

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

True repentance begins with knowledge of sin. The eyes of the repentant person are opened. He sees the length and breadth of God's holy law with distress and confusion. He sees the extent, the enormous extent, of his own transgressions. To his surprise, he discovers that he has been under a huge delusion by thinking of himself as a good person with a good heart. He learns that in reality he is wicked, guilty, corrupt, and evil in God's sight. His pride breaks down. His high thoughts melt away. He sees that he is a great sinner. This is the first step in true repentance.

Ryle, J. C.. Repentance - What it Means to Repent and Why We Must Do So (pp. 3-5). Aneko Press. Kindle Edition.

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

www.lightfordarktimes.com (blog)

Christ Reformation Church – YouTube Channel (Light for Dark Times)

Greatness in the Kingdom of God

September 15th, 2024

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 4:7-21

Scripture Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

1Co 4:7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

The boasting that we have been seeing in the church at Corinth – this spirit of arrogance – was a result of clinging to the wisdom of the world instead of the wisdom of God. A kingdom in the world's

measure of things – a great kingdom and a great king – is something that is large, exalted, powerful, and wealthy. If we apply those standards to God’s kingdom, we are going to be in trouble. That is to say, if we measure a Christian or a church in the world’s way of seeing things, we will reject the genuine and embrace the lie. In our day, and increasingly it would seem, this is what we see happening in the visible church.

Follow along as I read the Apostle Paul’s rebuke if these Corinthians:

1Co 4:7-21 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

(8) Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!

(9) For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all,

like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. (10) We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. (11) To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, (12) and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; (13) when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

(14) I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. (15) For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (16) I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

(17) That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of

my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

(18) Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. (19) But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. (20) For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. (21) What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Let's take a closer look at this. Listen to verse 7 again:

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Other translations begin this verse with something like: "Who regards you as superior?" or "Who makes you differ from another?" In their arrogance, the Corinthians were creating among themselves a kind of elitism. An attitude of superiority even over and above the Apostles. But Paul rebukes them

and says "*you are no different than any other Christian. Everything that we are is because of what we have received from the Lord*. There is no room here for boasting. And yet they were boasting. They were even exalting themselves above Paul.

Apply this carefully to ourselves – *We have nothing except that which has been given to us as a gift. We received. Salvation is of the Lord, not of the works of our hands.*

1Co 1:26-29 (NASB) 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, that He might nullify the things that are, (29) that no man should boast before God.

Foolish, weak, base, despised, chosen – no room for boasting.

Every church and every denomination I have had experience in has been troubled by arrogant people. They have an attitude of entitlement and superiority and they crave to be exalted. This is exactly how Rome and the Pope came to be, and we must be on guard against it and reject it. *We have nothing except that which we have received from the Lord purely by His grace.* Salvation is a gift from the Lord.

This also means that none of us are *inferior to others*. Paul will deal with this even further later on when he admonishes the Corinthians for arrogance in respect to spiritual gifts, and the resulting mentality in some that they were inferior and unimportant in the body of Christ. That is a lie. If you are in Christ, if you have been born again, then you must never think of yourself as either superior or inferior to others in the church. NONE of us have anything that we have not received from the Lord as a free gift.

Do you remember last time when we considered Paul's words here:

1Co 4:3-4 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. (4) For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

Listen to this comment:

“As Christians we must leave our judgment to the Lord. He is the Judge and you have no right to waste His time or your own time and energy in condemning yourself. Forget yourself, leave the judgment to Him; get on with the work. This whole trouble is due to this morbid preoccupation with self in the matter of judgment. Not only that, it is indicative of a proneness still to think in terms of what we can do....The parable of our Lord about the laborers in the vineyard was designed to demolish such arguments.” [Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, p. 87, *Banner of Truth*]

Now, with this in mind, listen once again as Paul uses some sanctified sarcasm to rebuke them further, contrasting their arrogant thinking about themselves with the real experience of the Apostles:

1Co 4:8-13 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!

(9) For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. (10) We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

(11) To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, (12) and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure;

(13) when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

The Corinthian arrogant spirit still plagues the church today and we see this sin in clarity when we hold up Paul's description of the Apostles' experience in this world against the experience of so many today who are idolized as the most eminent "saints" to be imitated.

Think on this very, very carefully. Did you hear what Paul said regarding his experience in following Christ?

- Last of all
- Sentenced to death
- Spectacle to the world
- Fools
- Weak
- Held in disrepute
- Hunger and Thirst, poorly dressed (ie, poverty)
- Laboring
- Reviled
- Slandered
- Persecuted

- Regarded as the scum and garbage of the world

Whose experience does that also sound like? Christ's, of course.

Now, why in the world do we fall for it? Why does the majority of that which claims to be Christ's church actually consider such qualities *to be marks of failure? As qualities which identify someone, like Paul, to lack God's blessing?* Why? Because they embrace the wisdom of the world instead of God's measure of greatness and authenticity.

Joh 15:18-19 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Rom 8:35-36 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? (36) As it is written, "For your

sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Even in respect to heaven, to our inheritance to be realized in the new heavens and earth, there is no room for boasting:

"An inheritance is something that is not obtained by the individual's own exertions, but by the free gift or bequest of another. The earthly inheritance of the external people of God (the nation Israel), was not given to them because they were greater or better than the other nations of the earth. It was 'because the Lord had a delight in them to love them.' And the heavenly inheritance of the spiritual people of God (the true Israel, the Church), is entirely the gift of sovereign kindness. 'By grace are we saved;' 'eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'" [John Brown, Commentary on First Peter, Banner of Truth]

What is the experience of the true church, the true people of God in this present life and world? -

“We are represented as ‘strangers’ scattered abroad.’ This description is borrowed from the term generally applied to the Jews dwelling in Gentile lands. The salvation of Christians while on earth does not resemble that of Israel dwelling in peace and security in Canaan, but that of the Israelites sojourning among strangers and enemies.

The selected people of God, while here below, are not gathered into one place, assembled together as citizens of the same city – children of the same family. They will be so by and by, but for now they are ‘strangers,’ ‘pilgrims,’ ‘sojourners,’ being a small minority among a people whose habits of thought and feeling, whose pursuits and whose pleasures, are altogether alien from theirs; and ‘scattered’ strangers, as being not merely far from home, but often far from each other, and but imperfectly enjoying the comfort and support arising from intimate communion with persons of kindred sentiments and

affections. Such was the external state of the Christians to whom First Peter was addressed – **and such is the external state of true Christians still.** [Ibid]

What is our experience here in this church? We are a minority. We are scattered abroad. We are far from many of our brethren. Think about this matter of *scattering*. You will recall that not long after Pentecost, as recorded in Acts, this happened:

Act 8:1-4 And Saul approved of his [Stephen’s] execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. (2) Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. (3) But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (4) **Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.**

Being scattered is not just a matter of Christians residing at distances from one another. It is the result of persecution. The true church, the real remnant of Christ in this present world is scattered, not gathered in one central nation or region.

Now, once again, for purposes of humbling ourselves AND taking great encouragement – *is this not the experience of our church in this present world? Are we not scattered abroad? Pilgrims and strangers in this world? Living among enemies?*

Now, listen once more to Paul:

(14) I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. (15) For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (16) I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

In this rebuke – and it is a strong rebuke – Paul is not trying to attack the Corinthians as an enemy –

Gal 4:16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Rather, he is as he reminds them here, correcting them as his beloved children. They were his children spiritually because they had been born again through the gospel he preached to them. He was, in that sense, their father in Christ. And then he tells them, and US –

“I urge you, then, be imitators of me.”

That is a powerful statement that should shock us into humility and confession of our own sin of pride. We have just heard Paul describe his life in Christ in this present evil world. He tells the Corinthians – *this is what your experience must look like too!!* Be imitators of me!

It is something like this – *“If you will humble yourselves, stop your boasting, and truly follow Christ,*

then your experience is going to look like mine.”

Now, let's ask ourselves this very pointedly and honestly – *does my experience in being a Christian in this world look at all like the experience of Paul, or of the Lord Jesus?* Let's look over that list again:

- Last of all
- Sentenced to death
- Spectacle to the world
- Fools
- Weak
- Held in disrepute
- Hunger and Thirst, poorly dressed (ie, poverty)
- Laboring
- Reviled
- Slandered
- Persecuted
- Regarded as the scum and garbage of the world

Does our thinking – be honest with yourself now – does your thinking on this subject, on this subject of greatness in the kingdom of God, match Paul's model which we are to imitate? Would you say that the

Apostle Paul was great in the kingdom of God? Alright then, *look at his experience. Look at his character and consider – we are to imitate him!* If we are really following Christ, our experience will match Paul's.

Finally, look closely again at the closing words of this section. They are sobering:

1Co 4:18-21 Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. (19) But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. (20) For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. (21) What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Paul only reluctantly pulled rank as an Apostle with people, but when it was necessary, he did it. And that is what he is doing here, giving warning especially to those at Corinth who were leading the people astray. What does he mean when he talks about coming with a

“rod,” or that the kingdom of God consists in power?

Just as an earthly father who loves his children exercises both gentleness, at times it is necessary for him to exercise the rod – discipline, chastisement. Love is behind both. A father would much rather not have to bring the rod, but would prefer his children respond to correction and instruction. And these are the things Paul is speaking of here. If the Corinthians persist in their arrogance, Paul will have to be stern with them when he comes.

And he speaks of *power*. God’s kingdom is established with God’s *power*. The gospel is *the power of God to salvation*. The Word of God, when preached, is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Corinthians had experienced that saving power when Paul had first come and preached to them. Is that same power found in the word these philosophers are bringing to them? Paul tells them, when he comes, they will find out.

I think also that Paul no doubt had in mind the power which God gave to His Apostles. At their preaching, the Holy Spirit came upon people and bestowed gifts – such miraculous gifts at that time being visible. The word of the philosophers had no such effect.

And then there is more. Paul is striking a bit of fear into the Corinthians – a fear of God which brings people to repentance. The Apostles had power and a power used by God sometimes to smite His enemies. For instance:

Act 13:9-12 But Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him (10) and said, “You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord? (11) And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.” Immediately mist and darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking people to lead him by the hand. (12) Then

the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord.

And again:

1Co 11:27-30 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. (28) Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (29) For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (30) That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

The kingdom of God, the body of Christ, is not to be trifled with.

Act 5:1-5 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, (2) and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. (3) But Peter said, "Ananias, why

has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? (4) While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." (5) When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.

The kingdom of God does not consist of talk, but of power. When we gather together as Christ's church, His presence and power is among us – that very same power saves, and it strikes down. The Spirit encourages us, and disciplines us, and strikes down the hypocrite. The power of the gospel Word preached saves, or it condemns. It saves the humble, and it strikes down the proud. Always the one or the other.