

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“The habit of preachers today is to address their people as though they were all Christians and just need instruction...men and women are being treated as saved who never knew they were lost.”

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One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism – Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians

*Part 7 – The Antidote to Boasting
– Why are You a Christian?*

April 7, 2024

Sermon Text: 1 Cor 1: 26-31

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor 2

“Julius Caesar established Corinth as a Roman colony in 44BC. The Romans refounded the city by installing Roman architecture, buildings, and temples....Unlike Rome, where the wealthy aristocracy ruled, Corinth provided its citizens (many former slaves now freed, and military personnel)

with a real opportunity to climb the social ladder. Business owners and townspeople competed for fame, wealth, and recognition. This city was fertile ground for patrons and clients, entrepreneurs, aggressive business practices, philosophers, mystery religions, and everything in between.

Such was the climate when Paul arrived at Corinth in about AD 51, staying there for 18 months. It was later, in approximately 54-55AD when he wrote this letter of 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. Political and sophistic factions, moral compromises, rampant idolatry, and the pursuit of fame and wealth characterized the city. Many consider these factions and egotistical behavior to be an

impetus if not the root cause for Paul's writing of First Corinthians.

Sophistic wisdom at Corinth was alluring, philosophical, and centered upon human ingenuity. Rhetorically gifted individuals paraded this wisdom, hoping to gain a following by their persuasive oratory. The Corinthians were jockeying with each other by aligning themselves with one sophist over another, thus, pitting the leaders and themselves against each other. The net result was a party-line division between the house churches. Apparently the divisions in the churches were not over theological lines, but rather personal rifts. If that were not enough, the wealthy within the church were also disparaging the poor members of the body, excluding them from fellowship. In the end, the Corinthians were struggling mightily with living as believers in a pagan culture. Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was still in them." [G.K. Beale, The Story Retold]

"Several ministers were dealt with

and encouraged by his Excellency the Lord-General Cromwell, to persuade all who hold Christ, the Head, and are therefore the same in the fundamentals of the faith, to agree in love – that there be no such divisions among people professing godliness as there had been, nor any railing or reviling one another for differences in mere matters of form but rather to call for all to fear the Lord in spirit and truth to labor for the unity of all God's people." [Life of Dr. John Owen, Preface to Volume 1 of Owen's Works, The Glory of Christ].

It is to this seemingly hopelessly compromised group of believers that Paul addresses this letter in this manner -

1Co 1:1-4 Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, (2) To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: (3) Grace to you and peace from God

our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (4) I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus,

“To the church of God...to those who have been sanctified in Christ, saints by calling, I thank my God for the grace given you....”

Paul knew them. He had lived among them for 18 months preaching and teaching Christ to them. He had seen the Holy Spirit gift them and had seen them make a good confession of Christ and baptized in His name. Largely then, his purpose in this letter is *to admonish them for being conformed to the Corinthian culture, and to remind them Who they now belonged to – Christ! BE WHO YOU ARE. WALK IN A MANNER WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING.*

This requires the Lord’s wisdom. How do we deal with people who claim to be Christians but are living like the world? Do we assume they are Christians and proceed along

those lines in dealing with them, or do we regard them as hypocrites whose bad fruit demonstrates they do not belong to Christ at all? Let me suggest these answers:

- If we have NEVER seen a good confession of Christ in a person, if there has never been any evident fruit of the new birth in them except for their mouthing of a claim to be a Christian, and particularly if they have shown themselves to be enemies by working to destroy the church, then they should be dealt with as a hypocrites and sternly warned of their need to be born again, even put out from among us if they will not repent.
- On the other hand, if we have seen evidence of real faith and real new life in them, as Paul had with these Corinthians, then we should work to fan that original flame in them once more, expecting them to show repentance and grief over their sin. Paul did this with the Galatians as well:

“who is sufficient for these things.”

As Beale noted, the foundational sin of these Corinthians, as they were being conformed to their world, *was this terrible evil of pride. Self.* This sin also opens us up to being suckers for the false teachings of Satan’s emissaries creeping in among us.

“The Corinthians struggled with church unity because they are a proud group of people, following proud leaders, and as a result division and factionalism ran rampant among them. “ [Ibid, Beale]

And when a church fails to evidence the unity which the Holy Spirit produces among us, our ability to shine the light of Christ in a sinful, dark, perishing world is dimmed if not lost.

A church, and an individual Christian, can appear to be a shining example of success, and yet be nothing more than the darkness of the world. The church at Corinth was in imminent danger

Gal 1:6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

Gal 4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

Gal 4:15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

This takes the Lord’s wisdom and we are, of ourselves, not sufficient for these things. We need His wisdom and guidance to know how to deal with such people. Sometimes faith is very small. And yet it is also a great mistake to deal with hypocrites who willfully wear a disguise. To deal with them in the same way as Paul is dealing here with these Corinthians is also a great error. No wonder Paul said

of becoming a morphed and perverted image which presented itself as being Christ's church but which in fact was on the path to becoming an agent of the enemy, a temple in which the Lord would refuse to dwell.

These very same dangers confront us today. And the start of all of it is this business of *pride and self-exaltation* which inevitably models a false "gospel" of "me, myself, and I and isn't God so very pleased with me."

If you are born again, if you have indeed been made a new creation in Christ – let's put this question to ourselves – *WHY?* The text of scripture before us this morning answers that question and corrects any prideful wrong-thinking in us:

1Co 1:26-31 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; (27) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the

world to shame the things which are strong, (28) and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, (29) so that no man may boast before God.

(30) But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, (31) so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

Why is anyone a Christian? Why are there any people whatsoever who have believed the gospel, turned from Broadway, and freely followed Christ on the Narrow Way that leads to life? Why?

We see the answer right here – ***by HIS doing your are in Christ Jesus.*** Think carefully:

If the Word of the Cross is foolishness to the natural man, if the preaching of Christ Crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and

laughable to the Gentiles, then so it was to YOU and to ME when we came into this world. Therefore, the question stands – how did this foolish message of the Cross become to YOU and to ME wisdom from God? How?

Surely we can see at this point that the answer simply cannot be – “Because I chose to regard it as wisdom and I chose to believe in Christ crucified.” The thing is an impossibility.

And yet, hear it again:

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption...

Look at the additional terms:

- Righteousness
- Sanctification
- Redemption

What is the world’s notion of righteousness? Clearly it is self-righteousness. We make ourselves

righteous by making ourselves righteous ourselves! Justification by works, in other words. But BY HIS DOING Christ crucified became righteousness to us. That is, through the New Birth effected in us by the Lord, we realized and for the first time understood that not only were we NOT righteous before God, *we could never, ever make ourselves righteous before Him*. THIS flashed into our minds:

Php 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

But that is not all. BY HIS DOING. Christ became our *sanctification*. HE became our holiness. BY HIS DOING we were enabled to see that the ONLY way to be regarded as holy unto the Lord is to be in Christ Jesus, by HIS holiness.

Zec 14:20-21 In that day there will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, "HOLY TO THE LORD." And the cooking pots in the

LORD'S house will be like the bowls before the altar. (21) Every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the LORD of hosts; and all who sacrifice will come and take of them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts in that day.

A description, you see, of Christ's real church, of His bride the New Jerusalem. ALL and ONLY because of Christ. There is no room for boasting, no room for claiming credit on our part that God regards us as holy instead of unclean and filthy as we used to be. Only Christ. HE is our sanctification. The Jews thought that that they were pure and holy in God's sight because THEY effected sanctification and cleansing through their own works. As such they regarded the Gentiles and filthy and detestable, unholy before God. And that kind of thinking is what was *natural to YOU and to ME* before we were born again. Christ was not our sanctification – WE were the ones who made ourselves holy.

Then Paul says this –

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and REDEMPTION...

What is *redemption*? It is a price paid, correct? More specifically, *it is a price paid to free something or someone from bondage or from debt which holds some kind of obligation or power over the one in need of redemption.*

If you *redeem* an item, for example, from a pawn shop, you pay the price required and it becomes yours. It is the idea of *release*.

“Buying back a slave or a captive, making free by payment of a ransom.” The noun form means “*a redeemer.*”

CHRIST JESUS BECAME OUR REDEEMER BY HIS DOING.

This wisdom from God which once was foolishness to us, this Word of the Cross, this Christ crucified,

BECAME wisdom to us and by HIS doing, our eyes were opened to see that Christ alone must be our Redeemer. No longer did we consider it wisdom to maintain that WE were able to redeem ourselves, or that we even needed redemption, just as the Jews insisted -

Joh 8:31-33 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; (32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (33) They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"

Think carefully on all of this. There was a time, before the Lord made you a new creation in Christ, that you actually believed the cross of Christ was foolishness, and that real wisdom was that YOU were your righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. That is to say, you believed – even if you grew up attending church and saying that you believed the Bible was God’s

Word and Christ died for our sins – STILL down in your being, you regarded yourself as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. That is exactly how so many, many professing Christians really think today. They believe that they are righteous before God, that they are holy to the Lord, that they have themselves paid the cost by their own "good" works, and that therefore they are saved and forgiven.

But can we not see very plainly here:

But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and REDEMPTION...

Let’s very carefully examine ourselves. We are growing older day by day. Every single day is one less day we have in this life before we pass out of this world and stand before the Lord. So let’s not be deceived. The sands of time are falling, the seconds on the clock and the days on the calendar are racing by. Our last day is

approaching quickly.

We must be honest and ask the Lord to show us ourselves. Am I righteous and holy and redeemed in His sight by HIS doing because of Christ crucified, or is that foolishness to us?

Have we ever really come to terms with our true condition in sin, under the condemnation of the Law, unable to contribute one mite to a real righteousness, holiness, and redemption? This is the lie, you see, that sends myriads and myriads of people to hell – this insistence to which pride and self and boasting in ourselves leads.

Job 9:30-31 "If I should wash myself with snow And cleanse my hands with lye, (31) Yet You would plunge me into the pit, And my own clothes would abhor me.

This, then was the root trouble at Corinth. These believers were boasting. They had forgotten Jeremiah's admonition, which surely Paul had taught them:

1Co 1:31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

Preaching on Jeremiah 17:9 ("The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" Martyn Lloyd-Jones said:

"Present-day religion far too often soothes the conscience instead of awakening it; and produces a sense of self-satisfaction and eternal safety rather than a sense of our unworthiness and the likelihood of eternal damnation."

By HIS doing, we are in Christ Jesus.