

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 3:9-17

Sermon Title: "Servanthood: Always on the Church's Mind" (A Journey through First Corinthians)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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**{SLIDE 1}** We return to the city of Corinth. It is a large city. It is a wealthy city. It is a loose city. Port city with lots of opportunities to have a good time and get into some big trouble.

In Chapter 3 of his letter, Paul talks to the Corinthian Christians about their sin. He calls them infants at the beginning of this chapter, saying that they are acting as unspiritual people, that they are too young to understand what it means to be spiritual. "I fed you with milk and not solid food," Paul tells these Christians, "for you were not ready for solid food," that is to say food that comes from God to causes a person to grow deeply in faith.<sup>1</sup>

**{SLIDE 2}** Why aren't they growing in faith? Why are they stuck on milk and not good spiritual food? It's because they keep fighting. We talked about this several Sundays ago. They have placed themselves in these groups that are exclusive from the others. They have leaders they attached to, and they follow those leaders as though they are the only ones who hold the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-2.

Gospel truth. They bicker and quarrel with each other on points of faith in Christ without helping each other growing in faith in Christ. There is more jealousy and discord shared than anything else.<sup>2</sup> These groups think that only they know God and only they serve God with perfection, while the other groups are viewed as careless, immoral, and downright evil.

{SLIDE 3} Christians should get along. They love the same Lord and serve that one God with joy and thanksgiving. And yet, the Corinthians held on to the bickering. Something still stirred in their hearts and minds, making them cold, making them bitter and frustrated. They all could have worn T-shirts all day that said, “Doesn’t play well with others.”

{SLIDE 4} Paul wants to stop all of that. Fight-or-perish, dog-eat-dog, no-holds barred competition, survival of the fittest: whatever the Corinthian Christians were calling it, Paul wanted it to stop. It doesn’t work in the Christian community. It doesn’t work if we are all believers under one God and Savior Jesus Christ.

So Paul introduces another idea: servanthood. “We are God’s servants, working together.”<sup>3</sup> Servants do not oppose one another. Servants don’t find what is

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:3.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:9.

wrong in the other person and decide to push him or her away. Servants come together to take on a common task. They figure out who has talents for what, and they distribute the work amongst themselves. They act as a team and get things done efficiently and joyfully.

**{SLIDE 5}** We have a food pantry in our church that could distribute about 100,000 pounds of food in a year. Hundreds and hundreds of families receive something for their tables, and now they don't have to worry about starving. Our pantry doesn't work with just one or two people. We see ourselves as servants taking on the same task, moving in the same direction. One group meets the clients to figure out how many people are in the house, a group takes the food to their car by grocery cart, a group counts the total numbers of people who came to our place, and a group bags all the food and places them in carts. Like a well-oiled machine, food comes in and food goes out, and we servants perform a task to God's greater glory.

**{SLIDE 6}** When we work together as servants, there is no time for bickering. There is no time for quarreling about who is right and who is wrong. Work needs to be done. People need to be served. We love to see work being accomplished, but we also love seeing the joy people have on their faces when they are served. They feel blessed. They are truly thankful. It

feels good to be servants together with greater purposes to fulfill.

**{SLIDE 7}** Paul continues with the idea of servants working together, but then he places us servants in a structure of sorts. “We are God’s building,” he says, as though we are a part of some edifice that stands the test of time.

Paul says that he is the skilled workman who lay the foundation of this structure. By his work and his teaching, the Corinthian Christians learned that there was a better life to live, other than the fast and loose life that the city offered. However, Paul could only lay this foundation, because the foundation of Jesus Christ had been laid for him. He could not become the skilled workman he was, if it wasn’t for Christ.<sup>4</sup> So, being a servant of Christ himself, he went forward with a task: teach people about the good news of God’s salvation. He visited the port city of Corinth, and he lay a foundation for people to become a part of.

The Corinthian Christians are a part of that structure. They are servants together working on that structure to keep it tall and strong. The word of God gets out to others by their service and speech. The structure of servants adds one more to its group, and

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-11.

the entire structure gets even taller and stronger. They do not use the materials that the city offers: selfishness, greed, arrogance, lust, competition. They use the materials that Christ offers: compassion, pity, grace, joy. Division is not the mortar that holds the structure together. If division is added, the whole thing comes crashing down. Love is the mortar, the strongest material we could ever use. Love keeps our hearts warm and sympathetic. Love keep our minds open and inviting.

**{SLIDE 8}** Maybe the best visual illustration for us is the brick wall behind me. All the bricks represent us. Who knows how many bricks make that wall, but each brick is important. If we represent each brick in that wall, then none of us can go missing, or the whole thing crashes. One brick is stacked on another, and the wall stands. We place ourselves that closely to each other as servants of God, and together the work we do makes a difference for God in our neighborhood. Love keeps our particular community strong – that’s the mortar we see between each brick – and we accomplish so much more because the love from God causes us to be focused on others and how to best help them. We choose not to allow bickering to let our structure crash. We choose not to quarrel over points or let any obstacle stand between us. The love of God is our bond. Christ is our foundation. We hold

together as a great wall, and a lot gets done for people in need.

**{SLIDE 9}** Now, a quick word needs to be said about verses 16-17. These verses are misused to the horror of many, especially those who have lost loved ones to suicide. People callously like to quote these verses out as though they have anything to do with suicide, and they leave grieving people with nothing to hope for.

Verses 16-17 have nothing at all to do with it. If you hear somebody quoting it, you best tell them to reread the Bible because they have no idea what they are talking about. Obviously, they have not read verses 1-15 which talks about the body of Christ, all servants together being God's temple. Verses 16-17 obviously talk about the consequences of allowing division and bickering and quarreling to enter the fellowship of believers. We are servants together, built upon each other into a great structure, doing great work together, but if that structure does not want to stay together, it will fall. If servants of God allow for squabbling and feuding, they are no longer servants of God but servants of their own self-interests. They stand apart from each other as individual brick, so to speak, that cannot be used to build anything. They can build nothing but a large heap of stinky garbage

that nobody want to come near.

**{SLIDE 10}** God calls us to be different people. The faith we have in Christ transforms us completely. We are no longer self-serving; we are other-serving. We do not build fortresses of our pointless ideas; we build sanctuaries for all to enter and receive the blessing of God. The fires of division might try to tear down what God has built up.<sup>5</sup> The fires might test our patience, ignite angry and frustration within us. We don't serve the divisions that try to burn things down. We serve the one true God who unites us together and keep us bonded to one another. We may have different opinions about how things should operate in the world, but we have a common believe in one God who gives us talents to share and ministry to carry out. We cannot help but want to serve our God together with all joy and thanksgiving. We cannot help but want to reach out and touch a person's life, hoping the best for them, hoping to change their lives around.

**{SLIDE 11}** Paul introduces another idea: servanthood. Servants have no time to bicker. With all the people we need to serve, there is no time for expressing personal opinions that do no good for nobody.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:3:13-15.

We keep building on that structure that God has made us into. We add to our fellowship people willing to believe in Jesus Christ and who want to spread the good news of life to others. We add to the talents God may give us to do his work, for we all have talents that God may use. We join together as a unit of different and colorful people, but as a unit who knows who is our Master and who wants to please that Master with joy and thanksgiving. It is remarkable what can get done when many hands are in the process. So much is done, and so many lives are transformed, for God has made us to be a great fellowship of people who do great things for our great God.



## **Assurance of Pardon:**

Listen to this Good News: “If we claim that we’re free from sin, we’re only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is absolute nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins – be honest and open about them – God won’t let us down. God will forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing.” Since we confessed our sins, God will forgive us through his Son Jesus Christ and bring us into the light of his salvation. Thanks be to God. Amen.