

Sermon on 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 prepared for Grace Church by Jonathan Shradar January 15, 2017

Babylon Bee Article - "Woman Unsure Why She Needs Jesus After Preacher Spends 30 Minutes Telling Her How Amazing She Is."

TWIN OAKS, AZ—According to reports coming out of Hope Community Church, first-time visitor Brittany Wilson remains unsure about why she needed “this Jesus guy” in her life after the pastor spent the entire Sunday sermon reiterating how awesome, amazing, unique, and special she is.

“The message was super-encouraging. It was all about how I need to let the goodness within me shine and ‘just do me,’ without worrying about all the haters,” Wilson said after the service.

“But then the pastor said I needed Jesus, out of the blue. Like, what? It made no sense. I’m not sure what He has to offer that I don’t, based on how wonderful the pastor said I am.”

Wilson, who hasn’t attended church since she was a child, further reported she was “a little hurt” that the pastor would segue into an invitation to add Jesus to her life.

“It really undermined my confidence in myself,” she said, adding she wouldn’t be back anytime soon.

It is fascinating that this is overridingly how we live our lives. With us as the center. Just saw a great movie that told much of this story - we are the author and main character of this wonderful story of our lives and we are entitled to live it as we choose and get all that we “deserve.”

This morning we come to a text in our study of 1 Corinthians that speaks directly to entitlement - this script of our lives based off what we are convinced we earn - and then something that slays entitlement; that breaks presumption and priority of self. Something so much more meaningful and fulfilling.

The gospel kills entitlement for our good.

1 Corinthians 9:1-18

Now on the face of it this seems to be about the right and necessity of paying gospel ministers (I think we can all get behind that - it’s biblical!), but there is a deeper, abiding truth that Paul is continuing to labor toward in this letter. There is something better - truer than our rights.

Just last week we heard of setting aside our rights out of care for other believers and now Paul - the one who refuses to eat meat if it makes a brother stumble - speaks to his relationship with the church in Corinth and how he is setting aside his rights still for something better.

As we unpack this deeper truth perhaps we will be stirred to let the same truth slay the entitlements that get in the way of living.

This is an age of entitlement. You can find hundreds of articles that uncover different niches of entitled culture - political realm, difference between generations, changing dynamics in the workforce. Entitlement is not just for those that want free stuff without work - it is the mentality that if I work I am owed something for it. It is pervasive. It invades our relationships, work and even our church/faith experience.

This mentality of expectation is nothing new. Actually it goes back to the garden long ago - “surely if you do this you will become like God...” ‘Aren’t you entitled to this fruit?’ And this is one of the things that is at work in the church in Corinth - straining relationships, with Paul, and clouding their ability to receive something wonderful.

Our path this morning then is to see the Tension of Entitlement, and Affirmation of Entitlement and finally and fantastically, the Death of Entitlement.

1) Tension of Entitlement

There has been an underlying tension in this letter to the Corinthian church; for a number of reasons some in the church have been questioning Paul’s authority and even apostleship because he is not acting like they want a church leader to act.

He doesn’t speak with dramatic flourish. He doesn’t own a room with his personality. And he refuses to take their money which has brought more accusation against him.

Right off a declaration of restricting his freedom lest he make a brother stumble, Paul claims his freedom still, his credentials as a church leader and the existence of the church is proof of his ministry - this is his defense to those examining him (questioning and challenging his authority).

And these things would continue to be a point of tension in the church.

2 Corinthians 11:7 “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted, because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?”

What Corinthians are used to are bold personalities demanding pay and privilege in exchange for preaching and speaking. Following the routine of the Philosophers, there may have even

been an expectation the better the preaching the more you should pay. As if you would get the message you needed if you were willing to lavish enough on the speaker.

Some in the church are convinced they deserve an apostle like this. Maybe every some so-called apostles or teachers might be falling for the same thing and entitlement that misses the point. But Paul won't do it and it creates some tension.

And that is what entitlement does, it brings tension and danger to relationships and the church. It unfolds in three ways.

It distorts our perception of reality. An inflated view of self will put us in a place of deserving, and then it puts everyone else in our debt. This is happening in Corinth, they can't hear the message because it is clouded by their expectations of Paul. They deserve a certain kind of leader and Paul owes it to them to change or bail.

Entitlement also *impairs our ability to receive gifts.* The Corinthians have been given the gospel by arguably the greatest leader in church history but rather than expressing gratitude their entitlement has them complaining and creating division in the church as they side with different leaders.

By clinging to what they think they deserve they are turning against Paul. Entitlement *turns us against the world and against the ones we love.* We have all experienced this in relationships. I believe I am entitled to this. You owe it to me to be this person, to play this role, to act this way, to talk to me in this tone at this time. After all, we are writing the script of our life and we need everyone to perform the role we cast them into. If they don't follow my script I'll just find someone to replace you. Entitlement is the bane of our relationships and it is the bane of the Corinthians' relationship with Paul.

We might be convinced we have the pastor we deserve! But this entitlement creeps in in other areas - in the church sure, what programs do I deserve the church to offer, what friendships to I deserve without working for them... but this happens in all corners of life. At work, don't I deserve what everybody else has. At home, I deserve the house to look a certain way and that husband should get with it and make it look that way. How we treat people serving us in restaurants, stores and in traffic - I am entitled to an open road because clearly I am the only one that knows how to drive!

This pervades our experience with Jesus too. I was well behaved, so I deserve the "blessing" of an easy life. If only I give or pray just right, then my breakthrough will come - I am entitled to it. We put our conditions not only on the ministers of the gospel but on the gospel itself, on God and his love. And it distorts our perception of reality, impairs our ability to receive good gifts from God and maybe even has us hating him when things don't go as we think we deserve.

Paul won't have this. And this is why he is quick to lay down his entitlement, because he doesn't want the church to miss what is important.

But he does something interesting in this letter, because where we might think he would rail against entitlement and tell the church they have the wrong perspective - he affirms the rights that he has.

2) Affirmation of Entitlement

4-5 "Do we not have the right to eat and drink? [5] Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? "

This is Paul saying "you want to talk about what you deserve, 'of course I have the right to this pay, to this type of honor." He builds the case for it, affirming his rights.

He says it is the ordinary practice of life - Soldiers don't serve at their own expense. The worker in the vineyard is expected to eat some of the grapes and taste the wine. Shepherds don't have to pay for the milk produced from their flocks. It is how the world works. He has every right to earn his living by leading the church.

He goes to Scripture for evidence in his favor. "You shall not muzzle the ox when it treads out the grain." Quoting Deuteronomy 25:4 as an indication that laborers have right to get their sustenance from their work.

In verses 11, 12 he says it is common sense, If we have sown spiritual things among you, we should also have a claim on the harvest, as much if not more than other preachers you have paid.

It is also appropriate religious custom - "those employed in temple service get their food from the temple.

To top it off, Jesus says you should pay the preacher, "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel..."

So here Paul has made an indisputable argument for his rights in relationship with the church in Corinth. They are mad he won't take their money and he says, you are right, I have every claim on your money. If you are looking for evidence as to why it is fair to give to the church so the pastor gets paid - here it is!

Where we would expect him to criticize their entitlement - "You do not deserve a preacher like me - you deserve hell!" - He affirms the rights they think he has. This is confounding to me. Isn't the way to kill entitlement to show us how we really don't deserve something? Isn't it to put us in our place and humble us?

He says the entitlement has a basis and truth to it. It makes sense. It makes so much sense it is a slam dunk argument.

This is a right. He is fully entitled to it. Without question. “Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right...”

There is something more important than our entitlement, and this is why Paul sets aside his rights. Why he desires for the church to do the same.

3) Death of Entitlement

This is Paul who is headed to the statement in chapter 11, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” So all that he is suggesting and living out is an invitation for the church. To undertake this lifestyle - one that is so shaken by the reality of Christ and him crucified that nothing will stand in the way of its proclamation.

“Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ...” “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!.. What then is my reward? That in my preaching, I may present the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.”

“In other words, he’s done with leveraging his position and title and pedigree for gain. He’s been there, done that, and it left him wanting. He is far too interested in the work he has to do (namely preaching the gospel of Christ) than any perks or fringe benefits that may accompany it, including financial compensation.”

For Paul the rights he has are nice, he actually deserves them, but he will gladly set them aside to present to the church the truth of Christ unrestricted, unrestrained by benefactors. Free of charge for all who will believe.

This is why the gospel is good news - it is freely given, forgiveness of sin is accomplished by Jesus and given as a gift not on the basis of behavior or entitlement. Granted the righteousness of God himself and transformed increasingly into his likeness. Jesus in love and self-sacrifice secures a way of relationship and life... and those that could never reach it, that don’t have a hope on their own, are welcomed in; they have a place to belong, to be protected, held and comforted.

Isaiah 55:1 “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

John 7:37-38 “Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. [38] Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Revelation 22:17 “And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”

And for Paul, it seems clear, this gospel is the water of life without price, it meets all the needs better than the fulfillment of his rights.

Just coming off the context of not eating meat sacrificed to idols out of care for other believers, this is a continuation of that thought, Am I not free? Do I not have all these rights, the entitlement to provision but out of care for others I set it aside, so that the free gospel will be freely proclaimed I give up my rights. Because it is better than all I would hope to gain from my rights.

This is bold. He is turning down food, money, hanging with the in-crowd, he is giving up the chance at celebrity status. Because the gospel is better. To offer it untainted; Jesus and nothing else. The thing of first importance to Paul. Forgiveness, freedom, fulfillment in Jesus.

We humans do silly things. We want to make even the greatest of gifts something to be earned... “This is yours... once you change your living situation. Forgiveness of sin... once you have gone without sin long enough. Have all the gospel goodness you want, just don’t overindulge or get lazy - pay back what you have been given. Suffer just a while longer and the real blessing will come in...”

Paul says I don’t want your money or your praise, because I don’t want to preach that.

“Because the Corinthians have become so obsessed with their rights, they found it almost impossible to believe that Paul could be inwardly driven purely by his love for Jesus Christ and his passion for the gospel. They would have reckoned it the ultimate disaster if they had had all their supposed rights stripped from them. For Paul, on the other hand, it would have been the ultimate catastrophe if he has been compelled to stop preaching the gospel. The penultimate catastrophe would have been if he has been prevented from doing so ‘free of charge’.” Prior

“Paul is shouting, ‘Your whole world runs on purchasing, paying, earning, deserving, and entitlement. The gospel doesn’t run on any of that - it’s free. And I want you to know that so badly - I want you to experience this good news for yourself so much - that I will live my life in a way that calls your whole system into question. I’m going off script, and that’s going to frustrate you, but you have to see that the game of entitlement is a joke!’” Um

He is inviting them to live like him and give up the culture of entitlement. To live for the better thing. And the invitation stands for us today.

“What kind of gospel would we need to hear in order to give up our sense of entitlement? This is what we would need to hear: we can stop trying to achieve, purchase, and deserve everything we’ve been after. “Here. Take it. It’s Free.”

“That sense of security we’ve been trying to achieve, that one that made us buy into the special life narrative, “Take it, it’s free.” That love and affection that we’ve been trying to buy with our carefully chosen words, with sheer romantic willpower, “Take it, it’s free.” That respect and dignity that we so desperately desired that it drove us through graduate school and has us at work 70 hours a week, “Take it, it’s free.”

The things we most deeply long for are free in Christ. This is the end of our entitlement - even when we “deserve” it, Jesus is better. The gospel speaks and delivers a better word into our experience. Into our hurt, into our struggle, into our striving.

These are the outlandish claims of the gospel we encounter in the reservoir of living water that is Scripture.

“There we learn that Jesus Christ, the ultimately entitled one, mysteriously and graciously chose to write himself into the script of our world... He came preaching freedom from entitlement and self-absorption.” And the human instinct of entitlement is to reject him - even sentence him to death, to remove him from the scene.

This is the moment that God uses to flip the script, the moment we killed the Son of God. It is this moment that kills entitlement for our good.

“It’s this free-of-charge gospel that sets us free from the grip of entitlement. We are free to give up the director’s chair. Which means that we will begin to perceive the world properly, without an inflated sense of self of a sense of entitlement. We are free to stop writing scripts for the people in our life because we no longer need them to play a certain role to fulfill us. We can enter into a relationship with them instead of guilt-tripping them and pressuring them into the version of them that we wish they would be.” Um

“This free-of-charge gospel allows us to stop putting the world on trial. We can forgive and find room for the people whom we once attempted to write off and write out. Ironically, it is in giving up our entitlement and rights that we are placed in a position of being able to care about the rights and entitlements of others. We can fight for justice, not for ourselves but for others. We can put our directing skills to use for our neighborhood because we’ve acknowledged that we were never really directing our life anyway.” Um

“The free-of-charge gospel allows us to receive life itself as a gift - as an undeserved, unearned, unpurchasable, unentitled, given thing.” Um

The gospel kills entitlement for our good.

This is what Paul is getting at as he recounts his rights and why he would reject them. He won't take their money because he has a mission - to live in response to what Jesus has done and offer it freely to all who will come.

This would radically transform the church in Corinth if they could get it. And it will radically transform our church if we can get it too.

No one here is under the illusion that we have each and every program any of us are entitled to. We don't have the fancy lights or throngs of people to choose friends from. We don't have a celebrity pastor or famous patrons... But what we do have we will offer to all and let it change how we live. The free of charge gospel. Forgiveness, life, purpose, help and a people to belong to.

“That little church? That's the church with the free of charge gospel!”

Oh, that the Lord would kill our entitlement with an awakening of his grace.

How can we respond to 1 Corinthians 9:1-18?

Should we stop paying the pastor? No!

Cherish the free of charge gospel - This is the invitation to come and see, to drink from the well of grace over and over again. To experience salvation in Christ alone, and live life in Christ alone. See it as the better thing, the life-defining good that is yours in Jesus.

Let it kill entitlement - Humbly ask the Lord to slay entitlement in your life. This is the invitation to come and die. To set aside your rights not only for others but because this free-of-charge gospel is better. Talk it over in community - get honest. And serve one another this free of charge gospel.

Close - story of this is all we need... Christmas Eve, a friend stopped at the door and recounted her week, the commotion and stress, feeling the effects of entitlement in others and herself... “give us the gospel, that Jesus came to freely give himself for us.” That we can't earn it but it is glorious. That it is the thing worth celebrating.

We pledge to do nothing else. May the Spirit use this free-of-charge gospel to transform us and use us for the glory of Christ.