

Sermon prepared on 1 Corinthians 6 for Grace Church by Jonathan Shradar

So many competing messages, many of which claim the center place of Christianity and today we come across one that truly stands above all others...

1 Corinthians 6

Taking this letter to the Corinthian church as a whole we can see that it is essentially a call to distinctiveness as a people against the backdrop of their society at large. Paul the Apostle uses gentle reminders of the how they were formed as a people, diverse yet unified in purpose and identity, and he uses stronger, direct correction when the church was striving after things that made to lose their saltiness... their distinctive flavor. The church that loses its distinctiveness is nearing extinction.

And again Paul is inviting the church off of its wandering path and to a place of living different; driven not by the potential for gain but because they had already been given - a prize.

We could take parts of Chapter 6 separately and be extremely thorough with the text. Where we could focus on legal wrangling, or uncover a long running dispute about the definition of words, we are focusing on the the truth that changes everything. With the grandest of implications for us still today - it is the truth that is like oxygen to tired lungs...

Those in union with Christ are freed from death-delivering lives of self-indulgence and empowered for distinctive grace-glorifying lives.

Paul, has been reasoning with the church to live like they are in Christ. To live the identity of who they are as a holy people. Here he has to confront still more drama within the church. Outsourcing justice, turning to the unbelieving world to settle accounts between believers, and the common abuse of prostitutes, an activity that was infiltrating the church because of its place of acceptance in the city.

As we process through the situation and what Scripture says of those in Christ, we want to engage three movements; Self-indulgence that is a pattern in the church, how they are actually set free from the captivity they were sliding back into, and that as those who believe in Jesus they are sourced to flee.

1) Self-Indulgence

Here is the church in Corinth, planted by Paul, a key stop on every great preacher's evangelistic tours, as diverse as the world class city they call home. Influence, wealth and privilege were theirs. Yet they are used by the Holy Spirit in Scripture to provide correction for those churches that miss the point. Here is a church that, like all other New Testament churches, is meant to be distinctive from the society around them. They are to live for different things, values that stand

apart from the crowd and principles that serves as an anchor in how they relate to the world.

But instead, the church, at least as described in this letter, lives in confusion about who Christ has made them to be and how he calls them to live in light of it. They are sliding into the realm of being indistinguishable from unbelieving Corinth and that just won't stand. The two categories warned against are not just behaviors to set aside but they reveal an inclination toward self-indulgence - pursuing self, the flesh, their preference and pleasure over all others.

Here are the saints... the believers set to judge angels, to have a place of inheritance, of honor in the kingdom... yet they were neglecting that truth to gain something for themselves in the moment.

“God views us one way, but we choose to reshape our own identities around things that please, comfort, and excite us.”

Members of the church are taking each other to the Corinthian courts rather than settling disputes within the church... How could someone dare to let unbelievers determine outcomes; it's a shame.

Essentially wronging and defrauding one another... Rather than submit to the church and its care of members, those in the church are pursuing their self-defined justice, which oddly enough always had them winning and benefiting!

Having heard the message of grace and the redefinition of the value of other people as image-bearers of God; some had come up with their own phrases giving them permission to partake in things that were as common in their culture as starbucks is in ours. “All things are lawful for me...” The thinking that self is all that mattered...

Corinth was known for its prostitutes, temple prostitutes would please you and by doing so please the gods... all for a nominal fee of course. In the darkness of the era, wives were for bearing children and carrying on the family line, but most certainly not for pleasure. Pervasive, disturbing (to us) and all about indulging in the whims of self - meeting my wants and urges with immediacy and no regards for others or who I am and the purpose of my body as a believer.

An Paul calls it unrighteousness and puts their behavior in the realm of the unbelieving world.

6:9-10 “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Church - you are not to live like that - it is a life that disregards the gospel, what God says of you, and that reflects an ongoing captivity to self just as those that will not inherit the kingdom of

God... indistinguishable from all category of sinful people far from God and by no means moving closer to him in their ongoing unrepentant sin.

“Ultimately the Corinthians are conducting themselves as though their Godgiven identity is of no importance. They are forgetting the gospel. They are failing to be what they are. They are saints, but they are acting like non-saints. They are righteous, but they are living as though they were unrighteous. The result is that their community, which is to be a present glimpse of the future community that God intends for the world, has nothing to offer - they have no means of displaying the way the gospel shapes a community.”

You are living as if you are not part of the kingdom - and it is not that grace was made too much of but that indulging in their own whims and sensibilities was preferable. And we get it... because we struggle with the same thing all day and every day. How I want to settle the score, how I want to be honored, how I undervalue people different from me, how I use people for my advantage; it is all about self-indulgence, putting me before all others, claiming a seat of privilege I could only maintain by putting others down.

Paul takes the church, and us, by the shoulders and says, “This is not who you! Don’t you know you are distinct, different, made for something vastly superior and worthwhile. Here comes the reminder of Jesus Christ and him crucified, the work that was accomplished on the cross and the unfolding realities of have a resurrected Savior!

2) Set Free

The worst of the worst, those whose sins make you blush at the mere mention of their name, and all those that idolized self over Jesus will not inherit the kingdom of God...

6:11 “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

You were set to miss an inheritance... you were lost in sin and pursuit of self... BUT! You have been made clean, holy, made right before God... in the name of Jesus and by the Spirit of God.

Ephesians 2:1-7 “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

Those that have faith in Jesus, that believe he lived a perfectly obedient life, dying a sacrificial death and beating death; their unrighteousness, all of it is now past tense, dealt with, handled and scrubbed from the cosmic record.

Notice it does not say - "You washed yourself... you sanctified yourself... you justified yourself." No you were washed, sanctified and justified, in the name of Jesus by the Spirit... you were dead, without a pulse and Jesus brings you to life by his work on the cross.

I was struck again this week by Jesus as life giver in the story of Jairus' daughter in Luke 8. Some of you know the story, maybe some haven't heard it. There is a man who loves his daughter and she has fallen ill. He has done all he can to help her and in faith runs after Jesus to ask if he could heal his daughter - he has heard he can. He finds Jesus in the city and he agrees to go to Jairus' house to see the girl. But as they are making their way the crowd crushes in and a sick woman touches Jesus knowing even that can heal her of years of bleeding. It does but Jesus stops to see who touched him, who had faith to be healed. By the time they move again servants of Jairus have come to say the girl has died.

But Jesus says "it's not too late... I am going to wake her up."

Jesus goes to the girls room, as told by the Jesus storybook Bible; "And there lying in the corner, in the shadows, was the still little figure. Jesus sat on the bed and took her pale hand. "Honey," he said, "it's time to get up." And he reached down into death and gently brought the little girl back to life."

This is what Jesus has done for those that believe in him! Brought to life and freed.

Set free from the captivity of sin, of being forced to follow the flesh and its indulgence. The cords of bondage destroyed by the word of Christ and his finished work on the cross.

No longer defined by what once soiled us. Made new. Given an identity. And made part of a community of believers where you are not rated by how bad things were or the worst thing you have ever done. We have verse 11 as a stick of spiritual dynamite against the accusations of the devil who would much prefer we settle for self-indulgence, convinced that we are too bad to belong to Jesus. There is not a day that goes by that we are not in need of that dynamite of the gospel...

This week Adia was in the hospital with pneumonia; it is an impossible place to sleep. Bless Stacy for pulling more duty than me. Medication through an IV and every time a cycle finished, then came the beeping! You would be fighting for rest just nodding off, the sheep are fully counted... then BEEP, BEEP... So I gave it all some beeps of my own in response!

That is the Spiritual Warfare of our day. We long to enter into the rest we are promised and Satan comes with his accusation - that is all he has - "but you are so unrighteous, you are too

dirty... remember that time...the unrighteous don't inherit the kingdom" His beeping... and we can throw back "And such was I. But I was washed, I was sanctified, I was justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Paul uses the glorious reality of the gospel to shake the church out of its slumber and sliding into the self-indulgent, calling them yet again to the new life they have in Christ. This is exactly the fuel we need for life; this is the identity oxygenation the church needs to be distinctive - that we were dead and made alive in Christ.

"We were washed, and the filth of sin has been removed. We are cleansed. We can stop trying to hide our sin and brokenness because it has been objectively dealt with. Christians have the essential fuel for honest reconciliation [and to avoid sexual immorality; all sin]. We were sanctified. The grip of sin has been released. We are freed. We don't have to live under the illusion that sin ultimately wins the day. We are free to pursue joyful obedience by the power of the Spirit. The essential perspective for Christian growth is that we were justified. The identity of sin has been replaced. We are accepted."

3) Sourced to Flee

Those in union with Christ are freed from death-delivering lives of self-indulgence and empowered for distinctive grace-glorifying lives.

6:14-15 "And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. [15] Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!" ...17 "he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."

Romans 6:5-7 "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. [6] We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. [7] For one who has died has been set free from sin."

Romans 6:19 "For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."

Set free and made part of something, united with Christ, indwelt by the Spirit to empower a different life - to kill self-indulgence and instead live glorifying God.

6:19-20 "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

The Christian life is a responsive life - from the truth of being washed, sanctified and justified in

Christ, we endeavor to live in new obedience and we have divine help to do so.

We can take our lumps in disputes with other believers because we have learned it is better to live low than run after self. We can seek reconciliation with those estranged from us because we were reconciled in Christ.

We can run away from and escape the lure of sexual immorality in all its forms because we have learned to value people as something more than an object and we have learned to value our own body as a temple of the Spirit.

All of this will over and over again crash into our sensibilities, our perspective of fairness and the “rights” we are convinced we have. It is suppose to. The gospel transforms our sensibilities and our priorities and perspectives.

By the work of the Holy Spirit, the gospel grants us new identities, new records, new resumes, and we are brought into a distinctive community of other rebels set free from sin and called to something so much better. A place where we are reminded to be who we are in Christ.

“We are called to be a community that reflects God’s good, shalomic intentions for the world. This means that we never pass over wrongdoing in our midst. But we also do not crush people for wrong they’ve done. The church is a court like no other - justice is served when grace is extended. Repentant perpetrators are forgiven. Radically broken individuals are restored. We fight gospel forgetfulness and identity crises by pressing one another into the gospel. In every aspect of the life of our churches we confront ourselves with the realities of who we are in Christ. When we consider the identity that we have in Christ, event the most drastic identity crisis cannot cause us to forget who we are. The Christian life is a process of remembering our true identity and striving to live in line with it by way of the resources provided in the gospel.”

And this delivers glory to God - that rebels have been redeemed, that they live distinctive lives, repentant lives, set free from sin, made righteous in Christ and empowered to be obedient, to live enjoying God forever by following him. The angels rejoice at the news, the cosmos is bursting with wonder at the undoing Jesus is working in the world, setting things right and bring the dead to life in him!

Those in union with Christ are freed from death-delivering lives of self-indulgence and empowered for distinctive grace-glorifying lives.

Application: *Snickers commercial “not yourself”*

Live as who you are - Living the self-indulgent life, you will find plenty of cheerleaders for this type of life. One that subjects all others to our preference and pleasure. To our definitions of justice and identity. Know that you are actually captive to this way of life. And don’t live different, don’t become “good” and moral - it does nothing for you - only those washed,

sanctified and justified by belief in Jesus inherit the kingdom of God... dwell with him forever.

Maybe, just maybe you will find this as an invitation to believe in Jesus. To be brought from death to life. To become righteous by his work on the cross for you - to surrender your self-indulgence and turn to Jesus for newness of life... do that today.

In Christ, oh friends, the freedom you have in Christ - to live distinctively, to see the value in others, to resolve conflict. Empowered by our union with Christ and the Holy Spirit to get through it all. Be reminded who you are, washed, justified, no longer defined by your sin and self-indulgence... Live to glorify God with your body, your relationships, your vocation, your voice, your everything...

Augustine of Hippo. Experienced a gradual but powerful change by faith in Christ.

As he walked through a village where he used to frequent, he heard his name being called... "Augustine, Augustine!" "It is I" 3 times... a prostitute...

"Yes but it is not I"

The "prostitutes" of our old life are calling out to us... "return"

We can speak a better word, of being washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God.

Let's take that into every inch of our lives, and live as we are in Christ.