“1 Corinthians - To a Troubled Church”

Theme: The Letters of Paul
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13: 1-7

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon
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Family/Community Activity for the week: Sometimes people in churches hurt one another. It is important to ask forgiveness when we sin against someone. As a family, take a handful of coins in a container to a nearby fountain. (If you are not able to go to a fountain, fill a bucket with water.) Ask each person to take one or more coins. Explain that this is a time to tell God “I’m sorry” for any sins committed. Ask each person to individually pray (aloud or silently) “Lord, I am sorry I ...” and confess his or her sins to God. Then toss the coins into the water. Invite family members to dip their hands in the fountain for a quick washing. Finish by praying, “Thank you, God, for the gift of your forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Amen.” Make sure to also ask the ones who were hurt by your words or actions for forgiveness.

Meditation Moments for Monday, August 22 - Read Acts 18:1-18. Paul went to Corinth, a large seaport known for all the vices typical among idle sailors throughout history, on his second missionary journey. God told the apostle that he had “many people” there. Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, fellow tentmakers, who became dear friends and co-workers (in Romans 16:3-4, Paul would write that they had “risked their own necks” for his life). He ended up staying in Corinth for 18 months.

• After Paul preached in Corinth for a while, some synagogue members “opposed and slandered him.” He “left the synagogue,” but remarkably, “Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household came to believe in the Lord.” Jesus told Paul in a dream, “Don’t be afraid ... I’m with you.” How does it change your outlook in difficult, scary situations to have a sense that you’re not all alone, that Jesus is with you? Where do you need God’s comfort and courage right now?

• When Paul met Priscilla and Aquila, they were all far from home. He’d come from Athens, and faced hostility in Corinth. Priscilla and Aquila were recent exiles from Rome at Emperor Claudius’ orders. Most often God works through people. How did God use the close friendship that developed to strengthen all three people to serve Jesus more effectively?

Prayer: Loving Lord, guide me as I keep building my ability to trust that you are always with me. And make me the kind of friend who can help and support someone else in serving you more faithfully. Amen.

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Tuesday, August 23 - Read 1 Corinthians 1:1-17. Paul wrote this letter to Corinth during his 3-year stay in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. We learned this past week that he wrote this letter to deal with the deep divisions in the church in Corinth, much like the world we live in today. We sometimes romanticize what the early church was like, but we see early on in this letter how all too human the followers of Jesus in Corinth were.

- What seems to be the nature of the Corinthians’ disunity? What is Paul’s answer to the problem of division? In what specific ways does this problem exist today?

- Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. How do some people perceive the message of the cross? What were the intellectual and social stands of the Corinthian congregation? For Paul, what was God’s motivation for choosing the weak and foolish things?

Prayer: Dear God, help to follow you and you alone. Give me strength, through the power of the cross, to be faithful so I might help heal divisions and help bring about transformation in your world. Amen.

Wednesday, August 24 - Read 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 and 12:31-13:13. Even though Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth, the Christians there had many struggles to grow beyond the self-serving, immoral culture that surrounded them. In a later letter to these Christians, Paul warned against the sexual immorality of their city. And, aware that they were dividing into factions striving for superiority, he penned his profound picture of what unselfish, enduring, God-sourced love looks like.

- Many first-world Christians, like many first-century Greeks, prefer a “head” oriented faith, which coolly analyzes religious ideas and avoids emotional expressions. Yet in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul called love “an even better way” [than relating solely through our strongest abilities]. Without love, he said, being able to “know all the mysteries and everything else” lacks eternal value.

- What makes God-given love “the greatest of these”— greater even than hope and faith? What does it mean for you to love God “with ALL your heart, with ALL your being, with ALL your strength, and with ALL your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27)?

Prayer: King Jesus, I want to love as you love, but every day I fall short of that ideal. But every day your love surrounds me, and I trust it to help me keep growing toward the kind of love you call me to live. Amen.

Thursday, August 25 - Read I Corinthians 8:1-13. In this text, Paul begins a lengthy response to the Corinthians’ questions regarding eating meat which had come from pagan temple practices. At first glance, this would have no relevance for us today. However, upon closer reflection, questions of Christian freedom and voluntary abstention motivated by love are something every generation must deal with.

- What does Paul’s phrase “Knowledge puffs up but love builds up” mean? Most of us are not struggling with the issue of meat being sacrificed to idols. What might be a present day cultural equivalent?

- Read I Corinthians 10: 14-33 which finishes Paul’s response to this subject. We could summarize Paul’s approach as “freedom and restraint.” There is the freedom to celebrate that everything is permissible, AND the restraint to not cause anyone to knowingly stumble. In recent decades, we’ve become familiar with the phrase “situational ethics.” How does Paul allow the situation to determine the ethics of meat eating? In what contemporary circumstances might the situation determine the ethical response? What robust attitude toward life does Paul display in verse 31? How can this concept become a way of life for us?

Prayer: God, help me, through all my actions, to build up. Give me strength to show restraint, even when I’m free to do things that are not good for me or others. Help me to do all things for your glory.

Friday, August 26 - Read I Corinthians 12:1-31. The subject if this portion of Paul’s letter deals with the nature, purpose and experience of spiritual gifts within the gathered worship service.

- How does Paul describe spiritual gifts in verse 7? To whom are they given and to what purpose? Make a list of the spiritual gifts Paul mentions here in verses 7-11. Can you identify what each of these gifts are? Are these gifts still available to the church today? Paul talks about the proper use of spiritual gifts for the building up of God’s new community. By studying Paul’s response, we can imagine just what attitudes and abuses must have been happening within Corinthian worship services. Again Paul, the master teacher and pastor, skillfully draws their immature attentions away from self-centeredness and on to humility and loving service. (Go to our website and take the Spiritual Gifts Inventory in the “Useful Links” section at the bottom left of the web page.)

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• How does Paul describe baptism in verse 13? How do you understand baptism as a rite of Christian imitation? In verses 14-26, Paul develops an analogy of the human body and the “body” of Christ. What is the analogy and how does it work? How could you summarize in your own words this analogy? The theme of verses 27-31 is a return to spiritual gifts. What gifts are in this list? How does it compare to the previous list? What do these gifts do? What is the implied answer to Paul’s repeating question?

Prayer: God, help me to discover and use my gifts to play the role in the body of Christ you have designed just for me. May I serve humbly and with a loving attitude to help transform this world into your kingdom. Amen.

Saturday, August 27 - Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-58. This chapter is one of the longest written by Paul and speaks about the historical resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the implications of that event to the Christian faith. According to 15:12 some of the Corinthians were saying “that there is no resurrection of the dead.” For Paul and all New Testament authors, the physical resurrection of Jesus is the absolute essential upon which the gospel stands or falls. Paul will build a logical and sequential case for the historical resurrection of Christ and fill in just what the implications of this belief are. For this apostle, the Christian faith is absurd if not for the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

• What are the implications for our faith, if Jesus has not been raised in verses 12-18? How does Paul describe the end of history? What is the final enemy to be defeated and how is that triumph described?

• The climatic conclusion of resurrection is brought into focus in verse 50-58. The future of immortality has been guaranteed through Christ’s victory over death. “Death has been swallowed up in victory” is Paul’s triumphant promulgation. How does Paul describe the future events of resurrection? Paul moves seamlessly from teaching to worship and praise in verse 57. Can you express your praise to God for this good news?

Prayer: O Jesus, you walked into the darkest, deepest place we face—into death itself—and then you emerged, alive and victorious. Thank you for winning that victory, which I could never have won for myself, and then sharing it with me. Amen.

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Theme: Transformed by the Letters of Paul
“1 Corinthians – Letter to a Troubled Church”
Sermon preached by Jeff Huber August 19-20, 2017

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13: 1-7

Today we continue our series of sermons on the letters of Paul, which were written to help followers of Jesus experience transformation in their hearts and their lives. The letter we look at today is the first letter we have from Paul to the church in Corinth, which was a troubled and conflicted church. I we find it interesting when people say things like, “I wish the church would just get back to the original church, like in the first century!” I giggle a bit when I think about the fact that the first church in the first century was pretty messed up and had just as many issues, if not more, than we do. The reason is because the church then and the church today has one thing in common. People.

In this series of sermons, we are trying to understand the historical context for some of the great passages of Scripture and understand what was going on in the local churches, or in the lives of the individuals to whom these letters were written. We also are looking at how these letters can apply to our life, and help us experience the transformation of becoming more like Christ in the world.

I have had people in the past tell me that when they read the letters of the apostle Paul in the New Testament, they don’t like them. Sometimes they don’t understand what they say and sometimes they do understand what it says and they don’t like it! There are couple of passages about women keeping silent in the church in 1 Corinthians, and other passages like those which grate on our nerves and are offensive to our modern sensitivities. But if we begin to understand the context in which these letters were written, if we can understand what was going on in Paul’s life and in the setting of the people to whom he was writing these letters, suddenly they can begin to make sense. We can have a little grace for those passages which are perplexing or offensive. We can begin to hear God speaking to us through these letters more clearly, and without the blockage of historical filters.

Our hope in the series of sermons is to introduce the sermons in such a way that you will find it a more powerful to read these letters, and will want to go deeper in the days ahead. With that in mind, would you please take out of your bulletin your Meditation Moments and Message Notes? There is the Scripture listed at the top that we will be using today and some blank lines free to write down anything you like to try and remember from today’s message. My hope is that you will write down things which will help you read the Scriptures more deeply in the coming weeks. Below that our daily Scripture readings from 1 Corinthians which will help you read the Bible on your own. The message today and the Meditation Moments are a package deal. The goal is that you would not only listen to the sermon but you would follow up with some deep reading on your own to see how the Scriptures might apply to your life today. My hope is they will come to life when you do these together.

Last week we began this series of sermons by looking a bit at Rome and Roman culture to help us better understand Paul’s letter to the Romans. Today, I would like to paint a picture of the town of Corinth in the day of Paul and the time in which he wrote this letter which was around 55 A.D., or about 20 years after the death of Jesus. Corinth was a city which straddled the Isthmus between the southern part of Greece and the northern part of Greece. The southern part is known traditionally as the Peloponnesse. You will see on the video screen a map which will put into perspective where the city of Corinth was located. This is actually a map of Paul’s second missionary journey which we also put in your bulletin this week.

(Graphic: Paul’s Second Missionary Journey)

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You can see the tiny land bridge between Corinth and Athens. The Adriatic Sea is on the left, which linked Italy to the rest of the Roman Empire. To the south is the Mediterranean Sea which linked the Roman Empire to Africa. And the Aegean Sea is on the right which leads over to Asia and modern-day Turkey. That land bridge which connects all these regions is about 6 miles. On either side of that land bridge was a port. Corinth was in a strategic location because it allowed it to be the only city in this region with two major ports on two major seas. As such, this was a major shipping location, so the goods and services being shipped from Rome and throughout Italy would come through Corinth by being transported 6 miles across this land bridge. This avoided the trip around the Peloponnese which could be dangerous during stormy seasons. Goods and services would pass back and forth between the southern and northern portions of Greece through Corinth.

In its day, Corinth was the leading city and all of Greece. It outshone the city of Athens, which was known for its sophistication and learning, but it only had 50,000 residents. Corinth had 650,000 residents which made it a huge city in Paul’s day.

Think of some of the shipping cities you have visited such as Galveston or South Houston or San Francisco or New Orleans. I was reminded of this on my vacation back to the Bay Area where I grew up, when we took a ferry from Oakland across the San Francisco Bay and could see all the shipping district. Here is a video I snapped as we traveled by the pier district of the San Francisco Bay.

**VIDEO**  San Francisco Bay

When you think of San Francisco, what comes to your mind? You might think of some of the sites, but my guess is that you also think of things like “free love” and other stereotypical thoughts of a port city. When the sailors would come to port in Corinth, their ships would either offload their goods and have them transported by carriage, or they had a system where they would roll the ships on a dolly across the stretch. You can still see the ruins of the channel they used to transport ships upon. Today there is a canal which allows the ships to pass through.

**GRAPHIC**  The paved road of Doilkos

**GRAPHIC**  Transportation of a ship through Diolkos

Here is a picture of that canal as we crossed over it.

**GRAPHIC**  Corinthian Canal

This meant that a ship’s crew would be on shore for six or eight hours with really nothing to do, unless there was some good entertainment available for those lonely sailors. Major business was to service and meet the needs of those sailors coming through Corinth, who’d been at sea for months at a time. Corinth was not only a major shipping hub but it was a very religious city, steeped in the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods. There were dozens of temples built in and around the city of Corinth with 12 major ones within the city proper. One Temple outshone all the rest and it was the acropolis otherwise known as the Acro-Corinth. Every major Greek city which had a hill behind it, would have an acropolis. People used to live on the acropolis and then they would move into the valleys and the temples would be built up on top of the hill.

**GRAPHIC**  Corinth Acropolis with Temple to Apollos

**GRAPHIC**  Corinth Acropolis

**GRAPHIC**  Acrocorinth Walled City

All that is left of the Acro Corinth is the walled city ruins, but one of the largest temples was on the very top of this hill and it was the Temple to Aphrodite, or Venus as you may know her Latin. Aphrodite was the goddess of love and so Corinth was known as the city of love. This was the finest of any of the temples to Aphrodite throughout the world, looking down upon Corinth.

Paul’s first letter to the people of Corinth is known as the, “letter of love,” but his idea of love is much different than the kind of love that was expressed through the temple of Aphrodite. She was not the goddess of Agape, or sacrificial love, but was the goddess of Eros, or erotic love. In her Temple were housed at times between 200 and 1,000 temple prostitutes. Aphrodite was the goddess of prostitution because she was known in Greek mythology for her affairs. She was married to one god but had children by many other gods. She was known as the protector of the prostitutes and the women

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who lived at the temple were protected. They were provided a home and the payments they received for their services went to the temple. During the daytime, they would come down from the acropolis and stand along the street corners in Corinth to provide comfort and companionship for the sailors who were going from one side of Greece to the other.

The morality in Corinth was a bit different than the morality and the rest of the Roman Empire and its idea of love was intertwined with eroticism and sexuality. It was a radically different picture of love than what was offered by the apostle Paul as he preached the good news of the gospel. We spent some time in Corinth and I want to show you a few more photos so you can get a feel for the place. The first picture you see is Main Street and you can see the acropolis with the temple of Aphrodite would’ve been right at the end of the street.

GRAPHIC Corinth Acropolis with Main Street
GRAPHIC Shops of Corinth

Also, at the end of the street, you will find this place where Paul preached and you can read about in the book of Acts, chapter 18.

GRAPHIC Bema where Paul Preached
GRAPHIC View from the Bema
GRAPHIC Temple of Apollos
GRAPHIC View from Bema to Communion spot
GRAPHIC The Acropolis overlooks Corinth

When you look out from the bema you can see the city and also the large Temple to Apollos. When you look to the left, you can see another stretch of the city and our group was able to do Communion just under those trees that you see in the distance. The acropolis looked over this entire city. The other thing to know is that the city of Athens was much more sophisticated, even with a small population because in Corinth, 400,000, or almost 2/3 of their population were slaves. 200,000 to 250,000 were free people and not many of them were in the upper echelons of the Roman world and society. Most of them were working-class and served the ships and the merchandise that was transported. This was Corinth in the time of Paul.

SLIDE Paul’s Second Missionary Journey

The church in Corinth was founded around 51 A.D. by the apostle Paul went on his second missionary journey. If we look at the map again we can see that he traveled throughout the Aegean Sea area and ending up in Corinth where he stayed for 18 months. He began preaching in the Jewish synagogue, as he would in most cities, and then he moved outside to reach the Gentiles who were not Jewish. Many people came to faith in Jesus Christ while Paul was ministering in Corinth and he eventually left and headed across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus. He went back to Corinth on his third missionary journey, but went to Ephesus first on this journey and he stayed in Ephesus for three years. It was around 55 A.D., while in the city of Ephesus, that Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth.

What prompted him writing this letter? People from the church in Corinth would make the three-day journey by ship, which was relatively short in the day of Paul, to Ephesus and give him a report of what was happening in the church. Paul heard about major problems and struggles in the church in Corinth. If you have your Bibles, you might turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 1. If you don’t have your Bible, you might grab one from the pews. We read here about some of the problems happening in the church in Corinth. This letter is all about the problems of one early church.

We learned last week that Romans is Paul’s masterpiece, because it laid out his theology and we got a chance to see his preaching in greater detail than anywhere else. But in first Corinthians, we find the greatest portrait we have of an early church in the first century. As we look at first Corinthians, we have a chance to see the problems and the issues being faced in those early Christian churches. We start off in verse 10.

BIBLE 10 I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church.

(Message Notes and Meditation Moments for August 20-21, 2017) For more, go to www.fumcdurango.org
Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. 11 For some members of Chloe’s household have told me about your quarrels, my dear brothers and sisters. 12 Some of you are saying, “I am a follower of Paul.” Others are saying, “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Peter,” or “I follow only Christ.” 13 Has Christ been divided into factions? Was I, Paul, crucified for you? Were any of you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not!

We learn in this passage that there were some in Chloe’s household, where may be one of the church’s even met at, who had come to Paul and told him there were quarrels and fighting happening in the church. The first quarrel is about who their leader should be. After Paul left Corinth, another preacher came in whose name was Apollos. He was a dynamic, charismatic and handsome young man who was an excellent preacher. He was known as a “silver tongued orator.” He made his living by preaching the gospel and he was a friend of the apostle Paul.

But Apollos and Paul were very different. Paul was very humble looking. He had a crooked nose, was balding and walked with a limp. He had one eyebrow connected across his forehead, what we sometimes call a “unibrow.” People didn’t see him as someone who was very handsome and he didn’t speak with much charisma. We might think of Paul as a fiery preacher, but he says of himself that he was not someone who had powerful words or was persuasive in that way. He was very smart and a good organizer and very committed to Christ. He was well read and learned and he was trained at the finest Roman schools so he knew how to craft an argument.

Paul also was working-class, working as a tent maker in the city of Corinth. Those who worked with their hands like Paul, could relate to him and connected to his style of leadership. Those in the upper or ruling classes tended to look down on the working class. Apollos was a professional and Paul was a laborer, which meant the upper-class seemed to identify more with Apollos and the working-class tended to identify with Paul.

SLIDE Chapters 1-4 - Who is their real Apostle?

The first four chapters of this letter are dealing with who the real apostle is and who they should follow. Paul made it clear that he loved Apollo's and he was a great preacher, but that he was their father in the faith. He warned them to be careful about being arrogant, because some of them believe they had outgrown him. They believed they were wiser and knew more than he did about the gospel. Paul reminds them that they all follow one Lord in Jesus Christ and it doesn’t matter who gets the credit. Thinking that one leader is more important than another.

SLIDE Chapters 5-7 - Quarrels over sexual ethics

In the next three chapters, Paul deals with quarrels over sexual ethics in the city that is known for sexual immorality and unusual views about sexuality. In chapters 5, 6 and 7 we find that these new followers of Jesus were struggling in this area of their lives. One of the main issues revolved around freedom that comes from Christ and how that is reflected in our sexuality. One group claimed that being free in Christ meant they were free from the law and whatever they did behind closed doors was their own business. They would argue that how they expressed their sexuality had nothing to do with their faith or the church. They could do whatever they wanted because God was not concerned about these things because what mattered most was our spirituality and there is a separation between the body and the spirit among these believers.

Chapter 5 begins with Paul dealing with a man who is having a sexual relationship with his stepmother. Paul addresses it directly when he says this should not be happening. God does care about this part of our lives. We find in the second half of chapter 6 that some of the men who were followers of Jesus are still visiting the temple prostitutes. Everyone was doing it in their culture and it was normal and so they believed it was just a part of life. They believed that God didn’t care because they were set free through the grace of Jesus Christ. Paul tells them directly that it should not be this way and that when they unite with a prostitute at the temple of Aphrodite, they are violating God’s temple. Here is what Paul writes.

BIBLE

19 Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, 20 for God bought you with a high price. So, you must honor God with your body.

(Message Notes and Meditation Moments for August 20-21, 2017) For more, go to www.fumcdurango.org
On the other side of the debate were those who said that sex was bad and sexuality itself was sinful and evil. They argued that you shouldn’t even get married, and if you did get married, then you should avoid sexual relationships except to have children. You had two opposite extremes teaching different things within the church. In chapter 7, Paul tells them that marriage and sexuality are a good thing and are gifts from God. He does say that singleness is the best thing because then you can be fully devoted to God, but that is not for everyone and so go ahead and get married if you feel called to do so. Sexuality is not meant to be seen as bad or sinful or evil, but offered as a ministry, one to another, and a great gift from God that is meant to be holy and sacred.

SLIDE Chapters 8-10 - Arguments about Idolatry

The next area of disagreement had to do with an issue for followers of Jesus throughout the Roman world. You saw in the pictures the large temple to Apollos. Right behind that was the meat market. When people brought their flocks into the city, they would offer them as a sacrifice to the gods, and they would be slaughtered and then sold at the market place. Most of the meat sold in the marketplace had been offered to some god as a sacrifice before it was slaughtered and sold. This created another area of disagreement in the church because one group in the church said that you should not eat any animals that had been offered as a sacrifice to the other gods, because once it has been presented to that idol it belongs to the idol and it is idolatry to eat that meat. This basically would mean followers of Jesus would have to be vegetarians in Corinth and most major Roman cities.

On the other side, were followers of Jesus who said that those gods and idols were nothing, so what does it matter. They’re fake and phony anyway, so you might as well eat the meat offered to them because it’s all a sham. The idol doesn’t own it because there is no such thing as these pagan gods. God doesn’t care about these things. This group also recognized that the people who had the best parties, and served the best food, were the people who worshiped Apollos and Aphrodite. They took it one step further and went to the festivals to those gods and ended up participating in the worship of those gods so they could eat the food.

Paul responded by recognizing that the first group was right and that the idols are nothing. You can eat that food if you wish which has been sacrificed to other gods, because you are just buying food in the marketplace and you know that those gods are not real. But then he turns to the other group and tells them that they shouldn’t go to these festivals just to get something to eat. He reminds them that when they participate in those worship services so you can eat, they end up giving them their heart and God is grieved by that.

Paul then takes it one step further as he reminds them that some of them may be able to eat that meat and not fall back into the patterns of idolatry and the Greco-Roman worship services. But there are others among them who are just coming out of that idolatry and discovering Jesus Christ for the first time, and putting that meat in front of them and inviting them to those worship festivities might tempt them. If you do that, then your freedom in eating that meat would result in hurting them as they fall away from their newfound faith. It’s not a sin to eat the meat, unless your eating it causes someone else to stumble and experience brokenness.

While it may not seem so on the surface, and this teaching is a direct correlation to us and our lives. The number one cause of death among young people is alcohol-related accidents. Where do children get their ideas about alcohol? Most of them get them from their parents. They watch us and they see what we do, regardless of what we say, and then they make their own decisions. I don’t believe it is a sin to have a glass of wine or beer with dinner. But, if our practices related to alcohol are being watched by young eyes, and they see that every party or meal we have must have alcohol, or we can’t have a good time, that becomes internalized. If what they see is that every time we are down or struggling or upset, we need a drink to calm down and self-medicate, they internalize that.

This is not always why our kids turn to alcohol and drugs, but I have visited with many teenagers who are simply repeating the patterns of the generation before them. I have done five funerals for teenagers who died because of drinking and driving. We need to be careful what we do. We might be free to choose certain things in our lives and not have it be a sin, but if practicing these things would lead others to a time of brokenness in their lives, we are asked to sacrifice it or it may become a sin in our lives. We are meant to watch our behaviors and see how they affect others who look up to us. We have a number of people in our congregation who are coming out of addictions and they need our support by not always having wine and beer at our gatherings, especially if we know that (Message Notes and Meditation Moments for August 20-21, 2017) For more, go to www.fumcdurango.org
alcohol is an issue. There are many other applications to this principle and it’s a powerful and profound spiritual idea, recognizing that we are all connected.

Another quarrel that was happening in the church has to do with spiritual gifts. The idea in the Christian faith is that when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, we are equipped with different gifts to minister to one another and to use in the church. In the early church, some of those gifts were very dramatic, like the gift of speaking in unknown tongues. You may have been in churches where you have heard speaking in tongues and some of you might have that gift, or the gift of praying in tongues. Some had the ability of prophesying or the gift of healing or the ability to work miracles. These were exciting gifts and there were gifts that seemed rather ordinary, like serving others, ministry, wisdom, ability to work with your hands and teaching and others that didn’t seem as energizing in worship.

In the early church, there were those who had the great spiritual experiences and there were others whose experiences seemed rather plain in comparison. Some in the church began to argue that certain gifts were better than others which made them more important. In the middle of worship, people with the gift of prophecy or speaking in tongues would sometimes stand up and interrupt what was going on and it was causing problems for others who didn’t have those gifts.

SLIDE Chapters 11-14 – Worship and Spiritual Gifts

Paul deals with these issues around worship in spiritual gifts in chapters 11 through 14. Paul says in these chapters that every spiritual gift is equally important. While some gifts might be more important for the body of Christ to be able to function, we need all gifts because we are all part of one body, and the body has different parts that each play a different role and they are all on equal footing. We are the body of Christ and in the body, there are eyes and there are thumbs and there are toes and there are feet and there are hands. Every part of the body is equally important. No one is more spiritual than another because they have a certain spiritual gift. He tells people in chapter 14 that, even though he can speak in tongues, he would rather speak five words that people can understand than 10,000 words in a tongue that no one gets.

SLIDE Chapter 15 – The Resurrection of the Body

The last quarrel is about the resurrection of the body and Paul deals with that in chapter 15. The argument is about what happens to our earthly bodies because some said that our bodies deteriorated too much in the ground to be of use after the resurrection. Others argued about cremation and bodies that have been destroyed in an accident. Paul corrects them both and says that we get new bodies when we are resurrected. It is not the old body which is reconstituted. Paul ends with these powerful words that we often read at funerals and burials. Listen to these words beginning in verse 51.

BIBLE

51 But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! 52 It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. 53 For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

54 Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

“Death is swallowed up in victory. 55 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

57 But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a summary of this letter, and I hope it will help you to dig deeper this week as you read 1 Corinthians on your own. I want to leave you with one question and it is very applicable to today’s world.

SLIDE Why were there so many quarrels?

We can disagree, and we always will have those disagreements, because we are human. But

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why was there such deep fighting and conflict that clearly was causing damage in the church? I think there was one underlying issue, and it’s one we still have today. It comes down to hubris or pride, which the church has understood to be the deadliest of the seven deadly sins. People began to believe that they were right and everyone else was wrong. People believe that they were more spiritual than others. People who had been Christians for three or four years believed they knew more than the apostle Paul because God had given them a special word. People in the upper classes believed they were better than people in the working class because they believed they were more intelligent and better educated. People who spoke in tongues believed they were more special than those who did not.

This sin of pride that speaks into our hearts is the most insidious of all our brokenness. No human is immune to this. Secretly, we begin to feel that we have a little edge on someone else. The challenge is, that the moment we begin to believe this, all our spirituality and self-control gets sucked away and we become a slave to our every emotion or feeling because we believe that we are the most important. Paul gives the most glorious answer to this human struggle in 1 Corinthians 13. It is meant to address are real, underlying problem.

I couldn’t help but think about this passage this week, in the wake of the pain and hurt left after Charlottesville. I must confess that last weekend, I had only heard bits and pieces of what happened, but as we continue to find out more information and have more public responses, it feels as if we need these words more than ever. We gave you this week, part of this verse as you Scripture memory verse. Let’s read it together out loud.

**BIBLE**

> Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.

Here’s this message is so important for us to hear today in the wake of what happened last week, and what seems to be happening more and more in our national dialogue, from face to face confrontations to name calling on twitter and Facebook. I keep hearing that it’s okay for people to spout hurtful rhetoric because, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” That’s a lie, and Paul knew it!

We know that is a lie physiologically as there is mounds of research that tells us that verbal abuse causes the same kinds of trauma in our brain as physical abuse. Words, and especially harsh and threatening words that are more than simple disagreement changes us and our brains which impacts our bodies, which are temples of the Holy Spirit! We cannot sit idly by when hurtful words are hurled, because the eventually can turn to physical confrontations as well. We are called by Jesus Christ to be transformed and live out this kind of love Paul writes about. Is it hard? Yes, which is why we invite the Holy Spirit to come inside and change us, giving us strength to stand up to injustice and inflammatory rhetoric with agape love.

There are many ways we live this out, but a real-life example of how you can see this kind of love in action came into my email inbox this week in the form of a letter from the CEO of Habitat for Humanity, Jonathon Reckford, who sent out the following statement in response to the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia.

> Last Saturday morning, as white nationalists gathered for their march of hate in Charlottesville, a very different group of people were gathering less than a mile away. On that city’s Charlton Avenue, members of seven local churches had joined together to lay the floor trusses on the foundation of the community’s newest Habitat home.

> Those Habitat volunteers—and thousands more working that same morning across the country and world—had come together to share a vision starkly different than those who seek to divide us. Our vision is one that is welcoming to all. Our vision embraces diverse views. Our vision knows that no matter who we are or where we come from, we all deserve to have a decent life. Our vision says that every one of us deserves the opportunity for a better future.

> As the forces of hate converged on Charlottesville’s Emancipation Park to tear us apart, Habitat’s spirit of inclusivity and understanding were working to bring us together.

The racism, bigotry and violence on display sickened and saddened me. I know I join the

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Habitat community in rejecting that hate, because those actions and voices run counter to everything we believe. As a Christian organization that welcomes people of all faiths and no faith, inclusivity is who we are. It’s what makes us a strong community, and it’s those same values that make us a strong nation.

As a lifelong Christian, I want to be clear: the white nationalists, neo-Nazis, KKK and their supporters who descended on Charlottesville have rejected the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Habitat for Humanity stands firmly against their words, actions and any suggestion that theirs is a legitimate grievance. We applaud and honor those who put their own well-being at risk to reject this hatred. We share in the nation’s grief in the tragic loss of Heather Heyer, whose life was taken while she was standing to protect others. We mourn for Lieutenant H. Jay Cullen III and Trooper-Pilot Berke M. M. Bates, who lost their lives while protecting and serving their community.

The hate-motivated acts we saw this weekend do not define us as Americans, or as citizens of the world. And they don’t define Charlottesville either.

Because even while that city grieves, there are forces of love hard at work. Later today, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville will break ground on a community of affordable housing that will give 14 families the opportunity for a better future. Dan Rosensweig, the CEO of this affiliate, shares these words:

We don’t have answers as to why the kinds of evil and hatred experienced in Charlottesville this week exist in the world, but we do know these three things: People who are swinging a hammer are not swinging a stick or a flag pole. When we are given the opportunity to work side by side with someone from a different background, we inevitably replace fear with a shared sense of purpose and humanity. And when we commit to listening without judgment, we all inspire people to be guided by something...more than pride.

Every nail hammered, every wall raised, is a rejection of hate and a step toward the future where everyone—irrespective of class, color or creed—has a simple, decent place to live.

There were several reports of the memorial service which took place for Heather Heyer, the young woman who came to protest the white supremacist groups, who was run over and killed during the unrest. Many powerful things were shared by her mother about wanting her daughter’s legacy to be one of standing up to injustice with love, and not wanting her daughter’s death to lead to more violence. I was especially touched by the words of her father, Mark Heyer. He recently told Florida Today that he’s forgiven James Alex Fields Jr., the driver of the car which crashed into the crowd of protestors, ultimately killing his daughter.

“People need to stop hating, and they need to forgive each other,” Mark said. “And I include myself in that, in forgiving the guy that did this. He doesn’t know no better. You know, I just think of what the Lord said on the cross. Lord forgive him, they don’t know what they’re doing.”

That kind of love, to forgive the person who killed your child, is a divine agape. The kind Paul speaks of in his letter to a troubled church filled with bitter, prideful people. As we close, I want us to say these words together one more time, but this time I invite you to do something I have done with you in the past, and that is to insert your name where the word love appears. This is what personalizes the scriptures and truly brings about transformation, when we are willing to speak it this way.

BIBLE

1 If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing. 4 ________ is patient and kind. ________ is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. ________ does not demand their own way. ________ is not irritable, and ________ keeps no record of being wronged. 6 ________ does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 ________

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never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

May we experience this transformational love, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let’s pray...

SLIDE

Prayer

O God, thank you for this letter of Paul to the people of Corinth. It reminds us of a painful truth, that we are all human, and as such we get filled with pride. We want things done our way and we want others to do life the way we want. Oh, if it were only that simple. The truth is you have created humans in your image, and so we are as diverse as all of creation. Help us to see past our differences and recognize that each of your children were created to be temples of you Holy Spirit. We each contain a spark of your divinity, and you live in us, so when we defame or use our words or power to harm others, we are harming you. Transform us from the inside out, by the power of your Holy Spirit. Give us strength to live a life of love and grace so we might be the presence of your son Jesus Christ in the world. Amen

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