

## **The Church in Corinth** by Pastor Kurt Hoover

### Litany based on Psalm 33

Leader: Let all the earth fear the Lord;

**All: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!**

Leader: For He spoke, and it came to be;

**All: he commanded, and it stood firm.**

Leader: The counsel of the Lord stands forever,

**All: the plans of His heart to all generations.**

Leader: Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,

**All: the people whom He has chosen as His heritage!**

Leader: We worship you, Lord, In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and The Holy Spirit.

**2 Corinthians 3 :1-6** Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? <sup>2</sup> You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. <sup>3</sup> And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

<sup>4</sup> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup> who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

**Acts 18:1-11** After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. <sup>2</sup> And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, <sup>3</sup> and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. <sup>4</sup> And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

<sup>5</sup> When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." <sup>7</sup> And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God. His house was next door to the

synagogue. <sup>8</sup> Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. <sup>9</sup> And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” <sup>11</sup> And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

*For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 2:6)*

This is Paul writing to the churches in Corinth clarifying one of the most subtle but life-giving arguments of the Bible. What is it that gives us faith. It is not rules, commandments, letters, words on a page ... nor anything that gets us thinking about ourselves. In short as soon as you have written something down it no longer has the power it once had.

Hearing my spouse say, ‘I love you’ changes me in a way that reading that in a note can never do. A word spoken to you is spiritual, reading a word on a page we tend to ask silly questions, like why does she love me, do I deserve that love, have I loved her enough in return?

When we hear, ‘I love you.’ It washes over us. We are less likely to argue with it. The spoken word actually changes us, shapes us.

*For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 2:6)*

And yes, this reality applies very much to the Bible. Paul makes this argument in Romans (which will be the last city we visit as we wrap up Acts.) Paul says - *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.* (Romans 10:17)

This is why we read the readings out loud before a sermon. This is why small groups matter. Hearing is alive, the letter is dead. Hearing gives life, a list of things that never get done kills us.

Paul knew this as well. When the church received his letters, they didn't go into a study Bible, they were read out loud. The same was the practice of the Gospel's in an oral culture. There is nothing wrong with a Study Bible, but it cannot replace the spoken word found in worship and small group.

Therefore God says to Paul, in the city of Corinth - *“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.”* (Acts 20:10-11)

This is not just true of any words on a page, but points to a truth about us.

When we hear God's voice, we are set free! We start wondering what God is doing, rather than what must I do. We are shaped and changed by what we hear.

That part of us, which is all of us... that part of us that wants to improve and prove ourselves dies. We must go through this. Our natural tendency is to approach faith, at first, as a list of things to do (law/letter). This is necessary but will never give life. But we must go through these attempts to improve or prove ourselves. There is not a type of human being that doesn't do this. We come to the end of ourselves and our abilities only to find that God has been speaking to us the whole time. And through our death, come new life.

*For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 2:6)*

Both are a necessary and a normal part of life.

My Senior year at Luther College I had already been accepted to Seminary and wanted to get some practical study. Truth be told I wanted an excuse to spend some time in Cedar Falls, Iowa where my girlfriend was attending UNI. :)

We had what was called a J-term, So I asked the local Lutheran Church in Cedar Falls if I could shadow the pastor for the month of January. I set up the internship with my college advisor. In fact, the idea and courage to ask the pastor came to me while listening to the sermon.

My motivation was time with my girlfriend, but I took it seriously. In fact, I kind of wanted to prove myself. This little 4-week internship, which was supposed to be an excuse to see Molly ended up killing me. I ended up getting strep throat and missing the first week of the next semester. I was miserable.

But I had to prove myself. I went to meetings, I taught confirmation classes, I gave a sermon at the Lutheran home, I sat at the foot of the beloved retired pastor who taught me how to learn who the people are and love them for who they are.

I put a lot of work in. I was prepared for every meeting, every conversation, until the last week. There was a Bible Study – small group hosted in a families home. They had invited the college/Seminary student to attend. In fact, the host introduced me to the group as a Seminarian. Which I did not correct, I like the idea that they might think I knew my stuff, or at least more than then them.

The trouble was I had only skimmed the text before the evening meeting. And each time I thought I would have some time to study each verse in detail I got interrupted. I was in front of the house panicking trying to read the text at least one time through before

the study, but everyone arrived early and saw me in the dome light of my car.

Well, I bet you can guess what happened. What do you think?

I turned out to be the most freeing experience of that internship and perhaps the most important lesson I learned in ministry. That experience set the foundation for who I am as a pastor today.

I don't prepare for anything... :) No that was not what I learned. What I learned was that the letter kills and the Spirit gives life. My attempts to control things actually kills me. It brings me to a place where I can actually hear something other than my own thoughts.

I tried at first to fake my way through the study conversation. We were kind of going one verse at a time. I was kind of holding my own bouncing back and forth between the study notes and trying to read ahead.

But I quickly became exposed. I had to correct previous points. 'What I meant to say...' I would have been much better off just keeping my mouth shut, but I needed to prove myself.

And then it happened. I started seeing, and more importantly hearing the text differently. Instead of this conversation depending on me and my understanding, or expertise... Instead of my need show my knowledge... Instead of my need to shape the understanding of the words on the page, the words started to shape me.

I started with a simple honest question. *'When Jesus says, this to me... I think I hear Jesus telling me what he has done for me... I mean this just happened today... I was about to follow my normal routine, but instead I just felt like why not try something new... and*

*I did and this wonderful thing happened. And isn't Jesus saying right here He is the one that made that moment happen??'*

From that point on the discussion happened. God was speaking. And it most certainly wasn't through the careful study of the letter by some wannabe pastor. God was speaking through the unprepared honest and vulnerable questions in the conversation. And most importantly the words we were sharing were shaping us rather than us trying to improve or prove ourselves by making Jesus words into a check list of things to do.

*For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 2:6)*

Jesus Christ is here now speaking in the same way he spoke through Paul in the early church. God goes before you to make his voice heard.

*"Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city [your family, your neighborhood] who are my people."*