

Tuesday, November 24, 2020—1 Corinthians 9-12

Discussion over serious matters deals with truth but stirs emotions. Feelings and facts are both important. One can often sway the other. Paul was addressing some difficult topics that likely angered or saddened the Corinthians as they read his strong words. Instead of apologizing, Paul reminded them of the calling God had on his life as his defense (9:1-2). He was fulfilling his role as a disciple-maker and church planter.

Paul could have leaned on the Corinthians and other churches to support him. Some even accused him of saying and doing things in order to make money. Paul reminded them he was self-sufficient. He preached the gospel because of the burden he felt and the blessing he received (9:3-27).

The Bible is full of examples of those who knew God and decided to live their own way, so Paul urged the Corinthians not to follow the same destructive path. Temptation was all around, but God always provided a way out (10:13). Their lives could glorify Him in all things (10:31).

Paul encouraged them to follow his example as he followed Christ (11:1). They could love Jesus and influence others. Their times of worship could have order and emotion (11:2-16). Their fellowship could grow more mature and meaningful (11:17-34). To live without an awareness of the value and needs of others was a sin against Jesus Himself (11:29).

A healthy church has functioning members, using a variety of gifts to build a Christ-honoring, unified body, willing to discuss truth and deepen relationships. Pray to be a fully-developing follower of Jesus.

Monday, November 23, 2020—1 Corinthians 5-8

You can't spell dysfunction with f-u-n. The chaos of having a family-filled house during the holidays or the memories of an unexpected detour caused by a traffic jam are good things that came from challenges. Dysfunction is not always bad.

In Corinth, dysfunction was certainly bad. Some say Corinth put the "funk" in dysfunction. They had divisions that were threatening the unity of the church. They also had sexual immorality that the pagans in Corinth would not consider committing, and the church was proud of it! Paul demanded they address this sin and repent of it as an entire church. If not, the yeast of sin would work its way through the whole dough. The church needed to judge itself and leave the outsiders to God alone.

The dysfunction led them to taking one another into court rather than solving problems among themselves. They were transformed by Jesus but not allowing that transformation to transform their attitudes and actions. Their bodies and their relationships were to honor God.

Paul told the Corinthians that marriage was a gift from God and a high calling. Their marriages were to exalt Christ, but those who were single were not second-class members. God could use them for His glory as well. In addition, social status was no hindrance. God uses anyone who believes.

Paul called the Corinthians to consider other believers before themselves. Their love for Christ and one another was to build others in Christlikeness, not cause them to stumble. Pray your walk will honor Jesus, build others up, and decrease the dysfunction caused by sin.

Sunday, November 22, 2020—1 Corinthians 1-4

During his third missionary journey, Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years. He was intentional about shaping disciples, strengthening churches, and proclaiming the gospel. While in Ephesus, he corresponded with the church in Corinth so he could address some of the issues with which they struggled and encourage them to grow in Christ.

Paul's primary concern was the divisions which had developed in the church. He didn't

want the people identifying with Paul, Apollos, or Peter. Jesus was the one who saved them and gifted them. Jesus was the only one they needed to celebrate and adore. Boast about Jesus alone.

They may have been lining up with certain apostles and teachers based on doctrinal positions or practical concerns, so Paul reminded them their faith did not rest in man's wisdom but in the power of God's Spirit (2:5). He was not saying they should not think critically and live wisely, but he was reminding them of the necessity of Spirit and the unity He brings.

The gathering of Christians was the temple of God (3:17), His dwelling place. They needed this reminder so they would work toward unity that glorified the Occupant rather than division that focused on the stones from which the building was made. Paul called them to live out faithfully the trust God had given them (4:2). Unity in Christ is of primary concern.

Thank God for the power and wisdom which save and sanctify. Ask the Spirit to bring deeper unity and love within your church family.

Saturday, November 21, 2020—2 Thessalonians 1-3, Acts 18:12-19:10

Addressing a problem is far better than ignoring the problem. Talking about the issue does not always solve it or make it go away. Often, there have to be several discussions to help process through the dilemma.

Paul spent 18 months with the Corinthians, and while he was there, he wrote to the Thessalonians to encourage them in their faith and to assure them about their belief in the end times and return of Christ. While in Corinth, Paul wrote a second letter to discuss these thoughts further. He had full confidence they were continuing to grow in the Lord and that God would bring justice for the difficulties they endured (1:1-12), but he had heard of their continued anxiety about the second coming of Jesus (2:1).

False teachers were saying Jesus had already returned, and the Thessalonians had missed it. Paul reminded them what he had taught them in their brief time together—the man of lawlessness would first come into power and there would be a great falling away of so-called Christians who would begin to align with this self-exalting man (2:1-11). That obviously had not happened, so they could be at peace and stand firm in faith.

Paul urged them to pray for him as he continued to follow the Lord, and he told them to hold one another accountable to serving one another and avoiding the pitfalls of idleness (3:1-15). Paul finished his second missionary journey and soon began a third (18:12-19:10).

Thank God for the truth of the Word that answers questions and gives direction to life. Pray for your community to be Word-directed.

Friday, November 20, 2020—1 Thessalonians 1-5

Paul met the believers in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. He praised God for the faith and love that prompted their work for Christ and the hope that inspired them to endure any hardship (1:3). He wrote to them not long after their meeting because he heard they were struggling with important questions about what Paul taught them.

Paul reminded them of the love he had for them and the spirit in which he taught them. He recalled how the Thessalonians had turned from old beliefs and followed Jesus with sincerity and how they suffered ridicule from their neighbors as the believers in Judea did from the Jews. What Paul had taught and God had done through Christ was genuine (2:1-3:5). Paul was richly encouraged by Timothy's report of their firm faith (3:6).

Paul told the Thessalonians to remain steady in their walk. They were to avoid immorality and live in self-control. "For God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life" (4:7). They were to look after the needs of others while living a quiet life and could be certain Jesus would care for the faithful who died and those who would be alive at His return (4:13-18).

Paul urged them to remain diligent—looking for Jesus' return and staying faithful to His call to service until then. This required self-control, faith, love, and hope (5:8). This also meant urging the idle to get to work in faith and obedience. God is faithful. His people are to be, too.

Thursday, November 19, 2020—Acts 15:1-18:11

Followers of Jesus have His Holy Spirit living in them. He is the Counselor who provides wisdom and the Guide who gives power and direction. While He provides unity among the disciples, they will at times have disagreements about doctrine and practice. How they interact and move forward is critical to their continued peace and to God's glory.

The early church had serious concerns dealing with how Jews and Gentiles—who had vastly different cultural expectations—followed a common Master. Were Jewish regulations necessary for salvation? Was Old Testament Law necessary for daily holiness? The believers convened in Jerusalem for a lengthy discussion and agreed the Gentiles had been purified by faith (15:9), so the burden of the Law was not necessary. They shared their thoughts with the church in Antioch and encouraged them.

Paul and Barnabas could not come to an agreement, however. They had different ideas about their second missionary journey, so they parted ways, each man finding a new mission partner. Paul began retracing his steps from his first journey to check on the churches. He met Timothy on this trip and had a vision which compelled him to go into Macedonia to share the gospel. Paul and Silas faced great difficulty but saw God do miraculous works through them faith (16:1-40). Paul continued to challenge people to think critically and to consider Jesus wherever he went (17:1-34). Some believed and repented. Many balked and scoffed.

Walking with the Lord is a guarantee of challenging conversations and difficult circumstances. Pray for faith and endurance in everything.

Wednesday, November 18, 2020—Galatians 4-6

Paul knew the Law as well as any of the greatest Jewish scholars of his day. He could recite passages from memory and tell of the commentaries of the most revered minds. Paul knew the Law described holiness but gave no solution for sin. The Law imprisoned people.

That's why Jesus was such a gift. He was born under the Law to set free all those who were under the Law (4:4). Those who believed the good news were no longer slaves to sin and the Law but were now sons of God. Men and women alike could now have full rights of inheritance. Why would anyone want to go back to the old way when Jesus had provided something so much better (4:9)? Paul wanted them to live in the joy of freedom.

If they wanted to live by the Law, they needed to realize they had to obey every single detail of the Law (5:3). This was impossible. Jesus freed them from that obligation. That freedom did not mean they could live however they desired, indulging the flesh (5:13, 6:7). In being free in Christ, they had the opportunity and power to love others as Christ loved them.

This Spirit-empowered freedom gave them a new relationship with Christ and fellow believers. They could support and rebuke one another in the power and gentleness of the Spirit instead of the Law (6:1-10). Pray for the