
This morning we continue in our series:



“A Life Worth Living.” Certainly, with the virus...all of our lives have been turned upside-down...nothing is normal any more... And we all have been asking: “When will this end?” Certainly, the virus has pushed us all to really look at our lives and see what’s most important??

How about you? What’s really important to you right now? Would you say your family? Yes. How about your church family? Yes, so many of you have told me how much you can’t wait to be back together as a church family! I heartily say, “Amen!” I miss you all terribly! They say, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” Well, in this case, that’s totally true.

You see, Church family, throughout this whole ordeal, even though we’ve not physically been together, through technology, we’ve been able to stay together...encouraging one another and helping one another and being there for one another... And that’s exactly what Jesus wants us to do. The title of this morning’s message is “Staying Together.”

In the last recorded prayer that we have of Jesus, which occurred just before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed this:

John 17:11b

Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

Jesus wants unity! But, you know what...every single church pictured in the New Testament, except for one...the church at Thessalonica, struggled mightily with staying together and being unified. Literally, you read through from the book of Acts all the way to the book of the Revelation and you’ll see churches struggling to stay together... It’s true, much of the NT was written under the backdrop of unity issues. Even the disciples argued about who would be the greatest in the kingdom and who would sit at the right hand of Jesus...

And this brings us to the church at Corinth...and I would I argue that perhaps they struggled more than any other church with unity...and I believe this will be easy to see as we read three passages of Scripture this morning. Let’s start in 1 Corinthians 1.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17

¹⁰I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. ¹¹For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹²What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." ¹³Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony^[b] of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men^[c] but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

¹But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ²I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ⁴For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? ⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. ⁸He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. ⁹For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

Can you see the unity issues here? I follow Paul...I follow Apollos...I follow Peter... Let me remind us, Church family, the two letters to the church at Corinth are two of the most direct and forceful letters in the New Testament, in my opinion. In fact, let me be very blunt. The church at Corinth was really messed up...it was really struggling...and the truth is...it seems they had been struggling for several years. As we have talked about, the Apostle Paul had spent 18 months there and it's been about 4 ½ years since he's last been there. He's writing from the city of Ephesus, where he would spend a total of 3 years. See this map...



Missionary Journeys of St. Paul

- Acts 13:4 - 14:26 First Journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor
- Acts 15:40 - 18:22 Second Journey to Syria, Asia Minor, and Europe
- Acts 18:23 - 21:15 Third to Ephesus, Macedonia, and Greece
- Acts 27:1 - 28:16 Fourth Journey to Malta and Rome

See Corinth in the middle of the map? It's modern-day Greece, (what we know as Europe). You'll also see how close Corinth is to Athens. Now look to the right and you'll see Ephesus (there in the middle). That's Asia Minor. Now, we read earlier that Paul has been told by a lady named Chloe and her people that there are major issues going on in the church. We don't know anything about Chloe other than she's apparently a prominent, trustworthy woman in the church. Paul obviously valued her opinion enough to write this letter addressing all of these issues.

You say, "What issues?" Oh my!!!...16 chapters worth of issues... "issues upon on issues," and then eventually another letter of 13 chapters, and by the end of 2 Corinthians (ch. 13), Paul warns them if he ends up having to come back to Corinth to straighten this stuff out...well, it's going to get really bad. You see, if you do a quick little study of the headings in your Bible in 1 Corinthians, you'll see things like: "Divisions in the Church," "Sexual Immorality Defiles the Church," "Lawsuits Against Believers," "Principles for Marriage and Divorce," and that's just through the 7th chapter...that's not even halfway through the letter.

So, there is much to deal with... BUT, isn't this true in all of our lives right now. We've all been dealing with a lot lately, haven't we? We all have "issues" don't we? Sure we do...and the church at Corinth certainly did...but, there issue wasn't a virus that was spreading...it was division. The church at Corinth had chosen sides. In fact, there were four groups or factions...and it was getting out of hand and that's why Paul literally begs them to get along. Look at verse 10.

1 Corinthians 1:10

¹⁰I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

Folks, you and I are never going to live lives that are abundant and full (lives worth living), if we're constantly arguing with one another. That's why verse 10 is such a strong admonition...Paul is literally using the name of Jesus to beg the Corinthian believers to get along. He's begging them to have the "same mind," which means...they are to "think alike." You say, "about what?" Well, what

directs us? Hmm? The WORD OF GOD, right? It's our guide... It's a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Romans 12:2 tells us that the word of God transforms our minds...and when that happens, we'll think the same thoughts.

Listen, God is not a God of confusion. His Holy Spirit is not going to tell you one thing and me something else. You see, Paul is writing to the Corinthians to explain to them the doctrines of the faith...what it means to follow Jesus. And He does this in all of his writings...in fact, here's another example of that...what he wrote to the church at Ephesus...

Ephesians 4:4-5

⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Does this mean we have to agree on everything? No! But, we don't have to be "disagreeable in our disagreement." Let me ask you...as a family, have you been voting on where you go and get take-out? Little pieces of paper and golf pencils and take a vote...or ask the family members to follow "Robert's Rules" and say, "All in favor say, 'Aye,' all opposed like sign, motion carries?" Of course not.

Church, you do understand...there were no votes in the first church. Try as you might, you'll never find a single vote in the pages of the NT. You will find "consensus." In Acts 15, when they were discussing the fact that salvation is in Christ alone, it says, "And it seemed good to the church." Consensus doesn't always mean total agreement and that means there will be times where we relent in our desires and go with the will of the people, unless it's something unbiblical or doctrinally unsound. You see, most disagreements come on style and preference. For instance, the church is being painted and blue paint was chosen...but, you wanted brown...consensus means, you relent.

But, some don't. They pick sides. They're determined that it should have been Brown paint and they create a stink! They want to win! Do you know what that is? Blatant SELFISHNESS and selfishness is at the center of almost all division... Somebody not getting their way. To them: it's a "My way or the highway..." Listen...churches have split over lesser things... Yes...some churches have split over the color of paint or color of carpet, or style of music. And what does that say to a lost and dying world? They shake their head and say, "I won't no part of that."

And that's what was going on in Corinth: No...it wasn't carpet or paint...but, leadership: The Paul group, Apollos group, Peter group and the Jesus group. You see, Paul had started the church some 6 years earlier and then he left and a really a good man named Apollos came along...Apollos was actually led to faith by a wonderful couple named Aquila and Priscilla and then at some point, it appears Peter came to Corinth with his wife (1 Cor. 9:5) and apparently some latched on to him, probably because "he had walked with the Jesus, right."

You say, "What about the Jesus group...who were they? Had those folks walked with Jesus?" No...because it had been almost 25 years since Jesus had ascended into heaven and Corinth is 1800 miles from Israel anyway... No, these people appeared to be the super pious people who most likely said, "Well, we're better than all of you, because we follow Jesus."

Well, that should have gone without saying, because certainly Paul, Apollos and Peter ALL said that the Corinthians should follow Jesus. No, the issue wasn't that there was a problem with Paul,

Apollos or Peter...no...the issue is that unfortunately, even today, people tend to emphasize the messenger over the message. This is why some pastors are more famous than their church...and people follow them. And so, that's why Paul had to set the Corinthians straight about the fact that they're all just men... See chpt 3, vs 5...

1 Corinthians 3:5-7

⁵What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

Do you want to know what the real issue was? **Baptism**... Who had baptized whom? You see, there were those who wanted to brag about how they had been baptized by Paul...and so he had to set that straight...

1 Corinthians 1:17

¹⁷For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

Paul's #1 priority was to preach the Gospel...that's it! He preached Christ and Him crucified and raised from the dead...Jesus saves! You see, Paul was absolutely terrified of saying or doing something that would empty the cross of its power. And so am I! I want to preach and teach from Scripture...not the newspaper, not CNN...not from what's politically correct or what some politician or daytime celebrity host on the View has to say. So much of what is being taught from our pulpits across America today has nothing to do with the truth...but instead, are empty testaments to the changing winds of culture, which have led to compromising the truth and so watered it down...that's it's lost its power...much like a table spoon of cough syrup drowned in a gallon of water...no power!

Oh, and this is why Paul had to express so earnestly what the Lord had told him. Look at chapter 2.

1 Corinthians 2:2-5

²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men^[q] but in the power of God.

Church, we need the Spirit of God to move...that's where the power is! The power of the Gospel is in the moving of the Holy Spirit! You see, following Jesus Christ is not JUST about following intellectual truths of the head...oh, it is that...but it's more... It's also a move of the heart and that's what Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well... He said to her:

John 4:23-24

²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

We must worship God with our heart (Spirit) and our head (Truth). It's both, not either/or. Church, you and I can do everything to a "T" when it comes to the things of God, and still miss the power of God. Like today...I can study and I can prepare and I can choose just the right word for my text...and if the Holy Spirit doesn't anoint it...then it will fail. The Praise Team can practice hard and come in here and hit every note and yet, God STILL not show up.

And, you know what else...there can be times when everything we do in here is a colossal train wreck...and it happens... The mics don't work, I come up at the wrong time...my battery pack is dead...Somebody on the praise team has a sore throat or a sick headache...and yet, God powerfully shows up anyway. Do you understand? It's not about our human efforts! We can do everything perfectly and it still be powerless!

There's an old southern Gospel group called the McKamey's. Have you ever heard of them?



They've been around forever. And the truth is...they don't sing like most of us are used to singing today. They sing by letter...they open up and LET HER FLY! But, let me tell you something...they're anointed by the Holy Spirit. Especially the momma...Peg McKamey, she loves the Lord...



and when she gets waving that handkerchief and sings "God on the mountain, is still God in the valley," I'm telling you...the Lord moves in! No, they might not be the greatest singers in the world and they might not hit every note just right...but, they are anointed by the Holy Spirit. Youtube them and you'll see!

I believe this is **the key to the entire message** and it might just be the reason that someone is struggling today. Perhaps you're not living in the Spirit. Listen, see if you can grasp this now...upon our salvation, whom did we receive? Hmm? The Holy Spirit! We received the Spirit of God. Think about that...the Bible is clear...once we're saved, we're to live in the Spirit and bear fruit. What fruit? The fruit of the Spirit, right? I want you to see what comes after the list.

Galatians 5:22-25

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Church family, it's simply, we are to live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit and when we do...we'll live like Jesus and we'll grow in our faith...but, if we don't walk in the Spirit, we'll become conceited and selfish, provoking one another and envying each other. Sound familiar? That was the Corinthian church.

Dear church family, so often we forget about the role the Holy Spirit is to play in our lives and in our churches. Look at what A.W. Tozer said 72 years ago:

How empty and meaningless is the average church service today. All the means are in evidence; the one ominous weakness is the absence of the Spirit's power.... The power from on high is neither known nor desired by pastor or people. This is nothing less than tragic, and all the more so because it falls within the field of religion, where the eternal destinies of men are involved.

-A.W. Tozer

So many churches just go through the motions and we wonder why nobody changes! I think about it a lot! We're not walking in the Spirit. Tozer also said:

“The presence of the Holy Spirit and the *manifestation* of his presence are not the same. There can be one without the other. God is here when we are wholly unaware of it. He is manifest only when and as we are aware of his presence.”

A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God



Is the Holy Spirit manifesting Himself in your life? Are you aware of His presence, or are you quenching Him? One of the shortest verses in the New Testament is 1 Thessalonians 5:19. Just five words...but, these 5 words can make all the difference in the world when it comes to your life...

1 Thessalonians 5:19

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit.

Are you? Do you want to know how you can tell if you are quenching the Holy Spirit? You can tell by your diet. You say, "By what I eat?" No, not physically, but spiritually. You can tell if you're on the bottle or the meat.

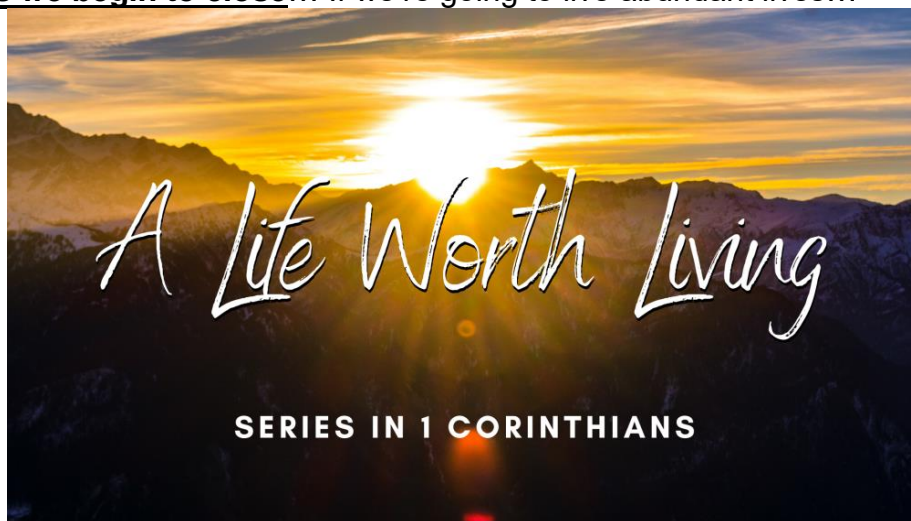
1 Corinthians 3:1-3

¹ But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?

These people were carnal...of the flesh...full of jealousy and strife and they had their little cliques, their little groups...and they let no one else in... They were exclusive...like a little club...and everybody saw it. And if you walked up to that little group, they clammed up. You say... "Are you sure you're not talking about a high school or a middle school?" No! I'm talking about in a church. Sad isn't it and it still happens.

Listen, it's so easy to get in the flesh in these little groups in our churches...and it's easy to become ruled by selfishness and jealousy that's pushed in these little cliques...but, that's not of God. We're the family of God... You wouldn't do that to your kids would you? One of your kids makes the group and the other is left out...talked about...shunned. We all know how that feels in school...so, why would we ever bring that into the church. Listen, you and I should talk to everybody in the church... **Sure, we're all going to have people that we're closer to than others...**that's human nature...but, everyone in the church should always feel loved and cared for no matter who they are. Don't ostracize people. That's not of the Spirit.

Please listen, as we begin to close... If we're going to live abundant lives...



one of the greatest determinants will be how we treat one another...as believers...how we treat one another in the body of Christ...that we're unified...as Jesus wanted. Because you see, when people on the outside of the church look at us...they look at how we treat one another as to

whether or not they want to be a part of us. So, they're watching what we say on Facebook and social media about one another and how we treat each other at the ballgames and in the stores.

Listen, your behavior, my behavior, as a follower of Christ is a reflection on Jesus even more than it's a reflection on you or the church. What you and I say and do reflects what we really believe about Jesus, and if we take his commands seriously: "to love another as I have loved you."

Brothers and sisters, when you and I talk about the church or church members in a negative way in front of unbelievers and we run down the preacher or certain things we don't like about the church, or its leadership...people are watching. Listen, if you've got a problem with someone Matthew 18:15 teaches us to go to them one and one and seek make it right... Most don't...they'd rather talk and so, when they choose to talk about that person and be negative about that person...and then get everyone in their little clique to be negative about that person...well, that breaks the heart of Jesus...because we're His children and He doesn't play favorites... Are you? If you are, that's Corinthian kind of stuff and you're still on the bottle.

So, it's pretty simple, folks...to follow Jesus in its simplest form is to live like He did and that's vs 9.

1 Corinthians 3:9

⁹For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

It's not about me! It's God's! Do you want to live in power...or live like the flesh...causing division, quenching the Spirit? I don't! Instead, I want to be like Paul. He said: (see it)...

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men^[c] but in the power of God.
