

Title: What is the Problem – Really?

Text: 1 Corinthians 6.6-8

Theme: Church-consumers will never be consumed

Series: 1 Corinthians #21

Prop Stmt. If you don't understand the heart of the church, you will not do church.

I often receive requests from couples to get married here. When people think about getting married in a church, they usually think about a building, a location, a setting, an atmosphere, a décor. When I think about weddings, I think about God, a marriage, a family and of course – the church, but not the building. The building and the location is not the issue, God and the church is. But, as you might imagine, that is not what many people think these days. I can understand that, because, quite frankly, in many ways, I used to think about the church like that too. The fact is, I thought of the church like a spiritual Home Depot. I love Home Depot and Lowes. The gadgets and ideas are endless. The slogan is so compelling – “You can do it, we can help!” And I thought that if the church could ever get large enough, it could be a spiritual version of that. You can have a great life – we can help! Are you looking for a little spiritual boost – we can help. Take our classes, check out the stuff for kids in aisle 13, have a high school student – look at the deals we offer in aisle 11. Lonely? We have a place for you. You can come when you want, leave when you want, pick what you want and find the teaching, the activities, the classes and all of the stuff you want in order to help you, live out your life, the happiest way that you want. You want a service early on Sunday – we'll have it for you. Want a service on Saturday night so that church doesn't interfere with a perfectly good Sunday – we'll have that for you too. We can make the church a 24-7 center to help individuals, live out their individual do-it-yourself Christian lives. After all, you can do it, we can help. This deformed idea of the church fits well with our individualistic, American culture. It is spiritual consumerism. The bigger the church, the bigger and better the goods and services that are offered. The little guy can't compete with that. But is that church? Is the church a contemporary facility that offers up-to-date activities and classes for every conceivable need and want? No! The church is a body, a family, a building, a temple, an army, a vine and a flock. The church is people and the emphasis of the NT is not on our individuality, but on our relationship together as a people. Why? Because the church exists and breathes for the glory of God and God is Trinity!

You cannot glorify God all by yourself! You have to have the church! God is Trinity! That means that God is 3 persons in 1 unity. And this perfect, unified relationship that God wants broadcast to the entire world, cannot be demonstrated all by yourself. You cannot show Trinity as an individual. Showing off God as Trinity, elevating God as Trinity, putting the Triune God on display is what it means to glorify God. I have to be doing life with a group of believers in order to accurately show off God to the world. I cannot do that by myself. I cannot glorify God to the level that he has called me to all by myself – I have to have the church. I have to have authentic relationships with other committed believers in order to grow and in order to be. You know what? You cannot do it by yourself either.

When I was in college, I knew that I loved to preach the gospel. I spent a couple of summers living out of a 1976 Monte Carlo, traveling in the Midwest and preaching in churches. In trying to make it clear what it meant to become a follower of Christ, I would often tell people that you only need to trust in Christ, you do not need to join a church; you only need to trust in Christ. Now, part of what I said was true. I did not want people trusting in the fact that they were a member of a church as the reason why their sin was forgiven, I wanted them to trust in Christ and Christ alone. But, the way I explained it left the impression that you can trust in Christ, and then go on your merry way, and life in the church is optional. But when you become a follower of Christ, you are not only saved from the wrath of God, you are saved to and for the body of Christ – the church. Life is designed by God to be shared because by yourself, you are incomplete. To the first man, God said, “it is not good that you be alone.” Spiritual life is incomplete on your own. You need the church. You need the body and the body needs you. Alone we are vulnerable, together in Christ we are complete.

What was happening to the church in Corinth? They were not thinking as a church. They were not thinking like Christians, they were thinking like consumers. (read text again)

1. **A Church that Attacks itself is a Disgrace.** (v.6)

The church (according to chapter 12) is like a body that works together, where all of the parts are functioning and working in harmony to accomplish a common goal. Each part, each one knows his or her part and is carrying it out for the good of the whole. There is a shared goal, a common understanding, effective communication, problem-solving, nutrition, growth, strength and progress. There is direction, momentum, confidence and security. The Church is the visible Presence of God to the Community That is the picture, but reality is usually quite different, isn't it? It was in Corinth, it was very different.

People in the church, were taking other people in the church to court. Problems between believers, were not being resolved in the church, they were not even trying to resolve them in the church, and they were going right into the public courts. Jerry addressed this last Sunday. You see the momentum of the entire text in the series of questions that Paul is asking like a machine gun beginning in v.1. All of this is building into the crescendo of v.6. What is Paul saying here in v.6? He is saying that all you can think about is your right, your right, your right and all of this self-centered thinking has blinded you to what you have been called to be to the world. You are more concerned that you look good, or that you get your way, than you are about the reputation of Christ, His church and the gospel. We know that problems will arise within the body of Christ and within local churches. It may be very clear to us inside the church, who is right and who is wrong, but the person outside of the church does not see it that way at all. You are (we are) the visible presence of God to this community. That is what the church of Corinth was supposed to be too. But they were a terrible misrepresentation of God to each other and to their community because they were thinking like consumers instead as committed

Christians. As long as you think like a consumer, you will never understand the church. And when the church caters to consumers, it denies its own identity.

What Paul is so appalled about is the fact that they were living in conflict with their calling in front of the very people who so desperately needed to see the gospel in their lives. Do you see this from v.6? Paul was not upset because the church had problems and that others knew it. He was upset because the church did not address their problems in the manner that they were called to. The believers in Corinth failed to live as a body, and instead took up sides and were attacking themselves. What do we call that when a body begins to attack itself? Cancer! And this is what is supposed to rescue the world?

2. **A Church that Attacks itself is already Defeated.** (v.7-8)

The exasperation in Paul is so apparent in verses 7-8. You are already defeated! You may win in court. You may win your little battle, but you have lost the war because you have lost sight of what the real battle is all about!! It is believed that because the Corinthian court system was controlled by the upper class, that the wealthy people, used the court system to take advantage of the poor, in some cases defrauding them of what little land or possessions or rights the poor had. If that is the case, you can see how the division in the church was being carried out in full view of the world.

The Church has to model the Relationship of God to the World. We are called to be the visible presence of the invisible God. What is God like? He is judged, by His followers. God does not attack Himself. God is delightfully, supremely, infinitely happy and secure. He delights in Himself and has created us to extol Him, honor Him, glorify Him, trust Him, delight in Him, and accurately reflect Him. How do we do that? Please listen carefully.

Since God is Trinity. God is a relationship. In order for us to accurately reflect Him and glorify Him, we have to have relationships, but those relationships have to be patterned after Him, the supreme relationship. I am going to conclude with 3 ideas:

- 1) God never made you to go it alone.

In His book, "It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian" Tod Bolsinger tells this story:

In the movie *For Love of the Game*, an aging baseball player named Billy Chapel (who is a Detroit Tiger) is pitching in Yankee Stadium in what could be the last game of his career. Through flashbacks we see the events that led up to this moment. Jane, his on-again-off-again girlfriend, has broken off with him, punctuating her feelings by saying, "You don't need me. You and the ball and the diamond, you're perfect.... You can win or lose the game all by yourself." And she left him.

While the flashbacks tell us of his inner turmoil, in the middle of the baseball diamond Billy Chapel is pitching a perfect game. A perfect game is the rarest feat in sports. It is a game in which a pitcher records twenty-seven consecutive outs. Three batters each

inning, three outs, nine innings. No one reaches base. Not one hit, not one walk, not one error, Perfect.

Even though he is forty years old, Billy Chapel starts off the game strong, striking out batters. But as he comes in to start the eighth inning, he says to his catcher, "I don't know if I have anything left." His catcher looks at him and says, "Chappy, you just throw whatever you got, whatever's left. The boys are all here for you, we'll back you up, we'll be there.... We're gonna be awesome for you right now. Just throw."

As he starts the inning he throws three straight balls. One more and he'll walk the batter, ruining his perfect game. In his mind's eye he sees his father reminding him to be calm. He pitches a strike, and then the next ball is hit so hard it looks like a game-wrecking home-run only to be stolen away as one of the outfielders makes a spectacular leaping catch. The catcher is right. The boys are there for him. It takes the heroic defensive plays of his fielders behind him, of his teammates, to ultimately save the game for him; an unlikely grab by the catcher, a long throw from third, a diving stop at short. He even adds a prayer. A remarkable win: he gets the perfect game.

But Jane's words haunt him, "You don't need me...you can win or lose the game all by yourself." At that moment, he realizes...no one is perfect alone."¹ God never made you to go it alone.

2) Only God through the church can provide you with authentic relationships.

There are many places in this world that provide substitute fellowship in order to try to fill that God-designed vacuum. On our way up I-75 on Wednesday, my family stopped at a Steak and Shake restaurant. Sitting at a table next to the wall was a middle-aged man, with a pot of coffee, watching a DVD on a little hand-held player that was plugged into the wall. He reminded me of some of the people I know who go to the same McDonalds or bowling alley or bar or wherever, to see the same people, to be known, to be recognized. You can find common ground with other Lions fans or Piston fans or that sort of thing, but only God through the church can provide you with authentic relationships. I will address this more in the coming months.

3) We have to learn to do life together in order to show our world what His life is all about.

3 Chairs – 1) Curious 2) Consumer 3) Committed (several chairs)

Christ gave us an object lesson that was designed to remind us that we are called to do life together. Have you ever considered how common communion really is? Eating and drinking are two of the most basic functions of life and Christ used those to show that life is to be done about Him and with others who are about Him. (Communion service)

¹ It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian" Tod Bolsinger (Baker Book House) p. 137-8.