the same as the Diana of Roman mythology. Acts 19:27, 35
7. Jupiter, the chief Roman god, another name for the Greek god Zeus. The people of Lystra called Barnabas "Jupiter," perhaps because of his impressive appearance. Acts 14:12-13
8. Mercury, the Roman god of commerce, speed, and eloquence, and the son of Jupiter. As a messenger of the gods he had wings on his feet. Paul was mistaken for Mercury at Lystra because of his speaking abilities. Acts 14:12
9. Merodach, also called Marduk, the chief god of the Babylonian pantheon and Nebuchadnezzar's favorite god
10. Molech, the god of the Ammonites and the most horrible idol in the Scriptures. Children were sacrificed to this Semitic deity. Solomon built an altar to Molech at Tophet in the Valley of Hinnom. Later both King Ahaz and his godless grandson Manasseh sacrificed their children to this blood-demanding idol. 1 Kings

11:7; 2 Chron. 28:1-4; 33:6

12. Nebo, the Babylonian god of wisdom and literature. Isa. 46:1

13. Nishroch, the Assyrian god of Sennacherib. The king was murdered in the temple of his idol after returning from the death angel defeat at Jerusalem. 2 Kings 19:37

14. Rimmon, the Syrian god of Naaman the leper. 2 Kings 5:15-19

15. Tammuz, the husband and brother of Ishtar (Asherah), goddess of fertility. Ezek. 8:14

16. Rachel's household gods. Gen. 31:19

17. The golden calf at Sinai. Exod. 32

18. The two golden images made by King Jeroboam and set up at the shrines of Dan and Bethel. 1 Kings 12:28-31

19. The golden image in the plain of Dura. Dan. 2

20. The unknown god on Mars Hill. Acts 17

21. The statue of the Beast. Rev. 13:14

(H.L. Willmington, Willmington's Book of Bible Lists (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1987), 153-55.)

Yes, idolatry was rampant in Israel in Bible times. But what does that have to do with us? We don't see many people today sacrificing their children to Molech, or bowing the knee to Merodach, or dancing around a golden calf, or carrying their household gods around in a suitcase as Rachel did.

Nonetheless:

Idolatry IS a problem.

It is just as real a problem today as then. Our idols just have different names.

Idolatry, after all, is simply the substituting of something in the place of God. The first of God's ten commandments is "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.*" (Exodus 20:2-3, NKJV) And the second even more clearly deals with the issue: "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*" (Exodus 20:3-6, NKJV)

Now in its truest sense, an idol is an image, or some sort of physical form that represents a false god. It might have a physical form such as the golden images Jeroboam set up at Dan and Bethel. The worship of Asherah involved a wooden (probably) pole. Dagon, the idol of the Philistines was a figure that had the body of a fish and the head and hands of a man. Golden calves figured prominently. Diana of the Ephesians was represented as a grotesque many-breasted female.

But I don't think we stretch the truth to say that an idol might not have a physical form at all.

Consider some idols folks bow before in Randolph today:

1. Wealth

Some people worship the dollar. Some people's lives revolve around the accumulation of more money.

QUOTE - There is something perverse about more than enough. When we have more, it is never enough. It is always somewhere out there, just out of reach. The more we acquire, the more elusive enough becomes. –Unknown

Some simply can't get enough... they must have more...

Now don't misunderstand me this morning - there is nothing wrong with wealth. Abraham was wealthy, as were all the patriarchs. Job was wealthy, perhaps on the level of being a king. David and Solomon were extremely wealthy, to the point where Solomon was described as being more wealthy than any who had gone before or come after. Joseph of Arimathea, whose garden and borrowed tomb some of us stood within recently, was a wealthy man.

Wealth is not wrong, and can be a wonderful tool to use for the glory of God. And I'm convinced that ALL of us would be more wealthy if we would take God at His word (cf. Malachi 3 - "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it."). WARNING - I'm not preaching a health and wealth gospel here, merely making mention of a principal in Scripture which I've proven true in my life, and many others have, as well.

But when the accumulation of wealth takes the place of God in our lives, it is an idol.

"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Timothy 6:10, NKJV)

ILLUS - Jesus gave an illustration of this form of idolatry - *"Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' ' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' ' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.'"* (Luke 12:16–21, NKJV)

2. Health

Paul said that bodily exercise is a good thing - *"For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8, NKJV)*

But when the pursuit of bodily health becomes an obsession... when it takes the place of serving God... when it consumes an inordinate amount of time... then it has become an idol.

3. Family

Jesus said family must not come before him - *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:26, NKJV)*

And yet, in our culture "family" activities trump God activities much of the time. Remember our definition? ANYTHING that takes the place of God in our lives is an idol.

And so, our public schools say to parents, "Sundays are for fun and sports... not for God." And parents say, "OK."

And so, our kids say to their parents, "There are so many fun things to do on Sundays... and it's the the only day we have to play... let's not bother with church." And parents say, "OK."

We listen to everybody but God on the matter. God says - *"Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6, NKJV) God says - *"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:4, NKJV) God says: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* (Matthew 6:33, NKJV)

Why can we not believe God when He tells us that if we will give our children to HIM... trust HIM with them... and teach them to obey HIM in all things, that He will take care of them? Why do we instead cast our children into the fires of this culture's Molech and then wonder why, when they come of age, they walk away from God?

4. Career

I read an interesting article about the workplace yesterday. It was primarily an article about women in the workplace, but there was a particularly good line in it which jumped out at me. It was in parentheses, mentioned as an aside. It simply said, "For most people, contrary to myth, work is just work."

I, personally, have not had much issue with this idol. I could easily never go to work again. There are so many things to do in life, that it often galls me to think of wasting so much time laboring for some business which has little eternal significance. If I didn't have to work, I could do more for God, I reason... if I didn't have to work, I could be more involved in missions, I reason...

I read of people who invest their lives in their careers, and then when they are forced to retire, they live only a short time, because without their work they have nothing to live for. I don't believe that will be me... I'm pretty sure I can find other ways to spend that time.

Career can be an idol. Career, when it becomes the most important thing in life, IS an idol.

ILLUS - I have a friend who told me about being fired from his job of many years. It was simply a cost cutting move, but he was greatly hurt by it. When he tried to explain to his boss how much he did around there, and asked how they expected to carry on without the many things he did, his boss said, "If I put my hand into a bucket of water, and then pulled it back out, you would never know my hand had been in that water. It's the same with you... when you are gone, this place will continue as if you had never been here."

ILLUS - Some thought Apple Computer could not function without Steve Jobs, who poured his entire life into the formation of that company. And yet, he is now dead and buried. And the company marches on.

We ought to thank God for employment... for the gift of a paycheck... for the opportunities it provides. But let us not let career become an idol.

5. Pleasure

Paul warned Timothy - *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful,*

unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," (2 Timothy 3:1-4, NKJV)

And to many in our society, given the opportunity to worship God on the Lord's Day, or do something more "fun", the "fun" always wins out.

I like golf. I stink at it, but like it. But on the Lord's Day, when it's time to worship, I need to do that, instead.

I don't remember who said it, but one man told his preacher, "I can worship God just as well on the golf course on Sunday mornings." To which the pastor replied, "You're right, you can, but you won't."

And of course, golf is just an illustration, isn't it, of a larger truth? Many of us struggle with the idol of pleasure - whatever form it might take.

Well, I don't mean to froth at the mouth this morning, and I don't want to beat people up about these various things. I just mention them to make the point that idolatry is alive and well in America today... in Randolph today... in some of our lives this very morning.

Idolatry WAS a problem, and idolatry IS a problem.

Conclusion:

Three statements of application and I'll be done:

1. Idolatry is not something that we grow out of, but rather something we fall into.

There is a thought amongst people of our day, that we are somehow more advanced than those who've gone before. (ILLUS - A tour of someplace like Israel, which is filled with the accomplishments of people from millenia past, is a good check on this. A question you'll hear often at such places is, "We don't know how they did this.")

On the spiritual side of that discussion lies the belief that we are somehow too advanced to practice idolatry... that idolatry was something primitive people practiced, but then we learned better.

But that is actually the opposite of the truth. Idolatry is something that pure and spiritual people fell into.

QUOTE - "We do not find, in the OT, an ascending from idolatry to the pure worship of God, but rather a people possessing a pure worship and a spiritual theology, constantly fighting, through the medium of divinely-raised spiritual leaders, religious seductions which, nevertheless, often claimed the mass of the people. Idolatry is a declension from the norm, not an earlier stage gradually and with difficulty superseded." (D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 495.)

Paul described it in similar terms in *Romans 1:18-33* (YOU CAN READ THIS ON YOUR OWN, and you'll see that it describes a slow slide DOWNWARD into idolatry.)

Idolatry is not something primitive people practice and grow out of. It is something that spiritual people can fall into if they are not careful!

Remember the earlier discussion of the various false deities worshipped in Scripture? Remember the description of Molech? Let me remind you what it said:

10. Molech, the god of the Ammonites and the most horrible idol in the Scriptures. Children were sacrificed to this Semitic

deity. Solomon built an altar to Molech at Tophet in the Valley of Hinnom. Later both King Ahaz and his godless grandson Manasseh sacrificed their children to this blood-demanding idol. 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Chron. 28:1-4; 33:

Solomon? Did you catch that? SOLOMON? The godly son of David? The one whom God entrusted with building the temple? The one who, when given a chance to ask God for anything, asked for an understanding heart to rightly govern God's people? SOLOMON BUILT AN ALTAR TO MOLECH???????

The best of believers can fall to this. We need to heed the warnings of scripture, and not allow ourselves to get established on that slippery slope downward.

2. Idolatry is something we must CONSCIOUSLY RECOGNIZE AND RUN FROM.

When we get to *chapter 10* we will see Paul's suggested solution to the problem of idolatry: *therefore, my beloved, FLEE FROM IDOLATRY (1 Corinthians 10:14 NKJV)*

It is not something we can play with... nor is it something we can dabble in without ill affects. It is DANGEROUS... and we need to RUN FROM IT THE MINUTE WE SEE IT.

3. We have Someone FAR BETTER to worship!

ILLUS - While in Israel, we visited Caesarea Philippi, which is in the extreme northern end of the country. Something quite significant happened there. (READ - *Matthew 16:13-16* Now, interestingly, the ruins that are there to see are of a temple to the false god Pan. It was a terribly idolatrous place, with ritual prostitution and other such practices rampant. And Jesus took His disciples into that place of gross idolatry to ask the question, "Who do you think I am?"

It was as if Jesus purposely set the disciples down in the midst of a whole plethora of false gods and said, "Who are you going to worship?" And the answer, rightly, was "You, Lord."

Look at our text - "*yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.*" (1 Corinthians 8:6, NKJV)

Oh how we need to worship the Savior, "*for in Him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28a, NKJV)

What about you, this morning? Are you somewhere on the slow slide down into idolatry? Is there something... anything... in your life that is higher than God for you? Is God first? Do you struggle with one of more of the idols of wealth or health or family or career or pleasure (or maybe something else)?

SEE IT!!!!!! Recognize the idol for the evil it is. If somebody was before you sacrificing a child in the fires of Molech, you would be appalled. You would SEE IT FOR WHAT IT IS. ALL IDOLS are equally evil. SEE IT!!!

Then FLEE IT. Some of you need to bow before the one true God and confess that you have drifted... that other things have taken His central place in your life. Some need to repent. Some need to run away from your idols and into the arms of the Father, who longs for your return. FLEE FROM YOUR FALSE GODS, and FLEE TO THE TRUE GOD.

I guarantee, you will never regret it. Only good things await those who turn from the false to the true. Only good things await you in Christ.

Chapter 13. I Want My Rights!

READ - *1 Corinthians 8-9*

TEXT - *Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Corinthians 8:13 NKJV)*

THEME - My rights are secondary to my brothers' rights. My personal liberty must take a backseat to the evangelism, discipleship, assimilation, and growth of others.

Introduction:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

(Declaration of Independence)

We recently celebrated Independence Day here in the US. Perhaps in honor of that occasion some of you took the time to read the Declaration of Independence, the beginning and ending words of which I just read to you. It is good for us to remember the ideals upon which our nation was founded, especially in our day when so many of them are being taken away from us.

One thing that strikes you when you read those words is the prevalence of the word "rights". "Endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights" is a phrase that most of us have heard time and again, even if we didn't remember where it came from. And as one reads the declaration, that word "rights" jumps out... it is mentioned several times in the text.

Since America was founded, we have lived with the idea that we have rights. The womens' suffrage movement brought the rights of women to the forefront, and the civil rights movement of the 60s brought the rights of oppressed minorities into view. Throughout the history of America, there has been an emphasis on rights. "I WANT MY RIGHTS" has become, if not a common refrain, certainly a common BELIEF amongst Americans.

And the same point of view has crept into the church.

And, that, my brothers and sisters, is a shame.

Now we don't usually use the word "rights" in the church. We usually use the word "liberty" or the phrase "Christian liberty." "I have liberty" is the Christian-ese equivalent of "I have my rights." And the truth is, Paul's words to the Corinthians teach exactly the opposite of "I WANT MY RIGHTS." This passage teaches that my rights are secondary to my brothers' rights and my sisters' rights. My personal liberty must take a backseat to the evangelism, discipleship, and growth of others.

Now I know that may offend some of you, but bear with me. Don't consider me an enemy just because I tell you the truth. You are intelligent people, and you can read what the Word of God says here just as well as I can. Let's look at the text, and see if it doesn't back me up on these statements.

See if you don't agree with me that the Bible here teaches that "My rights are secondary to my brothers' rights, and my personal liberty must take a backseat to the evangelism, discipleship, and growth of others."

First, a reminder of the issue Paul is discussing - meat offered to idols. Last week, we talked about the reality of idols, and how idolatry is just as much an issue today as it was then. We just have different

names for our idols today. Well, the matter of meat offered to idols exists today, too. Again, we just have different names for it.

Here is how one source described the problem that existed in Corinth:

QUOTE - "Everyday shopping presented problems to first-century Christians (v. 1). Meat sold in a Gentile market in Corinth could have been first used as sacrificial meat in a heathen temple (Acts 15:29). Part would have been burned on an altar, part eaten at a solemn meal in the temple, and the remainder sold in the market for home consumption. Some who had once believed in the gods to whom these sacrificial offerings were made, now found themselves uncomfortable eating meat offered in this way because they felt it to be a denial of their Christian faith and the knowledge that there is only one true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Others, however, recognized that an idol 'is nothing at all in the world' (v. 4) and that what might have happened in a heathen temple before the meat was put on sale was a matter of indifference." (Derek Prime, Opening Up 1 Corinthians, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 71-72.)

We don't face this exact situation today, but we face many similar areas of conflict, don't we? There are a myriad of situations where good Christians differ in their understanding of the rightness or wrongness of the thing... where some say we cannot in good conscience participate in the activity, while others say "we have liberty to do so." I need not make a list, do I, for again, you are intelligent people, and can no doubt come up with that list on your own.

Paul, here, gives some very thought provoking instruction on how to sort this stuff out. How to differentiate between "I WANT MY RIGHTS" or "I HAVE LIBERTY" and the concerns of others.

And once we've worked through his arguments, we'll come away reminded of this simple truth - the theme of our message today - My rights are secondary to my brothers' rights. My personal liberty must take a backseat to the evangelism, discipleship, assimilation, and growth of others.

I want you to notice 4 words or phrases that are in this passages... you might want to circle them in your Bible. We'll use them as our 4 point outline this morning. First, circle the word KNOW in vs. 1, then the word HOWEVER in vs. 7, and then the word BEWARE in vs. 9, and finally the word THEREFORE in vs. 13. Got them circled? OK. Let's consider each:

KNOW

cf. vs. 1

Once again, Paul is answering one of the questions they had put to him, and it must have been worded something like, "Of course we know, don't we, that there is no problem with eating meat offered to idols? Why doesn't everybody know that?"

Paul affirmed that truth. Yep. We DO know that. And he gives a wonderful reminder of some of the things we do know:

1. Idols are nothing in the world, and there is only one God. (vs. 4)

No reason to get concerned about false gods, for they are NOTHING. Some Christians worry about the rise of Islam, as if Allah was really a god, and really able to do anything. But all idols are NOTHING. We need not fear them.

ILLUS - Question asked at the Temple Institute in Jerusalem, when we were told that in exchange for the Jews having the right to open the tunnel along the western wall, the Arabs were given the right to dig under the temple mount - "Aren't you concerned that they will destroy any Jewish artifacts they find?" Answer - "Well, that is a concern, but then we have a God Who is bigger than that, don't we?"

Idols are NOTHING in the world.

2. We are OF God. (vs. 6)

“Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands! Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.” (Psalm 100:1–3, NKJV)

3. We are FOR God. (vs. 6)

(That phrase alone pretty much dismantles the "I have my rights" argument.)

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31, NKJV)

ILLUS - I like a tee shirt that I saw our brother Charlie wearing the other day. It has the words "It's not about me" imprinted on the front. Amen. It's about God. It's always been about God and it will always be about God. For we are FOR God.

4. We are THROUGH Christ, (vs. 6)

He is the agent of our creation.

“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” (Colossians 1:16, NKJV)

5. We EXIST IN Christ. (vs. 6)

Now I encourage you to look at that word "live" in your Bible, for if you are holding a KJV or NKJV, then you'll notice it's italicized. It looks to me like the Greek simply says "through whom WE." cf. "for in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28a, NKJV) While the translations all indicate either live or exist, I think the Greek allows for an even broader meaning. (NET Bible note - Grk "through whom [are] all things and we [are] through him.") Perhaps a literal translation is "through Whom all, and through Whom we." It's not just our LIFE that is through Him... it's everything about us.

And so, Paul agrees with them about what we KNOW. But even while affirming the validity of their argument (Yep, we do know that), he takes the wind out of their sails... he cuts them off at the knees, by reminding them that no matter how much they think they know, in the grand scheme of things they know nothing. (vs. 2) This is a recurrent theme in Corinthians, isn't it, their struggle with self-congratulation and pride. Likewise it is something all of us need to guard against everyday. It doesn't matter how much we think we know... and how mature we think we are in the faith... and how gifted we think we are... because we are nowhere near the end of the journey, and we have a long long way to go.

ILLUS - Paul is the classic example, and one I've shared many times in the past, for it strikes awe into my heart. *“Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.” (2 Timothy 4:9–13, NKJV)*

Paul knew from personal experience that even when he thought he KNEW, he didn't yet know!

ILLUS - Dr. Charles Whitfield, the pastor who hosted our recent trip to Israel, was one of my teachers in college, and probably the first one to really influence me in the area of expository preaching (he taught that class). I loved the Bible before I met him, but he deepened that love, and developed it. I visited him

in the office of his church once. He had a large set of shelves in his office, and they were filled with many large black 3 ring binders. I said something like, "Man, are those all your sermons?" (I was amazed at the quantity, and that was 30 years ago! I imagine the shelves fill a room now.) His response was, "Yes... someday I hope I learn to preach." With some men I would have thought that was false piety, but not him. I know him well enough to know he meant it. He was still learning. And after 55 years pastoring his church in Michigan, I believe he still is.

True knowledge of God is always partial. cf. *"For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."* (1 Corinthians 13:12, NKJV)

You see, this issue had little to do with KNOWING, and everything to do with LOVING. (vs. 3 - love is the identifying characteristic of the believer, not knowledge - cf. *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*) (John 13:35, NKJV)

The little chorus we learned in Sunday School reminds of that truth, doesn't it?

They'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.

It has rightly been said that "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

And so Paul says, "Yes, you are right. We KNOW there is nothing wrong with eating meat offered to idols. But KNOWING is not the issue. LOVING is the issue.

He said, "Knowledge PUFFS up (i.e. "makes arrogant"), but love BUILDS up." (vs. 1)

And so, this issue is not a head issue. The fact that we KNOW idols are meaningless is, well, meaningless! It is a HEART issue - our knowledge about God should not be our primary motivator, but rather our love for Him and His.

So there is the first word - KNOW. Let's look at the second word.

HOWEVER

cf. vs. 7

Here Paul explains the problem with their KNOWLEDGE. He explains why this is not a head issue but a heart issue. He explains why it is a matter of loving others, rather than simply exercising our own rights. He explains why my rights are secondary to my brothers' and sisters' rights. He explains why my personal liberty must take a backseat to the evangelism, discipleship, assimilation, and growth of others.

However, there is not in everyone that knowledge... (vs. 7)

What knowledge? The knowledge that an idol is nothing and that eating meat offered to "nothing" idols was therefore of no consequence. That knowledge. Some had not come to that level of maturity and understanding in their walk with God. Some had been saved out of idol worship. Some had spent years of their lives offering things to idols and now, the whole thing grieved them.

The word "weak" is interesting, isn't it?

QUOTE - "A weak conscience is one that cannot come to a decision on an issue where an individual is uncertain of the rightness of his or her actions." (Derek Prime, Opening Up 1 Corinthians, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 73.)

Paul's parallel teaching in *Romans* is very helpful here - "*But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*" (*Romans 14:23, NKJV*)

He also said, "... *if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.*" (*Romans 14:15, NKJV*)

If I am uncertain whether a thing is honoring to God, I should not do it. For to do such would be sin, according to *Romans 14*. Something that is perfectly acceptable to the person who understands it as such, is perfectly unacceptable to the one who does not.

That word "however" reminds us that we are not all on the same level in our walk with God. Look around this church and you see the same thing. Some have been saved for many years, and have studied and grown and matured in their walk with God. Some are new believers who are just starting out and have a very basic understanding of the faith. Some have been saved for years but have NOT grown... they are stuck in a level of their faith from which they should have graduated years ago.

Paul was saying, it doesn't matter what level of maturity we are at, but rather the varying levels of maturity that our brothers and sisters are at!

Not everybody is mature. And that should not be a source of pride for those who think they are, but rather a motivation to love and compassion and discipling toward them!

And because not everybody is mature in their walk with Christ, your rights (and my rights) are secondary to their's. My personal liberty (and yours) must take a backseat to the evangelism, discipleship, and growth of others.

Consider the third word:

BEWARE

cf. vs. 9

I can think of no other way to interpret this verse than as a warning. Paul is warning them of a potential danger... a potential error... a potential misstep in their walk with God.

In Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar", a soothsayer warned Caesar "Beware the ides of March!" He should have listened to that word BEWARE... He should have taken warning, but he ignored it and was stabbed to death.

Beware that your exercise of your rights (i.e. your liberty in Christ), doesn't cause a weaker Christian to stumble - to trip and fall.

Beware that somebody doesn't see you doing something they think is sin (and therefore to them it is sin), and then sin by doing that which they think is sin!

Beware that in so sinning against a weaker brother you don't then sin against Christ, himself!

Verse 12 is a stark warning when it says that when we insist on our rights, and overlook the scruples of our weaker brothers and sisters, we sin against Christ! So it's not just about you and me, or even just about the weak brethren... it's about our fellowship with Christ, which is broken.

Verse 12 is a reminder that WHAT WE DO TO OTHERS WE DO TO JESUS.

ILLUS - Paul had heard Jesus say this same thing to him on the Damascus Road - "*Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick*

against the gods.” (Acts 9:4–5, NKJV) Paul had been tearing all over the countryside persecuting, he thought, Christians. But Jesus said that He was the one Paul had really been persecuting.

Jesus said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me. (Matthew 25:40, NKJV)

So, BEWARE. And that brings us to the final word:

THEREFORE

cf. vs. 13

Here we see Paul's summation. He's going to continue to talk about this issue through chapters 9-10. He's going to use himself as an example, starting with this verse and continuing through chapter 9. He's going to remind of some Old Testament examples in chapter 10, and then finalize his arguments at the end of that chapter.

And this verse summarizes everything he's going to say. If it might cause somebody to stumble, then I simply will not do it. And that word from Paul applies not just to meat offered to idols, but to any area of our walk with God. Any situation where we might be tempted to say "Well, I KNOW that I have liberty in this area" but somebody else is tripped up by it. Any area where we might be tempted to say, "I don't care what they think about this, bless God, I HAVE MY RIGHTS."

No, says Paul. You have a responsibility, to love others as Christ loved (and loves) you.

QUOTE - "Christian behaviour is not based upon rights but upon duties." (Derek Prime, Opening Up 1 Corinthians, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 74.)

Turn with me to the end of this section, and let's notice how Paul concludes his long treatise on this topic. (READ - 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1)

"Paul, is it ok to eat meat offered to idols?" "Well, we KNOW that it is TECHNICALLY ok, because there is simply no such thing as other gods... they are false and nonexistent. But that's not the issue you should be concerned with. How does it affect others? Will it confuse them, or cause them to stumble in their early walk with Christ? What impact will it have on reaching the lost, on winning others to Christ? What impact on the discipleship of tender young believers? Don't allow anything to hinder those things! That would take something that is sinless (eating meat offered to idols) and turn it into something sinful for you (hurting a brother or sister in Christ). Don't do that! If there is a danger of that, then NO, it's not ok to eat meat offered to idols.

Conclusion:

Now, this is meaty stuff (pun intended). And it might be hard for some of you to swallow, and impossible for some of you to accept. But let me share just a few final thoughts that might make it a bit more palatable.

There is no sacrifice here that won't be rewarded a gazillion times over, there.

QUOTE - He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. (Jim Elliot)

“So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel’s, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.” (Mark 10:29–30, NKJV)

The need to submit our rights, our liberties, to the scruples of others, is only for a little while. It's not forever.

I remind you my brothers and sisters, that this is not the time to rest. We SERVE now, and REST when we get home. Too many American Christians are so confused about this. They want to play and rest now, and will lose out on so much when we get to heaven, and they realize they frittered it all away here. One of my favorite verses - there remaineth therefore a rest... (*Hebrews 4:9*) You give up your rights here, but not there. You may be the one serving here, but oh the joy when you get there!

ILLUS - This has been a ferocious week for some of our membership. We have had so many things converge in our schedule (completion of a construction project, Vacation Bible School, Caregivers Meal, Softball, Father-Son outing, Bible Studies, Campfire Fellowship, and more). I know some are tired... maybe even ready to throw in the towel. There are always a few who do the lion's share of the work in a church. But to them I would say, "Don't toss it in yet! Hold on and work a bit longer, for the reward will be great! And besides that, rest is coming! August is coming!" You see, we don't have anything big scheduled after VBS. Nothing the remainder of July and nothing in August. That's by design. And those faithful brothers and sisters who have worked themselves silly these past few weeks, can sit back and relax, KNOWING that they gave their best and served to the utmost when God and His church needed them... KNOWING that they subordinated their rights to the needs of others, and thus served and glorified the Savior.

ILLUS - My son, Joshua, used to come home from playing football at Mt. Union and say, "We left it all on the field, today." And some of you have left it on the field recently, and will leave what is left on the field this week during VBS. Such is what defines a champion. Such is what reaches the lost for Christ. Such is what builds the Kingdom. Such is what glorifies our Lord.

When we reach heaven, we'll never again have to sacrifice our rights for the sake of others, and we'll receive in full the reward for faithful service.

But until then, it's not about our rights... it's about loving and serving our brothers and sisters. And oh the reward, the eternal magnificent and heavenly reward, the "well done thou good and faithful servant" reward, that awaits those who take up the challenge of living for others, rather than demanding their rights.

Chapter 14. Imitate Me!

READ - *1 Corinthians 9*

TEXT - *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1 NKJV)*

THEME - The reason we sacrifice our personal rights and liberties is that we might see more people come to Christ, for that is the reason we are here.

Introduction:

If we but knew that through the closing door
Some one we love would enter nevermore,
Would we not hasten with our richest store?
If we but knew!
If we but knew that from the market-place
Soon we should miss some kind, familiar face,
Would our cold greetings not be touched with grace?
If we but knew!
If we but knew some heart beside our own
Had walked in dark Gethsemane alone,
Oh, with what largesse would our love be shown!
If we but knew!

We learned in the previous chapter that as a believer in Jesus Christ, living in the dispensation of grace, I have liberty in Christ... I have rights. (Paul deals with that topic extensively in *Galatians*.) However, Paul's point in that chapter is that my rights are secondary to my brothers' needs. And therefore, my personal liberty must take a backseat to the evangelism, discipleship, and growth of others.

But Paul continues right on through the 1st verse of *chapter 11* discussing this same topic - how do I balance the issue of my Christian liberty with the concerns of those weaker in the faith than me? Here in *chapter 9*, he gives his own personal testimony as an example. He holds himself up and says, basically, here is how I do it... how I deal with the tension between my liberty and the needs of others.

Now because this topic spans *1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1*, I chose *1 Corinthians 11:1* as my text, because I believe it is Paul's summary statement of the whole topic.

You see, Paul presents himself here as an example to follow.

So let's see just how he handled it, and what he was asking us to imitate.

I have rights, too.

cf. *vss. 1-8*

As an fellow-believer, he had the same claim to Christian liberty. And as an apostle and leader in the early church, Paul said that he had rights that were specific to that role, too.

1. The right to eat and drink (*vs. 4*)

This seems like an odd statement, doesn't it? Who would possibly deny that as an apostle, he had a right to food and drink? But apparently it was questioned. And it is questioned even today, isn't it? Have you

ever heard the illustration of the church that called a pastor, and in their praying about the new pastor said, "You keep him humble, Lord, and we'll keep him poor?" Some laugh at such things, but the fact is too many of God's servants are nearly starved to death because the churches in which they minister don't think they have a right to food and drink. People for some reason devalue the work of ministers. It is true today and it must have been true in Paul's day.

Remember what Paul said back in *chapter 4*?

READ - *1 Corinthians 4:9-13*

"We have the right to have the needs of our life supplied, just as you do!", said Paul.

2. The right to marriage (*vs. 5*)

No need to spend a lot of time here, is there? Pretty clear. There was no requirement then, and there is none now, that those in ministry give up the rights of marriage. Paul was unmarried, but the other apostles were not. Peter (Cephas) is especially singled out as having been married. If you've been raised to believe, as the Catholics teach, that Peter was the first pope, and that celibacy is a requirement of those in ministry, then this might come as a surprise to you. PETER WAS MARRIED. It is stated differently in another place where we are told that he had a mother in law. One man joked that it would have been pretty sad for Peter to have had a mother in law if he didn't have a wife! But he DID have a wife.

And though Paul did not, he was quick to point out that the right was his.

3. The right to payment / wages (*vss. 6-14*)

Redundant with food and drink mentioned earlier? Perhaps.

Paul gives a lot of space to this topic in *vss. 6-14*. Ministers should be paid a living wage, he says. He calls upon common sense (*vs. 7*), the Old Testament law of Moses (*vs. 8*), the example of the Old Testament priesthood (*vs. 13*), and finally the words of Christ, Himself (*vs. 14*).

Ministers should be paid a living wage, says Paul. That is a right they can reasonably expect. "It is a right I should reasonably expect," said Paul.

I spend a lot of time thinking about this passage, I confess. I receive a small housing allowance here, but no salary. Pastor Phil receives the same. When I first came to this church, I chose to maintain a secular job to support my needs, and receive no salary from here, for two reasons:

- a. There were less than 10 people here, and a salary would have been a burden the church simply couldn't afford.
- b. There were some things that I knew needed done here that were going to be hard... painful even. Frankly, I wanted freedom to do what I thought God wanted done here, without having to worry about whether I was risking my paycheck in doing so. There is tremendous freedom in that!

Pastors are human, and the temptation to guard their source of income is just as much a problem with them as with you, and there often seems to be some wicked person in the church who will hold that over the pastor's head to try and bend him to their whims. But if there is no source of income to guard, they can just barge ahead and do what needs to be done. NO FEAR, as the kids like to say!

But in another place, Paul lamented that he had not taught the people to give in support to their leadership. "*For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!*" (*2 Corinthians 12:13, NKJV*)

And so I struggle with the issue here. I am well cared for with the job I have, and have no need. But I will not be here forever, and I fear setting a precedent that may harm future pastors here. Church,

don't let that happen. If the day comes when this church calls a pastor full time - TAKE CARE OF HIM AND HIS.

For those who would argue that they had personal liberty and nothing should be allowed to hinder their exercise of that liberty... for those who would argue that their right to live as they wished regardless of its impact on younger and weaker Christians... Paul reminded them that he had rights, too. And in some ways his rights surpassed theirs.

But I don't demand them.

cf. vss. 12-18

Two times Paul states this fact here, in vs. 12 and again in vs. 15.

Nevertheless we have not used this right... (1 Corinthians 9:12a)

But I have used none of these things... (1 Corinthians 9:15a)

"I have rights... but I don't demand them."

He is clear, too, that he does not tell them of this now so that they will act to rectify it... he does not mention that he works to support his own ministry because he wants it to change... he does not remind them that he receives no pay from them because he is hoping they will start paying him now. (cf. vss. 15-18)

Paul actually took joy in serving without pay. He took reward in the fact he could present the greatest gift that had ever been given free of charge. (cf. vs. 18) His reward was the joy of preaching the gospel WITHOUT reward!

And so, Paul had rights... he had liberty. Just like the others in Corinth, and in some cases more so. But he CHOSE not to exercise them.

Let me tell you why.

cf. vss. 12b,19-23

We can summarize his thoughts, can't we? "I do it for the gospel's sake." "I do it SO THAT others will hear... SO THAT nothing will hinder their salvation... SO THAT I might win as many to Christ as is possible." Isn't that what he says in this passage?

During VBS this week, I had very little to do. I rejoice in that! I love the fact that there are more and more ministries in this church that are the result of others exercising their gifts and rising up to serve here. There was a time when if Beth or I didn't do it it didn't happen. Such is not the case now, and I rejoice! For VBS, I was on the security team, which means I spent some time making sure no little ones ran into the street, or crossed in front of traffic when parents were picking up and dropping off. I had to keep an eye out that children didn't wander off, and I had to watch any adults coming and going to make sure nobody took a child when we weren't looking. Stuff like that. It's an important role, and several of our men served faithfully in it, but it wasn't exactly a demanding role. And there was downtime. Once the evening's activities got underway and the kids were all safely in their classrooms, it became mostly a matter of standing around with little to do. During one such lull, I grabbed my Bible and headed for the auditorium to work on this message. Brother Ray was working in the sound room at the time, and after I had finished my reading, I turned to him and observed, "I can't wait to get to heaven and meet Paul."

Because, this passage gives another glimpse into his personality... into his makeup... into what made him such a warrior for God.

He didn't say he chose to voluntarily set aside his liberty in Christ because it was convenient or because it provided him some other personal advantage. There was no, "What's in it for me?" attitude in him. No... he plainly said that he did so for the "sake of the gospel." Notice:

Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things LEST WE HINDER THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. (1 Corinthians 9:12b)

I have become all things to all men, THAT I MIGHT BY ALL MEANS SAVE SOME. (1 Corinthians 9:22b)

Now this I do FOR THE GOSPEL'S SAKE. (1 Corinthians 9:23a)

I like the way the NLT renders vs. 12 - "We would rather put up with anything than be an obstacle to the Good News about Christ."

That was his motivation in everything - nothing must hinder it... nothing must stand in the way of even one person hearing the Good News about Christ! And he would give up anything... pay any price... to ensure that happened. If that meant personal cost to him, he was willing to pay it. And if that meant surrendering comforts and liberties, he was willing to do it.

I've said it many times in the past, and Paul says it here for us again - THE GOAL IS THE SOUL. He was a soul winner. He was never satisfied that he had won enough. He knew that as long as he was still on this earth, and Christ had not called him home yet, there were more who needed to hear... more who needed the good news... more who needed to be saved... more to win!

Some in the hyper-Calvinist camp like to disparage the idea of winning souls... and criticize the use of the term "soul winner." Paul would spit in their eye, wouldn't he? For even though nobody wrote more clearly on the doctrine of election in the Bible, nobody wrote more clearly about the need to win people to Christ, either. Paul understood that God plays a part in salvation, and so does man.

1. Man must HEAR the gospel if they would be saved.

(And that means somebody must SHARE the gospel.)

2. MAN must be CHANGED by the gospel if they would be saved. They must UNDERSTAND the crushing need of salvation that is their's due to their sin. They must HEAR and UNDERSTAND the good news that Jesus PAID THAT PRICE by taking their sins upon Himself on the cross.

3. Man must REPENT of their sin and BELIEVE the gospel.

When did that happen for you? When did the overwhelming reality of your lostness occur to you? When did you bow your heart before God and say, "Lord, I am a sinner, and need a Savior." When did you decide to believe the good news that Jesus paid the price for that sin and wanted to save you? When?

4. Man must CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD, asking for the gift of salvation that Christ died to give, and rose to assure.

"I don't remember doing that, pastor?" Then do it today, for there is no other way.

You see, Paul understood these things, and recognized that NOTHING was more important than winning the lost... not his personal liberty... NOTHING.

Therefore, in order to win those who were Jewish, he would set aside what he thought about their particular lifestyle choices and live in such a way so as to win them, not offend them. (vs. 20) (In Israel, there are certain sites that are holy to the Jews. Visitors are asked to comply with their sensitivities at these sites. Women are to be dressed modestly, and if they are not, there are wraps provided to cover them. Men are asked to have their heads covered, and if they do not, there are yarmulkes available at the entrance of these places. Some would chafe at such restrictions - "I don't believe that's necessary and I have liberty." Paul would say, "I want to win them... give me the yarmulke!")

... and in order to win those who were outside the Jewish law, he would live in such a way so as not to offend them... **THAT THEY MIGHT NOT BE TURNED AWAY FROM THE GOSPEL**, but might be **ATTRACTED TO IT**. (vs. 21)

... and to those who were weak (a direct reference, no doubt, to the very class of individuals the Corinthians were asking about in *chapter 8*), he deferred to their sensibilities, so that he might win them, as well.

Oh brothers and sisters. How can I make it any clearer than Paul did here? Oh that it might affect my heart... **NOTHING** is more important than the souls of the lost...

NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT than the souls of the lost...

NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE SOULS OF THE LOST!

We are here for that reason and no other. Paul's example, which he longed for the Corinthians to imitate is stated so well in vs. 22 - *I have become all things to all men, THAT I MIGHT BY ALL MEANS SAVE SOME*.

Conclusion:

I remember the first message I ever preached. Well, I don't actually remember the message, but I remember the event. It was here, at this church, and Pastor Paul Philips was the pastor at the time. I believe it was some youth day and I was to bring the message. He helped me with it. I still remember pedalling my bicycle to his house on Tallmadge Rd. in Rootstown to work on that message with him. And I remember the text... the passage I preached from. It was the last section of this chapter, *1 Corinthians 9:24-27*. (READ IT)

In those verses, Paul is saying to the Corinthians, to not be sidetracked in their race by trivialities. Don't let silly nonsensical "personal liberty" issues slow your pace. Keep your eyes focused on and your feet running toward the finish line ahead of you. Don't forget where your punches are supposed to be landing! Don't pull them from your opponent and direct them into meaningless air. Just as athletes voluntarily lay aside anything and everything that might slow them or hinder them or hamper their performance, so too should the Christian, who wants to win the race. And Paul says very plainly (cf. vs. 24) that we should be running like we want to win!

Brothers and sisters, we need to get real about what we are doing here on this earth. We are not here to exercise our own personal liberties. We are here to reach everybody we can with the gospel of Christ. Oh, I know we're here to worship God, and delight in God, and grow in grace, and all those good things. I've read all the same books you have. But we can and will do all those things far better in the presence of Christ than we can here now, so don't get confused. We are still here on this earth for one reason and one reason only - to witness to the world of the risen Savior. And the basic truth Paul was illustrating with his own example here, is that we need to lay aside everything... everything... **EVERYTHING** that might hinder us in that central task... even our personal liberties.

BECAUSE NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE SOULS OF THE LOST!

ILLUS - Let me close this morning with the story of John Harper:

It was April 15, 1912, when HMS Titanic sank beneath the icy waters of the North Atlantic, taking with it 1517 lives. The largest and most luxurious ship at the time was gone, reminding the world of our frailty as human beings. But there is more to the sinking of the Titanic than a historical tragedy. There is a story of courageous heroism and unshakable faith.

John Harper was aboard the Titanic when she set sail from Southampton, England, on her maiden voyage. An evangelist originally from Glasgow, Scotland, he was well known throughout the United Kingdom as a charismatic, passionate speaker who led many to Christ through his gift of preaching.

In 1912, Reverend Harper received an invitation to speak at the Moody Church in Chicago, U.S.A. On April 11, 1912, John Harper boarded the Titanic.

Some of the wealthiest people in the world were aboard. While many passengers spoke of business deals, acquisitions and material desires, John Harper was diligently sharing the love of Christ with others. In the days leading up to the tragedy, survivors reported seeing Harper living like a man of faith, speaking kind words and sharing the love of Christ.

On the evening of April 14, as passengers danced in the ballroom and tried their luck at the card tables, John Harper put his daughter to bed and read his devotions as he did every night. At 11:40pm, the Titanic struck an iceberg. The "unsinkable" ship was doomed. Either in disbelief or unaware at the time, passengers continued about their pleasures. It wasn't until the ship's crew sent up a series of distress flares that passengers realized the seriousness of their situation. Then chaos ensued.

It all happened so fast. But John Harper's response left an historic example of courage and faith. Harper awakened his daughter, picked her up and wrapped her in a blanket before carrying her up to the deck. There he kissed her good-bye and handed her to a crewman who put her into lifeboat 11. Harper knew he would never see his daughter again. His daughter would be left an orphan at six years of age.

Harper then gave his life jacket to a fellow passenger, ending any chance of his own survival. From a survivor we learn that he was calling out, "Women and children and unsaved people into the lifeboats." So he understood that there was a more important thing than surviving that terrible disaster. He understood that there were those who were unprepared to face eternity.

As the sounds of terror and mayhem continued, Harper focused on his God-given purpose. Survivors reported seeing him on the upper deck on his knees, surrounded by terrified passengers, praying for their salvation.

At 2:40am, the Titanic disappeared beneath the North Atlantic, leaving a mushroom-like cloud of smoke and steam above her grave and, tragically, over 1000 people, including Harper, fighting for their lives in the icy water. He managed to find a piece of floating wreckage to hold onto. Quickly he swam to every person he could find, urging those about him to put their faith in Jesus Christ. While death forced others to face the folly of their life's pursuits, John Harper's goal of winning people to Jesus Christ became more vital.

In the water, John Harper was moving around as best he could, speaking to as many people as possible. His question was, "Are you saved?" And if they weren't saved and if they didn't understand that terminology, then as rapidly as he could he explained the Christian Gospel.

Soon John Harper succumbed to the icy sea. But even in his last moment, this tireless man of undying faith continued his life pursuit of winning lost souls. It was reported that the last words he spoke as he disappeared beneath the waves were, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

One person remembered, "I am a survivor of the Titanic. I was one of only six people out of 1517 to be pulled from the icy waters on that dreadful night. Like hundreds around me, I found myself struggling in the cold, dark waters of the North Atlantic. The wail of the perishing was ringing in my ears when there floated by me a man who called to me, 'Is your soul saved?' Then I heard him call out to others as he and everyone around me

sank beneath the waters. There, alone in the night with two miles of water under me, I cried to Christ to save me. I am John Harper's last convert."

(Source: The Mission of an Evangelist: Pg. 267-268 [2001])

Brothers and Sisters, people are sinking beneath the waves all around us. What matters our personal liberties in light of such reality? That is what Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians of. And that is why he gave his own personal example, and then said, "Imitate me" in these things.

Oh brothers and sisters, let us imitate him.

Invitation:

Some of you have no assurance that if you were to slip beneath the waves of life today, you would be saved. Some have never understood the good news of Jesus Christ. Oh you've heard it, and thought of it as a historical event, but have never considered what it means to you. That cross, upon which Jesus died, is a shelter in which YOU can hide. And it's grace, so free, is sufficient for ME... for YOU... and deep is its fountain, as wide as the sea. There's room at the cross for you."

It was for YOU He died. It was for YOU He was crucified. He paid for YOUR sin. He paid it ALL. And He rose on the 3rd day to prove it was finished, and to offer you heaven... salvation.

But you have to hear it, and you have to believe it. Oh friend, if you haven't already, please believe it today. You have to receive it, and you have to call out and ask for it. If you haven't, will you do it now? Will you do it today? Will you *believe on the Lord Jesus Christ that you might be saved?* Will you *Call upon the name of the Lord and be saved?*

John Harper did not plan on going into eternity when he did. Neither did a single person on the Titanic passenger list.

Several people walked into a movie theater in Colorado this week thinking they were going to watch Batman. Little did they know their time was up... and they were going to leave that theater and enter either heaven or hell. Which would it be for you, if such a situation occurred today?

Some of you need to be saved today. TODAY. In a moment we will sing, and when we do, if you have never trusted Christ you need to immediately step out and come to the front. Let us introduce you to the Savior. Do it TODAY. You have no assurance there will be a tomorrow.

Christians, some of you need to quit wasting your Christian life on nonsense and triviality and get in the race. The goal is the soul. The world is dying around us and people everywhere need the gospel. Some need to confess that their personal rights and liberties have been way too important... and the souls of the lost here and around the world way too unimportant.

Good news! Christ hasn't called you home yet, and so He is not done with you yet. Opportunity yet exists to influence people for Christ. There is still somebody to swim to with the truth that Jesus saves. Will you commit to that, today?

Some of you need to make that commitment today, before God, and before your brothers and sisters in this place. Some need to say today, "I will imitate Paul in these things."

PRAY:

"Life's fleeting days will soon be gone,
And we will pass away;

So teach us, Lord, to know your will,
That we may choose your way."