

01/17/10

Facing Problems Head On – 1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Introduction

- How many of you would say that you like going to the dentist?...
- let's do a little brainstorming this morning –

[A. Opening Salvos]

1. INPUT - What are some reasons we don't particularly care for going to the dentist?

- the pain, the inconvenience, the pain, the expense, the pain...

2. INPUT – Then why do we go to the dentist?

- Because you know it is wise to solve little problems before they become big problems...

- well, if that is true of our teeth, should it also be true of our lives?...

3. Should problems in our relationships with others be addressed in a timely fashion before they become more significant (and therefore harder to solve in the long-run)?

4. Would we have any biblical justification for suggesting that problems should be solved quickly?

- **Matthew 5:23-24** - Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.
- **Matthew 5:25** - Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.
- **Ephesians 4:26-27** – Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.

5. INPUT - What are some of the reasons we don't particularly care for solving problems with other people?

6. INPUT – Then why do/should we solve problems with others in a timely fashion?

- now, I think many of us would say that we find this to be a very hard thing to do...which is why we want to talk this am about **Facing Problems Head-On...**
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, [page 130 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...]
- this morning we're beginning a verse by verse study of the book of 1 Corinthians...there will be times this year when we step away from this study for a period of time, but by and large, this will be our primary focus this year...

B. Introductory ideas about the book of 1 Corinthians.

1. The city of Corinth had a very strategic location.

- [show maps]...
- Greece is divided in two parts, connected by a 4 mile wide isthmus...

- in Bible times, it was very dangerous to sail around the southern tip of Greece...
- so smaller ships would actually be pulled out of the water and portaged on a set of tracks across the isthmus which saved a lot of time but was also much safer...
- larger ships would stop on one side, offload the cargo, and then sail around the tip of the country and come back and get their goods...that way, if something happened to the ship at least the cargo was safe...
- mariners used to say – “A sailor never takes a trip around Malea without first writing his will” ...
- Corinth was located right on this isthmus...which was an incredibly strategic location...
 - that brought with it everything you would expect with a bustling economy...
 - great wickedness in a concentrated place...like many seaports of the day...
 - there was also a fair amount of wealth and the intellectualism that sometimes comes with wealth---so the Corinthians loved knowledge, and worldly wisdom, and polished speakers...it was a very strategic location...

2. Corinth hosted the biennial Isthmian games.

- we typically think about the Olympics which were an important part of that culture...but the second major athletic contests were the Isthmian games, which were held every other year right here in the city of Corinth...
- so you have everything that would go along with athletics and training of the body...both good and bad...

3. Corinth was home to the Temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love.

- Like many ancient Greek cities, there was an acropolis (a high city) which rose 2000 feet and was used for both defense and worship.
- that's where the temple to Aphrodite was located, and history tells us that there were as many as 1000 temple prostitutes who worked at the temple during the day and then came down to offer their services to the men of the city and foreign travelers in the evenings...

4. Paul was used of God to plant the Corinthian church on his second missionary journey.

- you can read about that in Acts chapter 18, but Paul spent a year and a half founding this church and then beginning to ground them in the truths of God's Word...
 - but the challenge was, the church was still very immature and riddled with problems...they were behaving sinfully with their bodies, they were taking one another to court, they were not keeping their marriage vows, they were misusing their liberties, some were rejecting Paul's teaching and authority in the church, and on and on...
 - they also had a series of questions that they had posed to Paul in a previous letter that needed to be answered...
 - but one of the largest issues had to do with their lack of unity...they were a terribly divided body...
 - it's like a person who has not been to the dentist for quite some time...
 - so the question is – what's Paul going to do about it?...
 - and the answer is, he's going to address the problems head on...but the way he addresses them is very, very instructive...
- with that in mind, let's read our text...**read 1 Corinthians 1:1-17...**

- so we're talking about Facing Problems Head-On, and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **4 reasons we can confidently face problems.**

I. Problems Can Be Solved Because We Have a Divine Standard – v. 1

- letters written at this period of history were typically the reverse of how we do it today...
- in our culture you sign a letter at the end...
- that's the opposite of their practice...
- but what we need to see right off the bat is that Paul purposely identified himself as...
- **v. 1- Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.**
 - now, this wasn't just to be sure they didn't confuse him with "Paul the candlestick maker who lives down by the stadium..."
 - they all knew which "Paul" this was...
 - but it was important for them to remember that Paul was an apostle...a messenger of God to them...
 - and that was an especially important position between the time Jesus ascended into heaven and the time the NT was completed...
 - that office died out in part because the requirements necessary to hold the office, which included "having seen the risen Christ" is no longer possible...
 - but Paul had not come as some great orator, or distinguished intellectual...
 - he had come as an apostle, a messenger of Jesus Christ to them...
 - it was also "by the will of God"...
 - if you know Paul's story, it's certainly not that he always loved Jesus and wanted to serve him from the very beginning...
 - Paul was a persecutor of the church – and he totally changed the direction of his life after his experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus...but he was an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...
 - now, that automatically brings hope to the equation...because there is a divine standard by which problems will be addressed and solved...in their case it would have been the OT Scriptures, the verbal teachings of Christ which were in the process of being codified into the gospels, and the authoritative teaching of the apostles...
 - for us, and we will even learn more about this later in the book of 1 Corinthians...but we now have the benefit of the completed revelation of the NT...
 - now, please think about any problem or difficulty that you have with one of your friends...or with someone in your family, or a neighbor or a co-worker or certainly someone in this church...
 - why can you have hope that there doesn't have to be long-term division?...
 - because we have a divine standard...

A. Which tells us right from wrong.

- **2 Timothy 3:16-17 - All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**
- [develop – teaching—what's right, reproof—what's wrong, correction—how to get right...]
- that's how some Christian families are able to maintain a level of unity in the midst of problems and disagreements...
- the primary issue isn't – well, here's what I think, no here's what I think...
- the primary focus is – what does God think?...what is the standard He has laid out for us in the Word?...
- [cf. our pastor/deacons retreat last weekend – not a lot of fussing, in part because we are committed to functioning with one another in a way that Scripture is our authority...]

B. Which tells us how to communicate.

- It is amazing the amount of information contained in Scripture about our tongues, and speech, and communication, and problem-solving...
- [cf. the assignment to draw a tongue next to every verse in Proverbs about the tongue...also recommend War of Words by Paul Tripp and Your Family God's Way by Wayne Mack...]
- **Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue...**
 - implication being, when you speak, be sure that you are choosing to use words that bring life to the situation...
 - [could talk about the way these land acquisition and facility design committees are moving so rapidly – no fussin, etc – because they are committed to communicating in a biblical way...]
 - when people are not wasting their resources on sinful communication and all the diversions that causes, it is incredible what they can accomplish...
- this is a major Bible theme...[by the way – it actually is the overarching theme for the first 4 chapters of this book – there are a lot of other aspects to study---but that is the big picture...]
- but think about how this is emphasized in the Bible, both positively and negatively...
 - **Proverbs 6:16-19 – There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him...one who spreads strife among brothers.**
 - **Psalms 133:1 - Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!**

- now, one of the take-aways would be – when you have a difficulty with another person, is the Word of God the standard to which you turn – and do you know enough of Scripture so that you have a healthy arsenal to use, sometimes on yourself, so that you are sure you're addressing problems God's way?...and are committed to going to the dentist quickly, before that little spot of tartar turns into a cavity...Those problems can be solved because we have a divine standard...

II. Problems Can be Solved Because We Have a Divine Identity – v. 2.

- it is very important to...

A. Note the way Paul approached the Corinthians.

- with all that Paul invested in this church, and all that they had allowed to go wrong since his departure, you would have expected Paul to come into this discussion with a flame-thrower...
- and maybe that's the problem with some of us – I know it can be with me...
- some of us function like the blocking fullback on a football team...
- that's the guy who follows the linemen and precedes the running back...
- you know what his job is, don't you?...make a little hole bigger...
- some of us are like that...there's a little fire starting, but instead of using biblical principles of communication and problem solving and pouring water on the fire, we choose sinful words and actions that are like pouring gas on the fire...
- let's learn some lessons here...

B. He appealed to them on the basis of their identity in Christ.

1. Church of God

- **v. 2 – To the church of God at Corinth...**
- the issue of ownership needed to be faced...

- people who are trying to contribute to unity in the church by facing and solving problems right away in a biblical fashion are giving evidence that they realize...this isn't my church... I need to remember my identity...
- **Acts 20:28 - Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.**
- [cf. the point of Gordon's MacDonald's book – Who Stole My Church?]

2. Those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling. V. 2

- the word sanctify means set apart, or make holy...[could tell what Drew said to Danny this week...]
- we were talking about this in our counseling note rewrite meeting this week with our counseling center staff – and Pastor Green used a very helpful analogy...
- thinking about the story of sanctification being a book with three chapters...
 - Chapter one – positional sanctification.**
 - chapter one is what is being referenced here...positional sanctification, or justification...being declared righteous by God based on the finished work of Christ and His righteousness being imputed to our accounts...
 - so when you come to Christ, you are positionally sanctified, set apart, made holy...
 - Chapter two -- progressive sanctification**
 - bringing your practice (lifestyle) in line with your identity...that's becoming holy, becoming more Christlike, Christian growth...
 - Chapter three -- prospective sanctification**
 - or glorification---that happens in heaven—you'll be like Christ because you see Him as He is...
 - but the point here is – Paul appeals to them on the basis of who they are in Christ...
 - if they have been set apart by God, and freed from the enslaving power of sin, they can have high hopes that they can communicate and solve problems in a supernatural way...

- another part of their identity was that...

3. Those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

- that phrase too is just packed with meaning...
- Paul says – you can solve problems because you have access to the privilege of prayer...you can call upon the name of the Lord...
- as a Christian, you also recognize Christ to be your Lord...He is the One who is in charge...

C. Appropriate steps for people who have this identity when a problem arises?

1. Pray for divine help, understanding, a repentant heart, and a gracious spirit.

- problem solving should always be bathed in prayer...
- after an extensive discussion with the Colossians about numerous problems that may have to be addressed in our relationships with one another, Paul said...**Colossians 4:2 - Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;**
- facing something head-on does not mean facing it head first...the process should be bathed in prayer...

2. Study the Scripture to determine whether the issue is truly biblical.

- **Colossians 3:16 - Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...**

- if it is not a biblical issue, why would we fuss about it in the home or the church?

3. Be sure to seek to get the log out of your own eye first.

- **Matthew 7:3 - Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?**

4. Consider whether love should cover this particular issue or occurrence.

- **1 Peter 4:8 - Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.**

- be careful of this one, but not every issue needs to be addressed every time...

5. Avoid sinful gossip.

- **Proverbs 20:19 - He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, therefore do not associate with a gossip.**

6. Speak to the other person about the problem with the goal of glorifying God and finding a biblical solution.

- **Luke 17:3-4 - Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him.**

- the goal is – let's find a way to get this behind us...

- now, if you say – I'm not sure I can do that – think about your identity...

- you have the ability to pray and ask for God's help – [the word "can't" doesn't fit into that conceptualization very well...]

- you have said that Jesus is your Lord – so it doesn't matter about what you feel like doing, or how your grandmother used to handle such situations...

- God's allows problems in part to help us act on the implications of our identity in Christ...

- when this is occurring in a church – it is amazing how much can be accomplished...cf. the two projects I mentioned last week – there are 20+ projects that I could get fired up about – but our church family decided on those two – so now it's time to be fired up about those – even if they aren't your favorites---but what's interesting is – I have not heard one word about someone lobbying for their project to take precedent over the two the church family selected...you can communicate, solve problems, and move forward together...

- I mentioned last week that I was asking our pastors to make a formal commitment to Arvid about what they were going to be doing for the capital campaign in 11-13 by April 1st, and the deacons by May 1st...

- someone in the church family e-mailed Monday and made an extremely generous commitment to the capital campaign already...in its first week – that is a huge help because the sooner we know, and the more those conversations are initiated by folks from the church family, the more accurate our planning...[acting on our identity in Christ and building unity as a result puts in a position to accomplish much together...]

- so, problems can be solved because we have a divine standard, and because we have a divine identity...

III. Because We Have Divine Resources – vv. 3-9

- it's not just who you are in Christ but also what you have in Him...

A. Grace and peace from God our Father.

- that is a gift from God Himself to individual Christians and to the church family...

- the Hebrew counterpart would be shalom...the peace and rest that comes from being rightly related to God and others...

- [cf. the pastor/deacon's planning retreat – great unity because we have great provision...]

B. The ability to speak for Christ.

- **1 Corinthians 1:5-6 - that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech...even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you,**
 - you were enriched in speech...you say, what does that mean?...
 - it has nothing to do with being some golden tongued orator...that will become very apparent in coming weeks...
 - Paul is talking about their testimony...
 - one of the reasons we would want to work hard at preserving and promoting unity in the church and in our homes is because of the powerful testimony that is to the outside world...
- **John 13:35 - By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**
 - divisive people do not care about how their words and their actions might affect the corporate testimony of their church in their community...
 - [could talk about those who served in the recent Christmas day dinner and how they tried to contribute to the unity of the team...]

C. Enriched in all knowledge.

- **1 Corinthians 1:5 - in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge...**
 - in Christ you have access to the truth you need to solve problems well...

D. Not lacking in any gift.

- that's what verse 7 says...
- as individuals they had the gifts necessary to be what God wanted them to be...and as a church family those gifts were present...
- so if you would say – my wife and I can't resolve this---then get some help from other folks in the body and take advantage of the gifts God has given...

E. A hope-filled future.

- **1 Corinthians 1:7-8 - awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
 - for the person who would say – it's not worth it, having to communicate and solve all this stuff...
 - it may not seem worth it today – but the day will come when you'll be glad you did...
- **Romans 8:18 - For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**
 - I believe the day will come when our church family will be very glad we focused our efforts on trying to accomplish things for God in our community and world instead of fussing endlessly about things that don't matter...
 - [cf. folks who are at odds with their spouse or someone else in your life – the day will come when you regret all the resources you wasted on such foolishness...]
- [if time, could talk about the problem solving approach we use here corporately, reviewing membership list, believing problems are for solving, would be unwise to travel if I knew I was leaving unsolved problems, they multiply, etc...]

IV. Because We Have a Divine Calling.

- that's what verses 10-17 amount to...an apostolic appeal that these men and women solve the problems that exist among them...and that is consistent with...

A. Jesus' call to unity.

- **John 17:20-21** - **"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.**

- I know I used this verse earlier, but consider it again...

B. The Psalmist's call to unity.

Psalm 133:1 - **Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!**

C. Paul's call to unity in other places.

Ephesians 4:3 - **being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

- Paul had received this report from the house of Chloe that there were various divisions in the church, people aligning themselves with various leaders and fussing with one another...

- he exhorts them to...**1 Corinthians 1:10** - **...all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.**

1. Q – when the last time you visited the dentist?...has this passage identified the next step that you need to take – is there an unsolved problem or have you been contributing to a lack of unity in some area of your life?

2. This explains some of our initiatives...

- TEAMM Prayer
- BCC

3. Thankful for the great unity God has blessed us with – let's be diligent to preserve it...