

TO SERVE IN HUMANITY WITH DIVINITY

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MESSAGE SEVEN: THE APOSTLE PAUL'S UPLIFTED HUMANITY WITH DIVINITY IN FIRST CORINTHIANS (4)

THE STRUGGLING OF OUR SERVING LIFE IN AN UPLIFTED HUMANITY WITH COMMITMENT (2)

STRUGGLING IN AN UPLIFTED HUMANITY WITH COMMITMENT

The church in Corinth had four categories of problems: 1) problems with division, 2) problems in human living, 3) problems in their spiritual life, and 4) problems with truth. It seems that God governmentally allowed such a church to have the totality of all these problems, so that we could learn from them. After dealing with division among the Corinthians Paul came to the problems in their human living. Related to their human living Paul covered four different matters: 1) moral life 2) legal rights, 3) human logic, and 4) human needs. In every local church we will often have to handle these four matters. We need to remember that the church life is composed of real human beings. It is normal for there to be problems related to human living.

The church in Corinth was like most local churches - crowded with problems coming from the dear ones' flesh. This is the same as our own local church. Whatever church we are in seems to be crowded with problems. The first problem was with the dear ones' desire for belonging, which eventually developed into parties and divisions. We can consider this as the unhealthy normality in abnormality.

Is it normal or not for the church to have so many problems? On one hand it is abnormal, yet it is also normal. In other words, it is typical. If a church has absolutely no problems we can be sure that it is dead. As long as the saints are alive, there will be problems. Thus we can call this “the unhealthy normality in abnormality.” No local church can avoid it. We see some local churches that seemingly manifest the oneness, but this oneness can easily come from a strong, sweet, capable, and experienced leader and not from Christ and Christ Himself. In the same principle this oneness can be from a group of such people. This kind of cohesiveness can easily be broken. Sometimes in a local church when one person takes the lead, and then it changes to another person, the saints don’t know how to handle it. That is why we must bring the saints to Christ. We do need brothers who can take the lead. But even so, the saints should not just live according to who takes the lead. They should live according to how much they themselves are in Christ.

Furthermore, the problems we see in Corinth illustrate that a local church can easily have another three groups of problems: the first is related to humanity, the second is related to their spiritual life, and the third to truth. Every dear one in the church life needs time to grow to maturity, and all these problems will most likely occur at some time in the church life during such a growth process. Will we ourselves be a problem to our local church? The answer is yes, because we are growing. For there to be problems is normal. Perhaps our greatest problem is that we are too nice and don’t cause enough problems. We should realize that as we grow in the church life we will cause problems. This is true of all the saints. It is normal for us to have problems as we grow to maturity. Of course, we shouldn’t purposely set out to cause problems. This word should be taken in a proper way. Paul served the church in Corinth with a clear view. Outwardly he was reacting to situations, yet all his admonishing was based on what would give the church the highest profit.

It even is likely that the church in Corinth had many more problems than those that were recorded here. However, Paul had a clear view in his serving of them. He chose which specific problems to address so that the church would have the highest profit. He exhorted the saints not only according to truth, but with a high, uplifted humanity. We can see that Paul's exercise was in these principles: the testimony of God's kingdom is the purpose of the church life, the operation of the Spirit is the reality of the church life, the divine attributes are the substance of the church life, and the human virtues are the living out of the church life. The way Paul handled the church situation and problems in Corinth surely gives us such a realization. These four principles are crucial. We must remember that the purpose of the church life is the testimony of God's kingdom. When a small group of saints are meeting in a certain city but are not yet taking the stand as a local church, they may eventually ask whether they should have the Lord's table. Usually their consideration is based upon the number of saints who are meeting there. Yet to have the Lord's table and to take the stand as a local church is not a matter of numbers. If saints are asking whether to have the Lord's table, we have to ask, "for what reason?" The church life has a purpose. We must see that the purpose of the church life is the testimony of God's kingdom. Furthermore, in the church life there is an operation. The operation of the Spirit is the reality of the church life. When we are short of the operation of the Spirit in the church life we know that something is wrong. That is why we should be afraid of becoming routine and mechanical. When a church becomes routine and mechanical it is because there is no operation of the Spirit. The church life is not a matter of just faithfully doing what the leading brothers say. There must be the operation of the Spirit. If that is gone, then the reality of the church life is also gone.

Furthermore, what is the substance of the church life? The divine attributes. We saw in an earlier message that Paul's uplifted humanity was produced out of the divine attributes. This must also be the substance of the church life. We need to realize that if we do not have the divine attributes such as strength, or victory,

or resurrection, then there is no church life. It doesn't matter what we teach or how we exercise. Without the divine attributes the substance of the church life is gone. Then furthermore, the living out of the church life is the human virtues. We must be balanced. We should not be a "spiritual man" who is so filled with divine attributes that we become untouchable. A true spiritual man lives humanly. Sometimes brothers are so "spiritual" that you wonder whether they are in the heavens or on earth. The church life must be with those who are living out the human virtues. In the church life it should be very normal to give hospitality, to show mercy and sympathy, to sustain saints in their difficulties, and to provide practical care for the needs of the saints. If that is the case in our local church then we know something is quite healthy.

PROBLEMS RELATED TO HUMANITY

Dealing with the Moral Life

Following his dealing with the matter of "belonging," Paul began to address the problems related to humanity. The first specific problem he dealt with concerned the Corinthian's moral life. This can easily become a serious issue to all the churches. Morality is very hard to define. What was considered immoral many years ago may be considered normal today. Society is constantly changing. The understanding of morality may also differ from one place to another. Corinth was a city filled with terrible immorality, but to them it was normal. We might think that morality involves things related to fornication, but it is actually deeper than that. The church in Corinth had become degraded to the extent that one brother legalized having his stepmother. This was extremely serious. It was even more serious than adultery or fornication, because such an immoral relationship had become something legalized. It was allowed and even endorsed by the church. This shows the extent of the church's degradation.

This was a great shame to the testimony of God's kingdom. Therefore, Paul judged such a one by strongly exercising his spirit to be with them in their meetings. Such a verse is hard to understand. Paul wrote this epistle in Ephesus, in Asia, while Corinth was in Europe. Yet Paul met with them. He joined their meetings by exercising his spirit. We don't even know how this is possible. Then, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the power of the Lord, he delivered such a one to Satan, so that there would be nothing leavening the church life. Not only was Paul present, but he exercised a certain judgment. He attended the meetings of the church in Corinth in his spirit and judged that person. We don't know how Paul was able to do such a thing, yet we surely see his care for the church. He knew that such an immoral marriage could bring the whole church into immorality. Saints would live immorally because now it was legalized. Paul would not tolerate this. Eventually, he demanded the church to remove the evil man from their midst. Later, in his second epistle, Paul portrayed his sorrowfulness at the time he made such a judgment. Here we see something very different. Paul had exercised his spirit in Ephesus to attend the meetings in Corinth. He had delivered the immoral brother to Satan and told the brothers there in his first epistle to remove this evil man from among them. Yet in his second epistle we see how sorrowful he was when he did this. Paul would say, "I judged this brother severely. I even delivered him to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit would be saved. But do you know how sorrowful I was. I carried out this judgment with much sorrowfulness." Paul was like a parent spanking and severely disciplining his son, yet crying at the same time. He exercised the wrath of God, yet with a high humanity. He had exhibited the high humanity of Jesus while he was caring for God's kingdom. If we care for God's testimony, we have to realize that the exercising of righteousness comes from love. The reason Paul judged this situation so severely was because he loved the church and he loved the saints.

He had been so sorrowful and testified, “out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you through many tears... that you would know the love which I have more abundantly toward you.” Paul could say to the Corinthians, “I was weeping while I was writing to you. When I wrote about how the church would be damaged by leaven, I was crying. The reason I was so severe was because I love you.” What a man this is! Even when exercising judgment, his person is so tender.

Now, because such an evil brother repented, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to confirm their love to this one, so that he would not be swallowed up with excessive sorrow. After someone marries his stepmother, would there be any hope for him? Why would Paul even waste his time on such a person? If we were Paul, we would probably think to ourselves, “I have so many local churches to care for. I have Timothy, Titus, and so many co-workers to care for. How can I have time to care for a brother who could marry his stepmother? Not even educated or cultured people would do such a thing. This brother doesn’t even have a basic understanding of morality. He is just unrefined, uncultured, and uneducated. If he repents, it is only one more brother meeting with the church in Corinth. He will never be an elder or a leading one. He’s hopeless. His future is over.” Yet Paul was in tears. He said, “Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you through many tears.” Then perhaps after receiving Paul’s first epistle the brothers in Corinth were afraid to restore the brother who had repented. So Paul wrote that they should confirm their love to this brother so that he would not be swallowed up with excessive sorrow. “Since he has repented, please bring him back.” This is too deep and profound. Paul had so much feeling for even such a brother as this. Paul’s apostleship was exercised in such a high humanity.

In continuing to deal with problems of the Corinthian’s church life related to humanity, Paul addressed three more categories of problems. The first one dealt with legality, the second dealt with logic, and the third dealt with human affairs.

Dealing with Legality: Willing to be Wronged and Defrauded

The apostle Paul picked up one case which happened in the church in Corinth - one brother had a law case against another brother. There may have been many things which had happened in Corinth related to legal aspects. Paul just picked one, but he was very strong about it. Paul reminded them that the saints will judge the world, even judge the angels. The saints will even judge Satan. Paul spoke this to their shame and questioned whether any were wise, whether any could discern between the brothers, indicating that he hoped some would develop the ability of discernment. This is a strong and serious rebuke. "Is there any among you wise when you do this. I speak to your shame." Paul was concerned that if they spent so much time arguing about legal matters they would not grow. Yet most of all, he exhorted the brothers to be willing to be wronged and to be willing to be defrauded. Paul would say, "What's wrong with being taken advantage of? What's wrong with being defrauded? We should be willing for such things. We should even be joyful."

Oftentimes, we are caught with the legal right of a particular saint and are void of the fact that it is the Spirit who operates to bring in the reality of the church life. The church life must be of the Spirit. It is the possessing of the divine attributes that brings in the substance of the church life. When we care for the saints, we actually care for the testimony of the kingdom of God. It is not adequate to only stand with the legal rights of the saints and forget to help the saints to exhibit the humanity of Jesus - an uplifted humanity.

We need to shepherd the saints into an uplifted humanity. Then if they are taken advantage of, they will still be joyful. They won't struggle for their legal rights. We should learn to serve as Paul, to continuously remind the saints that they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

Dealing with Logic: Not to Live Under Human Logic

Paul's struggling was always a matter of fighting against human logic. He realized there is only one real logical realm, the divine logic of Christ. No matter how good our logic is, it doesn't match the divine logic of Christ. For example, many saints use their logic when considering whether to serve the Lord full-time. They think, "If I don't work, then what about my family? What about my future?" But that is not the divine logic. Our human logic doesn't work in the church life. Serving the Lord full-time is not humanly logical. We should not think so much. It is a blessing to live in the divine logic. Thus, when Paul testified of his struggle he said, "the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but powerful before God for the overthrowing of strongholds, as we overthrow reasonings (which means human logic) and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ."

Some dear ones in Corinth, while living according to their human logic, were abusive to their body in the matter of eating, even to the point that they became unhealthy in their moral life. Their human logic was to say, "This is my body. This is my lifestyle. I just want to eat this way. I want to have this kind of life." This shows how human logic can become a serious matter in the church life. Yet our human logic always operates. We are always arguing, "I have my rights," even when we are improper in our daily life. This was a disgrace to the testimony of the kingdom of God. Paul presented to them a spiritual fact - he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit - and asked them to flee fornication.

He reminded them of the fact that their body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and they are not their own. Paul would say, “You don’t belong to yourself. You have no right to say ‘I will eat what I want to eat,’ or ‘I will live this manner of life because I want to.’ Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. You are not your own.” Therefore, the most logical realization is, “you have been bought with a price. So then glorify God in your body.” This is divine logic. When we live by the divine logic our whole person, even our body, becomes the source of glorifying God.

There are endless logical excuses for many saints to live an unhealthy church life. For example, there are so many reasons saints will use for not making the church meetings. Their logical excuses are endless, and this brings in an unhealthy church life. Everyone has personal needs, both psychological and physical. Everyone would have their logic, because there are so many personal needs to meet. It is an endless effort to meet all these needs. Every dear one who is away from the reality of the church life may have good reasons, but the fact is they are under the power of the things they seek after. When you visit saints who have dropped the church life, they always have good reasons. But actually what drives their logic is a lust for something they are seeking after. Possessing the divine attributes, Paul could boldly testify, “All things are lawful to me, but not all things are profitable; all things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything.” To say “all things are lawful” is human logic, but then to say “all things are not profitable” is the divine logic. This is a living not according to human logic, but according to an uplifted humanity endeavoring to bear the testimony of the kingdom of God. So when someone in the church life tells us, “I have the right to do this,” we should say, “Yes, you have the right to do this, but will it be profitable to you? Or will you be brought under its power?”

Dealing with Human Affairs: Taking Care of Human Affairs Humanely

Regarding human affairs, Paul knew what was the best. He didn't just concentrate on spiritual things. He knew it is good for a man not to touch a woman, and that it is good to devote ourselves to prayer. Although he wished all men to be even as he was himself, Paul viewed marriage as a most crucial item in human affairs. He humanely cared for the matter of marriage, the unmarried, the widowed, the married, and the fathers' concern for their daughters. He was so human, always knowing what was the best, yet having the understanding of what was practical. Paul knew that there was a line between what is best and what is practical. We should want what is the best for the saints, but we should also understand what is practical for them. Otherwise we will become a law-giver. Although he knew what was the best, he also stressed each one having his own gift from God, one in this way and the other in that. Some are gifted to be alone, and some are gifted to be married. For the most part, from our observation, we would encourage saints to get married. His view of God's kingdom as the testimony of the church life was so strong that he insisted that the divorced one go back to her original spouse. This is hard to believe. Paul absolutely did not agree with divorce. He forbid a believer to leave an unbelieving spouse. He boldly stated that the unbelieving husband is sanctified by his wife, the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the brother, and that their children are holy. Again we see Paul's humanity. As far as Paul was concerned the oneness of the husband and wife could never be broken unless a third party was involved. In the sight of the Lord there is no divorce, except in the case of adultery. Further, he stated that the unbelieving one has the right to separate, but not the believing one. If you are a believer you have no right to separate, but the unbeliever does have this right. In his humanity, Paul cared for God's testimony - "God has called us in peace." Even more, Paul suggested the possibility of the operation of the Spirit by saying, "how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband?"

In situations such as this, most sisters get saved first, and then their husbands. He was strong in saying that “however as the Lord has apportioned to each one, as God has called each one, so let him walk.” We must walk in humanity in the Lord’s presence. Through this, we can realize that he fully saw God’s government and he fully saw the individual saint’s freedom in walking according to God.

Then beyond marriage, regarding one’s status, he stated, “Each one, in the calling in which he was called, in this let him remain,” so that no one would become abusive, taking advantage of others. An example of this is seen with Philemon and his slave Onesimus. Even though they were brothers, they should still remain in their status in which they were called. In other words, one such as Onesimus should not take advantage of his salvation. Philemon was still his master. Eventually, his conclusion was that we all were bought with a price, we all have been called, and we all are Christ’s slaves. Paul said, “If a brother was called as a slave, he should still be a slave happily. But even his master is a slave of Christ. We are all slaves.”

What a spiritual man! What an exercise of his apostleship! His humanity was so high and uplifted according to the divine attributes to the extent that his own opinion became the speaking of the Spirit of God. Regarding certain matters he testified that he did not have a commandment from the Lord. Yet, he gave his opinion and that very opinion was the Spirit of God. How mature was such a one! Yet Paul considered it all a matter of mercy. We worship the Lord for such a serving one. We also must serve in such a humanity.

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