**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 2-12-2023
The Most Excellent Way**

Friends, I am so thankful to our Triune God for His many blessings. One of those blessings has been that I’ve been able to participate in Chestnut Grove’s book group that meets every other month. And all are welcome. It’s a lot of fun. You can come just to hear about a book, if you’d like.

One of the things that we have done a handful of times or so, is read biographies or autobiographies of different Christians. We’ve enjoyed reading about and discussing people such as Corrie Ten Boom and Joni Eareckson Tadi and George Meuller. We also read a powerful biography about a man named Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Bonhoeffer was a pastor and teacher from Germany prior to and during World War II. He is most well-known today for leading numerous pastors to stay faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ in a time when much of the German church just went along with whatever Hitler told them to do.

But Jesus is Lord, and not anyone else, especially folks like Hitler.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a few powerful books. One of those books is called *Life Together*. This book was about the illegal seminary that he was leading through this very difficult time in history. They were truly putting their lives on the line to do what they did. In this book, in describing how they sought to do life together, Bonhoeffer addresses what Christian community is meant to look like from a biblical perspective.

And from the title, *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer reminds his readers that the church is to be about doing life together. The church is meant to be a community that actively cares for and supports and loves one another.

The church was not meant to be a collection of individuals that happen to come together one day a week for an hour to worship God and then just do their own thing. Instead, the church is meant to intentionally practice life together.

As we now turn again to the church in Corinth in the 1st century, we find that they were not practicing life together very well. Paul gives a few different examples of this in his letter. One way that they were failed to do life together was in how they celebrated Holy Communion.

Now at that time, Communion was normally celebrated as part of the meal that the church would enjoy together. Perhaps we should do that again at a future congregational meal sometime. But in any case, in Corinth they used wine instead of grape juice and there were folks that came early to these gathering and got drunk on the wine.

That is not doing life together very well. That’s being selfish and carnal. That’s being a church gone wild. Two other ways that the Corinthian Christians were not doing life together very well were in regards to the subjects of spiritual gifts and having order at worship services.

Today we are going to consider each of these growth areas and then turn to Paul’s answer.

Let’s first consider spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul lists several gifts or manifestations that the Holy Spirit chooses to give to God’s people. There are all different gifts. And other New Testament books mention several other spiritual gifts from God.

So what was the problem? It was that sadly, in Corinth, these gifts from God were being understood in a competitive way, rather than as a way to bless and serve and help one another.

Remember, a few weeks ago I mentioned that there were those Isthmithian Games (which were like the Olympic Games). These Isthmithian Games were held in Corinth every other year. And it just seems that this culture of competition was seeping into the minds of Christians in all different kinds of ways – including on this subject of spiritual gifts.

Now, we need to remember there is nothing wrong in and of itself with competition. We need godly athletes who give all the glory to God. People like Kyra, my daughters, and many others of us. And there is nothing wrong with watching the Super Bowl as well.

But doing life together as the church is never meant to be a competition. Instead, Paul writes how the Spirit distributes these gifts to each believer just as He determines.

**This means that there is no superiority. The gifts were meant for the common good.** The Christians were not to view the gifts that God gave them as badges of honor or marks of superiority. But instead, it seems like that was what was going on.

Church life is never meant to be a competition. It is meant to be a family, growing up in Jesus together and doing life together.

To help correct this error in the Corinthian church, Paul uses the image of a body to emphasize how each part of the body is important. Bodies have all different parts and each part is not called to be boastful or envious of other body parts. That just sounds ludicrous. Truly, as the human body parts work together, physical life is improved.

And Paul is teaching the Corinthains that the church is like a body. Not every person is gifted in the same ways, just as every part of the body does not do everything.

Instead, every Christian in Corinth was called to use the gifts that God has given them for the common good of the church. It is not about a notch on one’s belt, but about an opportunity to bless.

Now jumping ahead to chapter 14, we find Paul addressing the importance of order in worship gatherings. Again, the focus is to be on blessing God and blessing one another as God’s people gather to worship.

But in Corinth, what we find is basically a free-for-all. People were speaking in tongues when it wasn’t appropriate to do so. And there were different people speaking at the same time. There were some women that were asking questions during the worship service in a way that was a distraction.

And Paul is basically saying that there is a time and a place for questions and to participate in all kinds of ways. But the church services were not called to be disorderly. He writes in chapter 14:33, **“For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.”**

So what’s the solution? While there is some correction and instruction given in chapters 12 & 14, the fullest answer is in perhaps the most famous chapter in all of the Bible - 1 Corinthians 13. And we can call this answer what Paul calls it himself – The Most Excellent Way.

Let us now turn to God’s Word in 1 Corinthains. We will actually begin with the last sentence of chapter 12 and then we will hear all of chapter 13. Paul writes:

**And yet I will show you the most excellent way.**

**2 If I speak in the tongues[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A31-13%3A13&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28667a)**] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2If 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 do not have love, I am nothing. 3If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A31-13%3A13&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28669b)**] but do not have love, I gain nothing.**

**4Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

**8Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. 11When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12For now we see only a 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.**

**13And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.**

This passage is a very familiar one. We often hear it read at weddings. And while that is certainly fitting, its original context is focused on how the church of Jesus Christ is called to do life together.

So what is Paul seeking to say? What is the glue that helps the church to be strongly united in doing life together?

The most excellent way is the way of love. God’s love.

It is by being filled with the love of God that the Corinthians would be enabled to not be carnally minded when it comes to spiritual gifts or actions in church gatherings.

Those gifts of the Spirit will eventually cease, Paul teaches. Greatness in the kingdom of God is not about gifting. It is about growing in faith, hope, and love.

And by growing in the love of Christ, the church will better function in orderly ways. By growing in the love of Christ, spiritual gifts will be used to bless others for the common good.

IN A SENTENCE, BY LIVING IN THIS MOST EXCELLENT WAY, THE CHURCH WILL BE ABLE TO DO LIFE TOGETHER VERY WELL.

**Paul describes this highest type of love, the agape love of God, in many beautiful ways in this chapter. Love is** **patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not boast. Love is not proud. Love does not dishonor others. Love is not self-seeking. Love is not easily-angered. Love keeps no records of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil. Love rejoices with the truth. Love always protects. Love always trusts. Love always hopes. Love always perseveres. LOVE NEVER FAILS.**

Friends, this is what the Corinthains were called to wholeheartedly pursue. Growing in God’s love and growing in faith and hope.

So again, as we seek to apply the truths found in this powerful section of 1 Corinthians, what is the big idea or main takeaway for us?

**And I believe that it is simply this: As we seek to do life together, the key is to grow in faith, in hope, and in God’s love.**

As we grow in these ways, we will be become less and less selfish. As we grow in these ways, God will naturally enable us to discover and use the spiritual gifts that He gives us in ways that bless and support and care for our brothers and sisters in Christ. As we grow in faith, hope, and love, our worship gatherings will naturally be orderly and everyone will be enabled to participate and contribute in all different ways. Christ is the focus and it is not any one of us. But Him.

Please, if you would like to share a testimony or a special song or serve in any way during a worship service, just talk to me about it. There are many ways that we can bless one another at our weekly worship gatherings.

But the key is to let God’s most excellent way be our focus as His people.

One of my daily prayers is that the Lord would fill me with the love of Jesus Christ more today than ever before. I desire to keep growing in His love and in my faith and hope.

I would encourage you to consider praying in a similar way if you do not already do so. God is a God of love and if we ask Him to fill us with more of His life, that is a prayer that is definitely in agreement with His will.

In conclusion, I just want to say that I believe that, by the grace of the Lord, I feel that this is lived out and experienced at a very high level here at Chestnut Grove. But let us keep growing. We are called to be a light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ.

We are to be filled with the love of Christ in such a way that it cannot help but impact every area of our lives and every relationship that we have with others – both inside and outside the church. May the love of our Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, empower and guide us to not only do life together better every day, but to impact a world that so deeply needs Jesus as well. Amen.

Resources: [www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com), Dr. Doug Buckwalter’s Literary Structure handout on 1 Corinthians