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Sermon Notes

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The Power of the Gospel to Transform a Dysfunctional Church

1 Corinthians 1-16

Today, we begin a new journey in scripture for the glory of God. As we do, I am reminded of a remarkable moment in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Jesus took his three closest friends and apostles up a mountain with him – Peter, John, and James. There they had the ultimate “mountaintop experience” together... Jesus was transfigured before their very eyes – his face shone like lightning, and his clothes became radiant, as white as light. Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Jesus. A bright cloud enveloped them and God Almighty spoke to them with a powerful voice, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” The disciples had fallen face down terrified, but Jesus touched them and told them to get up and not be afraid. It was an overpowering foretaste of heavenly glory, one they would never forget for the rest of their days. As I just said a moment ago, the ultimate “mountaintop experience”

But all such experiences on earth soon come to an end, sometimes a crashing end... and this was no different. As Jesus and the three apostles reentered life with the rest of the apostles and the maddening crowd, a man came to Jesus clearly frustrated with the apostles he’d left down below. He had brought his demon-possessed son to them – a son who was so tormented by the demon that he often threw himself suicidally in the fire or water. He brought them asking for them to heal the boy, but they had been powerless to do anything. This is despite the fact that Jesus has given them exactly this ministry to drive out demons by the power of God. They tried to drive the demon out by their own strength, without any prayer, and they had miserably failed. The father was extremely distressed and said “I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

Jesus’ words were directed toward his OWN PEOPLE... the church he was building:

Matthew 17:17-18 "O unbelieving and perverse generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me." 18 Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

They went from a soaring high to a crashing low... and that was simply because of the muck of dealing with people's sin... even the sins of his own disciples

That's how it feels for me now as we turn our attention to 1 Corinthians... we are going from the highest high to some of the lowest lows in the New Testament. We have been soaring into the future heavenly realms of the New Heaven and New Earth... by faith, we have walked the streets of the pure and perfect city of God, the New Jerusalem... we have seen the Bride of Christ – the church – in her state of perfection, radiant with the glory of Christ. That has been our mountaintop experience.

But now, we are going to see the church at its most degraded in many respects... dealing with all manner of nasty sins. The Bride of Christ still sinning, still dirty in habits. Or to use another image from the NT, still smelling of the pig sty where the prodigal son came from to be welcomed back by the Father

There are hardly any significant sin patterns that have faced the people of God that are not addressed in some way in this challenging book... and we are going to walk through it line upon line

We have soared into the heavenly realms and seen the perfection of the church; now we are going to muck around in the imperfection of the church – the church not yet glorified, the church divided, the church led astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ

This morning, I am going to begin our journey through this book by giving an overview of some of the most significant themes that dominate its message

I. The Power of the Gospel

A. The Apostle Paul Brought the Gospel to the City of Corinth... in a way scarcely even noticed at the time

1. He had just been mocked in Athens by the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers there when he preached the resurrection

Acts 17:18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbling trying to say?"

Acts 17:32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered

2. He travelled the 50 miles to Corinth and entered the city quietly

3. He found a couple of Jewish tentmakers named Priscilla and Aquila and set up shop with them making tents

4. He describes his mentality when he came to Corinth

1 Corinthians 2:1-3 *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.*

5. He began preaching the gospel in the Jewish temple there, but soon they became abusive

6. Despite Paul's amazing courage, there's only so much abuse a person can take

7. That's why he asked for prayer for boldness from the Ephesian Christians:

Ephesians 6:19-20 *Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

8. That's also why the Lord encouraged him in a vision

Acts 18:9-10 *One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."*

9. As a result of this encouragement:

Acts 18:11 *Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*

B. Paul's Resolution: Stick to Christ, Crucified and Resurrected

1 Corinthians 2:2 *I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

1. Paul was rejecting the worldly human philosophies that the Greek people were so famous for... the teachings of Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, and the rest

2. He was determined to stick to the simple facts of the gospel... determined to focus on Jesus Christ and him crucified

3. The facts of the gospel are plain, but Paul repeated them again and again

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 *Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ² By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. ³ For what I received I passed on to you*

as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

4. These are the facts of the gospel... and that gospel has the power to SAVE SINNERS from the wrath of God

C. The Message of the Cross is the Power of God

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1. There is an INITIAL SAVING WORK of the gospel—of Christ crucified and resurrected—called justification; by faith in the power of the message of the cross, sinners are FORGIVEN of their sins, RECONCILED to God, seen to be perfectly righteous in God's sight
2. BUT THEN there is an ONGOING SAVING WORK of the gospel... we who are BEING SAVED... and that is the power of this simple message; that's why Paul wanted to remind them of the gospel which they had received so many years ago...

Tim Keller:

"Paul is showing that we never 'get beyond the gospel' in our Christian life to something more 'advanced'. The gospel is not the first 'step' in a 'stairway' of truths, rather, it is more like the 'hub' in a 'wheel' of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom."

3. There is TRANSFORMING POWER in the gospel of Jesus Christ
4. So Paul wanted to keep the message of Christ crucified and resurrected continually before this Corinthian church

D. The Role of the Holy Spirit

1. However, the words of the gospel have NO TRANSFORMING POWER, no SAVING POWER in the life of a sinner apart from the work of the Holy Spirit

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power,⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

2. Only the Holy Spirit can transform a sinner into a Christian

3. As we're about to see, the natural mind cannot accept the gospel; only as the Holy Spirit works while human messengers proclaim the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified are sinners convicted of sin and made to see the greatness of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:3 no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:11 you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

II. The Lostness of the World

A. A City that Loved Wickedness

1. Sexual immorality

Corinth was a port city, a place where sailors and merchants from all over the Mediterranean would come to ply their trades;

Like all port cities throughout the history of the sinful human race, sexual immorality was overflowing like a stopped up sewer

As a matter of fact, the ancient Greek city of Corinth acquired something of a proverbial reputation for sexual promiscuity, and modern biblical scholarship has frequently reiterated a view of the city as a particular hotbed of immorality and vice.

Yet even if the proverbial ancient remarks are accurate, they refer to the period a century or two before Paul's time, and there is little to suggest that first-century Roman Corinth was significantly different in this regard from any other city in the empire at the time. Basically ALL pagan cities were characterized by sexual immorality, especially focused on temple prostitution. By the first century, the time when Paul brought the gospel of Christ to Corinth, the city was no more or less debauched than most Greek/Roman cities... the whole world lay in the grip of the Evil One, and he is ALWAYS selling sexual immorality to the fallen human race

The Corinthians were mired in gross sexual misconduct connected with the pagan temples... also homosexuality, adultery, and all manner of vice and wickedness... and the gospel of Jesus Christ alone has power to break those sins

2. Idolatry

- a. Three full chapters of this epistle are devoted to the problem of meat sacrificed to idols

- b. Temple worship was a massive part of their pagan lifestyles... in the days before refrigeration, people who loved the taste of meat got it from going to the temple where animals were being continually sacrificed... eating meat sacrificed to idols was part of the sensual lifestyle of the pagan... deeper than that was the idolatry itself... worshiping gods and goddesses who were actually DEMONS in disguise

1 Corinthians 10:20 the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

- c. So the pagan city of Corinth was a haunt of demons through their pagan religion

3. Human philosophies

- a. The wisdom of this world reached a pinnacle in the Greek philosophers
- b. Athens, a mere 50 miles from Corinth, was the world center of human philosophy, and some of the greatest pagan thinkers of the ancient world developed their systems in Greece... Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Archimedes, and Epicurus are the most famous, and we'll be talking about their systems in due time
- c. But the Greeks were PRIDEFUL about their philosophies, and looked down upon other nations as a result

B. The Message of the Cross is Foolishness

1 Corinthians 1:18-20 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

1 Corinthians 1:22-24 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

C. The Sinful Mind Cannot Accept the Things of God

1 Corinthians 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

D. Only the Power of the Gospel + the Power of the Spirit Can Change That

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

III. The Sinfulness of the Local Church

A. A Truly Dysfunctional, Messed-Up Church

1. The Corinthian church was lavishly gifted with every spiritual gift

1 Corinthians 1:4-7 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. ⁵ For in him you have been enriched in every way-- in all your speaking and in all your knowledge-- ⁶ because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

1 Corinthians 12:28 And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

2. However, it was also rife with just about every disease that commonly attacks local churches in every age

Factions and Divisions... False Teachers... Lawsuits among believers... Sexual Immorality of the most scandalous kinds... Marital Problems... Idolatry/Arrogance (Meat Sacrificed to Idols)... Gender Roles... Conflicts over the Lord's Supper... Spiritual Gift Problems... False Teaching on the Resurrection

B. Factions and Divisions

1. The first chapter mentions these divisions...
2. Infighting and lack of love among believers in local churches is a problem in almost every New Testament epistle... Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, James, Hebrews, Peter, the Epistles of John... they ALL mention significant divisions, infighting, lack of love among believers
3. Corinthians may be among the worst...

1 Corinthians 1:10-12 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. ¹¹ My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. ¹² What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

4. Paul says this is a clear display of their immaturity and worldliness as disciples

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

C. False Teachers

1. They are much more apparent in 2 Corinthians where Paul specifically has to defend his apostleship from slanderous attacks from people who called themselves the "Super-Apostles"

2. These false teachers Paul describes powerfully and clearly

2 Corinthians 11:3-4 I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. ⁴ For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. ¹⁵ It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.

These false teachers were exploiting the Corinthians and enslaving them for their own ends

2 Corinthians 11:20 you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face.

D. Lawsuits

1. The divisions in the Corinthian church were so severe that they were taking each other to court!!

1 Corinthians 6:1 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints?

2. Remember Jesus' words

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

3. One of the greatest proofs of the Christian faith the ancient church had for the pagan world was their evident, sacrificial love for one another... as Tertullian, the Christian apologist wrote

He imagined pagans looking at Christians and saying, "Behold . . . how they love one another (for they themselves [pagans] hate one another); and how they are ready to die for each other (for they themselves are readier to kill each other)." [Apologetic 39:7]

4. But instead of putting their love for one another on display, they were taking each other to court... in front of the very pagans they were supposed to be reaching with the gospel
5. This is why Paul devoted an entire chapter of this epistle to LOVE, as we shall see

E. Sexual Immorality

1. The Corinthian church was filled with people who had COME OUT OF sexually immoral lifestyles, as we just mentioned

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

2. However, some of the problems still existed... even of the grossest sort

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife.

3. Furthermore, it seems some members of this Corinthian church were still visiting the temple prostitutes

1 Corinthians 6:15-18 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.

4. This church struggled as much with sexual immorality as we 21st century Americans... the problem is not a new one
5. Therefore this book can help us as we strive to be pure, and as we seek to reach people addicted to internet pornography or tempted toward homosexuality or toward adultery... the word of God is LIVING AND ACTIVE and SHARPER than any double-edged sword...
6. This book will warn us powerfully to flee sexual immorality for the salvation of our souls

F. Marital Problems

1. The problems of divorce and marital discord were rife in that church as they are in our day
2. Paul devotes an entire chapter—1 Corinthians 7—to Christian marriage and singleness
3. As we walk through that chapter, we will see some lasting principles concerning Christian marriage, divorce, and singleness which are every bit as needed today as they were almost twenty centuries ago in that dysfunctional church

G. Idolatry/Arrogance (Meat Sacrificed to Idols)

1. As I've said, all of chapter 8-10 are devoted to the problem of meat sacrificed to idols
2. Some members of that church were only very recently converted from a lifestyle of paganism... their habits of Christian godliness were not well-established
3. They had tender consciences and were ready at any moment to buckle and fall back into the alluring sensual life of the pagan temples
4. Others were super mature in their knowledge, and were flaunting their freedoms and were eating meat sacrificed to idols with no trouble at all... they knew that idols were nothing, and that meat was just meat... but in their confident freedoms they were destroying weaker brothers and causing them to stumble

H. Gender Roles

1. There was also the need for clear teaching on the roles of men and women in the life of the local church

2. The famous “head coverings” passage is in the context of this issue... what does it mean to be a godly man and what does it mean to be a godly women IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH?
3. That timeless question is wrapped up, I believe, in the cultural issue of head coverings...
4. But it goes to a much deeper level, and it is massively relevant today, for I know of no culture in history so confused on gender roles as 21st century America

I. Conflicts over the Lord’s Supper

1. The Lord established the Supper as a unifying ordinance... to remind us of his grace at the cross, and of his second coming and his eternal Kingdom
2. It was also to remind us of our unity in Christ, since we partake of one loaf and are eating all together
3. But they were sinning at the Lord’s Supper, gorging themselves on the bread and getting drunk on the wine... their carnal selfishness was so bad, the Lord had disciplined some of them by taking them out of this world or causing others to become sick

J. Spiritual Gift Problems

1. As I mentioned, this local church was a supremely gifted, talented church
2. There was no spiritual gift that they lacked
3. All of them were in full effect, including miracles (like healings) and speaking in tongues and prophecies
4. BUT there were tons of problems as well... they were very prideful, and self-focused in their use of the gifts... some were arrogant and thought they didn’t need anyone else; others were humiliated by them and felt their gifts were worthless and completely unneeded
5. The famous LOVE CHAPTER (1 Corinthians 13) is set right in the midst of these spiritual gifts problems (more in a moment)

K. False Teaching on the Resurrection

1. Some of the false teachers were pushing the standard Greek philosophical system of denigration of the physical... the BODY DOES NOT MATTER
2. They actually were saying “There is no such thing as a resurrection from the dead” (1 Cor. 15:12)

3. So Paul writes a whole chapter on the resurrection of the body that is the finish line of our salvation
4. Christ HAS BEEN RAISED from the dead, and he is the FIRST FRUIT of a vast harvest of Christians who will be raised LIKE HIM in glorious resurrection bodies
5. 1 Corinthians 15 describes the resurrection body powerfully

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

6. The resounding triumph of the resurrection from the dead is the culmination of Christ's saving work worldwide... including in Corinth

1 Corinthians 15:55-57 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. The Power of Mature Christian Witness

A. The Most Powerful Weapon for Gospel Advance is a Healthy Church

1. The gospel message is the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes
2. The Spirit makes the gospel understandable and desirable for the elect when they hear the message
3. Evangelists can preach that message and the Spirit does his work... but then the converts need to be drawn into a healthy local church to be taught to obey everything Christ has commanded them... to work out their salvation with fear and trembling... to give and receive spiritual gifts and grow to full maturity in Christ
4. So healthy local churches are VITAL for the salvation of God's chosen people
5. Paul yearns for this Corinthian church to be on fire for the gospel!!
6. He is not called to stay there forever as their pastor; he wants them to move onto maturity and take responsibility to reach the lost in their city and region

B. The Cost of Courageous Christian Witness

1 Corinthians 4:8-13 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings-- and that without us! How I wish that you really had

become kings so that we might be kings with you! ⁹ For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! ¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

C. Paul's Example (1 Cor. 2, 1Cor. 9)

1 Corinthians 2:1-4 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰ To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

D. The Confidence of Final Success

1. The teaching of the resurrection of the body from the dead is a GREAT MOTIVATOR for Christian witness
2. We know that Christ will most certainly save all the elect and raise them up on the last day

John 6:39-40 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

E. The Call to Labor for the Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain

It could be argued that this is the point of the whole epistle of 1 Corinthians... they are supremely gift SO THAT THEY CAN USE THOSE GIFTS TO BUILD THE BODY OF CHRIST... they need to conquer their immaturity, stop being so divided, put their sins to death, be holy and pure, love each other, use their gifts to build each other up, and be willing to SUFFER GREATLY that the lost in Corinth may be won to Jesus!!

V. The Supremacy of Love

A. This was a SUPREMELY GIFTED Church!

1. They lacked no spiritual gift
2. They were powerful both in knowledge and the ability to articulate that knowledge
3. They were able even to do miraculous healings, to speak prophecies and tongues

B. BUT there were significant PRIDE ISSUES as well... the gifts were given by the Spirit to make them ONE and move them to MATURITY

C. Nestled in the midst of three chapters on spiritual gifts is this amazing warning

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1. All our spiritual gifts mean nothing if we do not exercise them in love!
2. We will get no rewards... we will not grow into Christlikeness... we will be NOTHING in Christ's eyes if we have not love

D. Then Paul Describes Love

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ ¶ Love never fails.

Having described love, he then proclaims in no uncertain words that all spiritual gifts are temporary, but love will extend into eternity

- E. All gifts will pass away at some point, because their only purpose is to build the Body of Christ. When the Body of Christ is finished, when the heavenly perfection comes at last, the gift will become obsolete. But love will last throughout all eternity.

1 Corinthians 13:12-13 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love

It was from meditating on these words that Jonathan Edwards preached one of his greatest sermons, "Heaven is a world of love"

VI. Applications

A. Realize the power of the cross yourself

1. Is the story of Christ, the Son of God, dead on the cross, risen from the dead on the third day... is that story the POWER OF GOD in your life to SAVE YOU FROM SINS??
2. Or is it foolishness to you? Meaningless?
3. Let me quote 2 Corinthians 6:2

2 Corinthians 6:2 "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

B. Realize the Power of God to Transform a Sinful, Dysfunctional Church

1. Every church of Christ throughout history and around the world deals with SIN
2. We are ALL to some degree dysfunctional
3. The sin patterns that made the church at Corinth so weak and wretched are at work in our church as well... perhaps in some very different ways, but still
4. Look at the list of sin problems I listed

Factions and Divisions... False Teachers... Lawsuits among believers... Sexual Immorality of the most scandalous kinds... Marital Problems... Idolatry/Arrogance (Meat Sacrificed to Idols)... Gender Roles... Conflicts over the Lord's Supper... Spiritual Gift Problems... False Teaching on the Resurrection

5. We do not deal with all of those issues... but they are always a threat to our health!

6. We need to do an honest evaluation of our weaknesses and sin patterns and repent so we can reach Durham with the gospel
7. Especially we need to be honest about sexual sins that are assaulting our souls...hurting our marriages, corrupting our young people
8. Sexual immorality is every bit as alive today as it was then

C. Be Willing to Suffer to Be Messengers for the Gospel

1. Paul said that, as an apostle of Christ, he felt like a man condemned to die in an arena... he was persecuted viciously in every city he preached in
2. He also was willing to do whatever it took to reach lost people... to the Jews, he acted like a Jew to win the Jews; to the Gentiles, he acted like a Gentile to win the Gentiles... he became ALL THINGS TO ALL KINDS OF PEOPLE to win some for Christ
3. How is that reflected in YOUR LIFE?

D. HAVE A MINISTRY and Do It!

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain