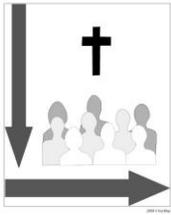


Week Forty-seven: Kingdom Problems, Kingdom Solutions - 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:1-3; 5:1-2, 9-11; 6:20



Overview

After the Fall in the Garden, problems became the norm for human society. Adam and Eve's first descendant, Cain, killed his own brother. Strife became so bad within 10 generations that God destroyed the human population during Noah's time. Jacobs's sons fought with one another and even sold their brother into slavery. The nation of Israel divided over governance issues and idolatry, and strife became the

order

of the day between the two kingdoms as well as among those kingdoms around Israel.

In New Testament times, problems still surface. During the ministry of Jesus, the apostles argue with one another about which of them is the greatest. People in the gospel stories ask Jesus to intervene and settle disputes. It is no surprise, then, that problems should appear in churches. Churches are not buildings but people—people who have been redeemed by Christ but still struggle with sin. One such church, the church at Corinth, reflects the reality of these problems. Paul writes to the church to offer kingdom solutions to church problems.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to identify the problems and the solutions to the problems experienced by the first century church and apply them to the church of the 21st century.

Key Truths

Problems accompany church growth. Problems must be identified and addressed before they get out of hand.

Disunity infects the church today and is a sign of carnality, not spirituality.

Problems reveal those in the church through whom God is working--and those who oppose His true work.

Lesson Outline

Challenges and teaching opportunities surface as the gospel of Jesus Christ moves beyond Israel's borders and embraces Gentile believers, prompting the apostles to address various issues. James writes to demonstrate that righteous behavior flows out of real belief. Peter writes to encourage Christ followers who struggle under persecution. Paul addresses problems and teaches theology through the letters he writes. Galatians addresses the problem of legalism. Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians deals with questions and assurance regarding the Lord's coming, and his second letter encourages them to endure suffering and to watch for false teachers.

The messy but growing community of pagan-background believers at Corinth has its share of problems, and Paul confronts their problems systematically. He first exalts the wisdom of God in the gospel of salvation through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church; then he addresses multiple problems that exist in the church in Corinth. Time alone will allow us to identify the sin producing division among believers, the sin of condoning immorality in the community, and the sin prompting believers to sue other believers.

1. Sin “disguised as spirituality” alienates believers from one another and weakens the gospel message - 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:1-3

Believers were identifying themselves by the particular teacher they followed—“I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ’” (1:12). Each had come to Christ, albeit through the preaching of different men (Peter, Paul, Apollos, or Paul, who could identify himself as one won by Christ Himself). Christ saves through the human agency of proclamation, but proclamation doesn't make that man great. Paul warns believers against glorying according to the flesh, “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1:29), and admonishes them to glory in Christ alone—“of Him [not of Peter, Paul, or Apollos] you are in Christ Jesus” (1:30). Pride lurks behind the attitude of the one who creates conflict by his insistence on following human teachers rather than embracing Christ's cross.

The gospel came not to make men great but to make them alive; it came to make men evangelists, not celebrities. Those who find personal spiritual validation by following certain popular authors or pastors are carnal. Division occurs when Christ-followers exalt one man over another, identify themselves with that particular teacher, and then smugly judge others by whose teaching they follow.

The solution to the problem:

- Recognize the Holy Spirit as the communicator of truth and God's ministers as servants who are merely delivering God's message (2:10-16)
- Recognize gifted teachers but follow Christ (1:26-31; 3:21-23).

2. Sin “protected by tolerance” in a professing believer's life defiles the body and misrepresents the gospel message - 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 9-11; 6:15-20

Corinthian believers celebrated their tolerance by allowing someone who was living in sexual sin to participate actively in the community of believers. Paul rebuked them for their “generosity of grace.” These believers not only accepted this immoral

relationship; they actually prided themselves for being more tolerant than their pagan neighbors.

The solution to the problem:

- Paul demands that they recognize that sexual immorality should not characterize any believer and that the church must 'judge' that person and deal with his or her sin appropriately (5:11-13)
- Paul calls them to recognize that those who have been born of the Spirit are one spirit with Him (6:17)
- Paul reminds them (and us) that the body is "the temple of the Holy Spirit" and that immorality defiles the temple (6:19-20)

3. Sin "mishandled by individuals and parties" disrupts fellowship in the community and distorts the gospel message - 1 Corinthians 6

Believers were taking one another to court instead of handling money matters as a body of believers. Paul urged them to allow their new identity in Christ to guide their interaction with one another. Lack of forgiveness toward one another and continuation in sin demonstrate lostness. Justified people act justly toward one another.

The solution to the problem:

- Paul calls the church to recognize that followers of Jesus Christ must not act like the world. Rather be wronged than sue a brother (6:7-8)
- Paul realizes that problems are actually God's tool to reveal those whom He approves (11:19).

Paul addresses other problems within the Corinthian church: marriage (chapter 7), meat offered to idols, and how to live between the lines of personal freedom and personal responsibility (chapter 8), the need for authority within marriage (11:1-16), the abuse of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and church member relationships and spiritual gifts (12:1-14:40).

Churches have problems, but their solutions are unlike the world's solutions. God's solutions always flow from His wisdom—Christ—and His Word is the source of all God's wisdom.

Application - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?

Men have a tendency to follow favorite leaders and to measure their spirituality and that of others by whom they follow.

Carnal Christians are those who find personal validation by following a particular teacher or persuasion instead of simply being Christ-followers.

Teachers are responsible to direct people to know and follow Christ.

Believers tend to elevate teachers and other leaders; they must recognize and honor teachers but elevate Christ.

Followers of Jesus Christ need to understand that their physical bodies host the living God; therefore, they must abstain from sexual sin.

Believers cannot resolve their problems as non-believers do.

Summary

God speaks by addressing problems that affect every church in every generation.

God acts by giving the church spiritual gifts through which the entire body benefits and grows.

God reveals His deep interest in every area of the lives of His people individually and collectively.

Discussion Questions

In what ways do people today elevate certain teachers or doctrinal positions? How should believers respond when faced with those positions?

How does sexual sin affect the believer? The church? The Holy Spirit who indwells the believer?

Paul forbids believers in Corinth to go to court to resolve their differences. What contemporary ways do disgruntled people use to air church differences publicly? What does it mean to “let yourself be cheated”?