



June and July Sermon Series: Messy Church

Sermon #1: Messy Church... Rough Around the Edges

Getting the Nod:

Start with Video: [Top Church](#)

There is no perfect church. Max Lucado has said, “There could be a perfect church if it wasn’t for the people!” We’re beginning a new series entitled, “Messy Church” and it will be a selective study on First Corinthians. Corinth was a melting pot of pagan cults and religion-sanctioned immorality.

Man... they had some serious problems around them... and even greater problems inside their church. They had “preacher cliques” and weak leaders... as well as members living in incest. Some members were suing other members and some were even participating in pagan-ritual prostitution! They were discriminating against some at communion... getting drunk at their fellowship meals... and at the same time they were quarreling about women and their head coverings.... And the proper way to be married. **But Paul still believed that the Church at Corinth was salvageable. All their weaknesses were an opportunity for God to show His strength!!!**

Transition: So, Paul, the one who planted this church tries to get a hold of their waywardness and blatant sin with this letter.

Connecting Us:

Despite their quarreling, Paul believed that the Bible was not given for information... but our transformation! So, Paul started to write his letter to get this chaotic church back in line. **You do know that quarreling churches are a tough, rough around the edges kind of people. They too often are stubborn and unchanging...**

Illustration on Trespasses and Debts: The story is told of two congregations that were located only a few blocks from each other in a small community. They thought it might be better if they would merge and become one united, larger, and more effective body rather than two struggling churches. Good idea ... but they were not able to pull it off. The problem? They could not agree on how they would recite "The Lord's Prayer." One group preferred "forgive us our trespasses," while the other group demanded "forgive us our debts." So, as the local newspaper reported, **"One church went back to its trespasses while the other returned to its debts."** (From a sermon by Bob Joyce, It's About the Kingdom, 8/4/2011)

Transition: Let's get started on our series. Let's look at 1 Corinthians 1. Starting at verse 10...

God's Take on 1st Corinthians:

NKJV | 1 Co 1:10-17 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 lest anyone should say that

I had baptized in my own name. 16 Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.

Corinth was made for greatness:

1. An incredible trading and commercial center.

- All traffic from north to south including Athens, the north of Greece to Sparta, and the Peloponnese had to be routed through Corinth, because it stood on the little neck of land that connected the two.
- East to west was worse for mariners and boats. The Saronic Gulf created a labor dilemma. If ships were small enough, they would reach what was called the Isthmus... which was a four mile stretch of land called the Corinth Canal. When Upon reaching the canal, they would drag the boats out of the water, set them on rollers, and haul them across the isthmus, and then relaunch them on the other side. The only other option was the 200-mile trip around Cape Malea... a dangerous route that was spoke of by the Greeks in this way, "Let him who sails around Malea forget his home."
- So, there was no choice. Anyone travelling from Athens to Sparta or to Peloponnese had to go through Corinth. So, it became a powerful and influential city.

2. Known for its luxury markets.

- Dean Farrar, who wrote on the life and works of St Paul, writes: 'Objects of luxury soon found their way to the markets which were visited by every nation in the civilized world—Arabian balsam, Phoenician dates, Libyan ivory, Babylonian carpets, Cilician goats' hair, Lycaonian wool, Phrygian slaves.'

3. It was the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.

- The city was called the Bridge of Greece, or even the Lounge of Greece.
- Corinth was the Piccadilly Circus of the Mediterranean. To add to the throng which came to it, Corinth was the place where the Isthmian Games were held, which were second only to the Olympics. Corinth was a rich and populous city with one of the greatest commercial trades in the ancient world.

Corinth was mastered by wickedness:

1. It had a reputation for reckless living.

- The very word *korinthiazesthai*, to live like a Corinthian, had become a part of the Greek language, and meant to live with drunken and immoral debauchery.

2. The Temple of Aphrodite promoted immorality.

- The very name Corinth was synonymous with debauchery; and there was one source of evil in the city which was known all over the civilized world. Above the isthmus towered the hill of the Acropolis, and on it stood the great temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. To that temple, there were attached 1,000 priestesses who were sacred prostitutes, and in the evenings they came down from the Acropolis and plied their trade on the streets of Corinth.

3. The streets at night were filled with filth.

- In addition to these cruder sins, there flourished far more subtle and little-known vices which had come in with the traders and the sailors from the ends of the earth, until Corinth became a synonym not only for wealth, luxury, drunkenness and debauchery, but also for filth.

What a mess! It should have been a model church; after all it had all the earmarks of becoming the greatest church in the denomination. Its founding pastor was the most prolific church planter in the denomination; the next man was by far the best preacher that could be offered and tossed in for good measure was one of the original founders of the denomination.

One who had stood closer to the original flame that started the group than any other. It had everything that could be offered to it, it had been planted in a major metropolis that was the capital city of the state. Time, money and talent had been invested in seeing it become everything that it could possibly be. This church was destined for greatness.

But then it came tumbling down like a house of cards. They began to have problems with the spiritual gifts and tongues in particular seemed to tear the church apart. Sexual immorality had reared its ugly head within the congregation, as well as incest, adultery, marriage problems and just a hint of heresy over the resurrection. Members were taking each other to court, and their fellowship times were becoming excuses for gluttony and even drunkenness.

And then if that wasn't enough the entire church split along party lines giving loyalty to either the guy that planted the church, or to the fellow who was such a great preacher or the denominational official. What a mess.

The Church was divided over allegiances:

In our text today, let's get something understood. **The fight between who was more important to be aligned with did not compliment any of those in the fight!** More than one commentary would agree that these divisions were being led by divisive people.

True believers are to follow peace with all men and to let holiness be their guide (Romans 14:19 / Ephesians 4:3 / Hebrews 12:14). So, as we look at the four groups fighting... don't necessarily think of the one being elevated. Think of those using the person as a stick to fight with...

1. The Gentiles: Those who turned liberty into license.

- **There were those who claimed to belong to Paul.** No doubt this was mainly a Gentile party. Paul had always preached the gospel of Christian freedom and the end of the law. It is most likely that this party was attempting to turn liberty into license and was using their new-found Christianity as an excuse to do as they liked.

2. The Alexandrians: Those who intellectualized the scripture.

- **There was the party who claimed to belong to Apollos.** There is a brief character sketch of Apollos in Acts 18:24. He was a Jew from Alexandria, an eloquent man and well versed in the Scriptures. Alexandria was the center of intellectual activity. It was there that scholars had made a science of intellectualizing the Scriptures.
- Those who claimed to belong to Apollos were, no doubt, the intellectuals who were fast turning Christianity into a philosophy rather than a movement of believers.

3. **The Legalists: Those who exalted the law and belittled grace.**

- **There were those who claimed to belong to Cephas.** Cephas is the Jewish form of Peter's name. These were most probably Jews, and they sought to teach that Christians must still observe the Jewish law. They were legalists who exalted law, and, by so doing, belittled grace.

4. **The Separatists: Those who claimed that Christ only belonged to them.**

- **This group must have been a small and rigid sect who claimed that they were the only true Christians in Corinth.** Their real fault was not in saying that they belonged to Christ, but in acting as if Christ belonged to them solely. It may well describe a little, intolerant, self-righteous group.

Transition: May we learn from the African Proverb...

Our Response:

TRAMPLED IN THE CHURCH

An African proverb says, "**When elephants fight, it's the grass that gets trampled.**"

Building a church is hard enough without bigger than life characters causing a stampede. The Church at Corinth had... conflicts, disagreements and misunderstandings... even though the church had been nurtured by two of the world's greatest evangelists: Paul and Apollos. **That means it can happen to any church. Great churches have toppled over issues of division.**

And... Here's what church divisions cause:

- **Spiritual Comparisons:** Their individual followers were displeased with each other...
- **Grudge Holding:** They disrespected each other and distanced themselves from each other.
- **Unity Destruction:** This strained the fellowship in the church...
- **Stalled the Ministry:** which then neglected the work of the gospel...
- **Ruins the Church Image:** It hurts the name of the church in the community and...
- **Quenches the Holy Spirit:** It destroys any hope of possible move of God.

Transition: So, what is our response to this information?

Closing:

Let's use the old K.I.S.S. principle: Let's KEEP IT SPIRITUAL SAINTS!!! Look at the last verse in the passage: **17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.**

May we never forget as a church this truth: "Fundamentally, Jesus' primary message was Himself. He did not come merely to preach a Gospel; He himself is that Gospel. He did not come merely to give bread; He said, "I am the bread." He did not come merely to shed light; He said, "I am the light." He did not come merely to show the door; He said, "I am the door." ...He did not come merely to point the way; He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." **May we never lose sight of Jesus because of other people. And may the cross never be hidden because of differences that are prefabricated by men. Churches can lose sight of Jesus. And so can we! How is it?**