

June 7, 2020

How the Gospel Changes Everything

Overview of 1 Corinthians

The narrow vs. the broad view

It's vital that begin 1 Corinthians with an overview before we dive into a verse-by-verse exposition. There are countless truths that we learn in small sections of Scripture. Yet other truths can only be learned by taking a broader view. It's the difference between walking through a forest *and* flying over the same forest in a helicopter. That's what we are doing this morning. We are going to fly over Corinthians and see it as a whole.

The worldly Corinthians and the gospel that sustains

What are we going to see? I pray that we will see that the gospel Jesus Christ does more than *merely* save us. The church in Corinth was not only a baby church—about 5 years old when Paul wrote this—but it was a fleshly carnal church. The world had gotten into the church. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 3:1** “But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.” They were a people shot through with problems. And what we are going to see as we fly over this book is that each of these problems “grew out of the Corinthians’ inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their...lives.”¹ In every problem, in every crisis, Paul presents Christ as the solution. Beloved, “most of our problems in life come from a lack of [understanding] the gospel.”² Every Christian understands that the gospel is what saves them. But how many of us understand that the gospel is what continues to sustain us? How many of us know that “to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (**1 Corinthians 1:18**). That's where we are going.

¹ Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 5

² Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2012), pg. 51

The Big Idea...

The gospel doesn't *merely* save us, but it sustains us and speaks to everything we face in life

- ☆ The City of Corinth
- ☆ The Crises in Corinth
- ☆ The Cure for Corinth

I. The City of Corinth

The beginning of the Gentile mission

In v.2 we read “To the church of God that is in Corinth...” What was Corinth like? If we are to understand the struggles that this church faced, it is vital that we understand the city in which they lived. Let’s start with a broader view. The gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke & John—end with the resurrected Christ commissioning His disciples to “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” (**Mark 16:15**). The book of Acts then records their missionary work. At first the disciples misunderstood Jesus’ great commission. They were still captive to the Jewish mindset, that God would save men and women *so long as* they became Jewish first. It’s not until you reach Acts 11 when Peter retells the story to the Jerusalem church of how God gave him a vision to go to Cornelius—a Gentile—to preach the gospel, that they grasped God’s greater plan. **Acts 11:18** reads “When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”

The birth and care of churches

Fast forward to Acts 13, and Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey to bring the gospel to the non-Jewish world. ‘They went to

Antioch Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. They were driven out of each city by jealous Jewish religious leaders. Later they returned by the same route, strengthening the new churches as they went.³ And that was their pattern: plant, plant, plant, and then return to nurture and instruct and strengthen. The letters in the NT reflect Paul's ongoing care for the churches that he planted.

Paul comes to Corinth

It wasn't until Paul's second missionary journey that he came to the city of Corinth. Please turn with me to **Acts 18**. Beginning in v.1

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 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, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. 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." 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. 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. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, 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."

³ Source: <http://www.tcbchurch.org/sites/tcbchurch.com/files/pictures/Messages/Colossians/Paul's%20Three%20Missionary%20Journeys.pdf> Accessed June 6, 2020

And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.⁴

Corinth: a geographical, economical, political, cultural, moral melting pot

That is the record of the birth of the church in the city of Corinth. Alright then so then what of the city itself? **Geographically**, the city of Corinth was located on an isthmus—a land bridge—four to six miles wide that connected the northern landlocked portion of Greece to the Peloponnesus peninsula. It was a port city—the Aegean Sea is on its eastern coastline, and just a few miles to the west was the Ionian Sea. **Economically**, this made Corinth absolutely strategic for imports and exports. Instead of having to take the dangerous journey much farther south around the tip of the peninsula, a paved road⁵ was built to allow ships to be dragged or wheeled across this narrow neck of land. Therefore Corinth was busting at the seams for its economy and commerce. “The city dominated virtually all trade between Asia and Italy.”⁶

Politically, Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.⁷ Acts 18:14-16 records that it was Gallio whom Rome had sent to rule the city. **Culturally**, it was the absolute glory of Greece. It “...was home to the Isthmian Games, an athletic even second only to the Olympics in importance, and dominated by celebrity athletes.”⁸ Therefore it was very much a tourist hotspot for the ancient world. But it was also an intellectual hotspot. The Corinthian air was filled the breath of the ancient Greek philosophers. One only has to read

⁴ Simply amazing what God told Paul in **v.10** “...go on speaking... for I have many *in this city* who are my people.” As Kim Riddlebarger points out “It is noteworthy that the doctrine of election became the basis for Paul’s efforts to evangelize the city.” [Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians*, (Powder Springs, GA.: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), pg. xxx] God’s election is not the enemy of evangelism but the greatest encouragement. We can preach the gospel with confidence knowing that God’s Word will infallibly and invincibly and irresistibly save those He has elected.

⁵ The Diolkos Road

⁶ Riddlebarger, pg. xxvii

⁷ Corinth was under the rule Gallio, cf. Acts 18:14-16

⁸ Riddlebarger, pg. xxviii

the first two chapters of Corinthians to see how much they treasured eloquent and lofty speech. Paul’s constant thorn with the Corinthian church is that he was being compared to false apostles who had snuck in and had mastered the art of sophistry. Sophistry is a type of reasoning that is sound in appearance only. Meaning, it was the sound bite that was important, much like our day. It didn’t matter how fallacious you were, as long as you sounded good doing it. **Morally**, Corinth was completely licentious. Home to the temple of Venus, the Roman goddess of love, sex, beauty and fertility.⁹ There were brothels and religious buildings set apart specifically for cultic prostitution. The very term “Corinthian” became a synonym for fornication.¹⁰ “To call a young lady a “Corinthian girl” was to imply she was promiscuous.”¹¹ We know the church struggled with this sexual immorality as chapter six makes plain that some of them were still engaged in prostitution themselves. As one commentator said “...this was not an easy place to be a Christian¹²...the city of Corinth was the New York, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles of the Apostle Paul’s day, all rolled into one.”¹³

The relevance of 1 Corinthians

This is why the book of Corinthians is so relevant for us today. So many of the other letters in the NT are theologically richer—like Romans or Ephesians—but no letter of the NT “...discusses so directly the moral problems of that age or of our own...”¹⁴ Do you want to know how to fight against the sexual immorality that you are daily assaulted with? So you want to know how to act

⁹ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. vii

¹⁰ “One Athenian playwright (Aristophanes) used the phrase *korinthiazesthai* as a synonym for fornication.” Riddlebarger, pg. xxix

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² *ibid*, pg.xxix

¹³ *ibid*, pg. xxv

¹⁴ Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. xxiv

as a church in a postmodern pluralistic society? Do you want to understand why the doctrine of the resurrection is so vital? Do you want to understand how your union with Jesus Christ informs all of your life. Do you want to grow into a loving local church where we consider the needs of each other more important than our own? Do you want to see why individualism is so deadly, and why a gospel centered church—not socialism—is the answer? 1 Corinthians speaks to all concerns. It shows us how to be a Christian in this present age. That’s our **first point**. The city of Corinth is not unlike any modern city in America. “To be a Christian in first-century Corinth was much like being a Christian in twenty-first century America.”¹⁵

II. The Crises in Corinth

The two parts of Paul’s letter

After Paul had stayed in Corinth for a year and a half—from 50-51 A.D., he left. When he began his third missionary journey, he stayed in Ephesus for three years from 52-55 A.D., and it was here when historians think he wrote this first letter. In terms of the simplest of outlines for this letter, it can be divided into two principle parts: chapters 1-6 & chapters 7-15. In chapters 1-6 Paul is addressing a troubling report of the church that he had heard from Chloe’s family—presumably while in Ephesus. If you look at **1:11** we read “For it has been *reported to me* by Chloe’s people...” So the first part of the letter deals with this report. In chapters 7-15 Paul answers questions from a letter that the church had sent him. If you look at **7:1** he says “Now concerning the matters *about which you wrote...*” So the second part of the letter deals with questions the church asked the Apostle.

But whether it be the first part of the letter or the second, each of the issues that Paul addresses constitutes a crisis for the Christian. A serious crisis

¹⁵ Riddlebarger, pg. xxv

which if left uncorrected would destroy the church.¹⁶ Let's consider a sampling of 5 crises that Paul addresses in Corinth.

Crisis 1: They were self-righteousness

Please look with me at **1:10-13**

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

The church had become divided into factions, each following who they considered to be the most important teacher. *Yet* these divisions existed primarily because of *boasting*. Paul makes this clear. In **3:21** he says “So let no one *boast* in men.” To boast means to *inflate* something—like blowing up a balloon. Boasting is inflating the worth and importance of one man over against another. *But* this wasn't primarily about boasting in Paul or Apollos or Cephas or Christ. It was about boasting in *themselves*. Look again at **v.12**, ask yourself: in each of these statements who is being inflated? The self. “*I* follow Paul,” “*I* follow Apollos.” They weren't *mainly* inflating their teachers, they were inflating *themselves*.

Flavors of self-righteousness

¹⁶ “A church composed of people of these characteristics, with a large infusion of Jewish converts, educated in the midst of refined heathenism, surrounded by all the incentives to indulgence, taught to consider pleasure, if not the chief good, yet in any form a good, plied on every hand by philosophers and false teachers, might be expected to exhibit the very characteristics which in this epistle are brought so clearly into view.” Hodges, pg. xii

Dear congregation, this is the human condition: self righteousness. Everyone looks to *something* for their sense of importance. There are many flavors of righteousness.¹⁷

Discipline righteousness - I work hard and am self-disciplined, clearly I am better than those less-successful people

Family righteousness - I “do things right” as a parent, therefore I’m more godly than those parents whose kids act up.

Theological righteousness - I am better studied and believe better things than that group over there.

Mercy righteousness - I care about the poor and suffering, obviously I’m a better person than him who does it very little.

Financial righteousness - I manage my money according to Biblical principles therefore I am more deserving of blessing than her.

It’s an unending list. There is immunization righteousness, prison righteousness, or to be timely, face-mask righteousness and race righteousness.¹⁸ Even small children exercise self-righteousness: “I obeyed mom *better than* you did.” Whenever you inflate yourself more than someone else because of what you do

¹⁷ The following list was adapted and/or paraphrased from Robert H. Thune’s *Gospel Eldership: Equipping A New Generation of Servant Leaders*, (Greensboro, NC.: New Growth Press, 2016), pg. 30-31

¹⁸ Even a “drunk righteousness” R.W. Glenn reports “There was a group of homeless alcoholics, who used a tiered system that they used to compare themselves to one another. At the top were people who could get drunk everyday and still hold down a job. They looked down on the people who got drunk everyday but could only work sporadically. And those people looked down on the people who got drunk everyday and lost all their front teeth and couldn’t work.” R.W. Glenn from his sermon: Priorities of the Mission

or don't do—it's self-righteousness.¹⁹ That's the first crisis that Paul addresses: self-righteous boasting. It was dividing and destroying the church.²⁰

Crisis 2: They refused to practice church discipline

Please look with me at 5:1-2

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.”

Look at v.11 “But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”

They refused to practice church discipline and as a result not only put this man in danger but the whole church. Paul says in v.6 “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” Meaning, that the yeast of sin will not stay isolated to that one man, but it will spread *by example* to the whole church. In both crises so far, the church looked more like the world than Christ. In the first crisis, the church engaged in a type of worldly moralism.²¹ They tried to one-up each other based on their allegiances. But here in the second crisis, the church

¹⁹ “Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by nature—while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having it more than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.” C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York, NY.: Harper One, 2002), pg. 69

²⁰ “The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual...that is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.” *ibid*, pg. 60

²¹ 2 Corinthians 10:12 “Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.”

engaged in worldly relativism. They took on the ethic of the culture around them: ‘as long as your sex life isn’t hurting anyone else, then there’s no need to fuss about it.’ And so by refusing to practice church discipline the whole church was in danger.

Crisis 3: They engaged in sexual immorality

Please look with me at **6:12-16**

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything. “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. 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! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.”

Many in the church hadn’t left the pagan practices of prostitution when they became Christians.²² They believed that the “...bodily appetites were matters of indifference for Christians just as they apparently were for everyone else.”²³ But Paul points out that to engage in such behavior, would be to join Christ *Himself* to a prostitute. Halfway through v.15 Paul asks, “Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!” This was a crisis in Corinth. Jesus Christ—the LORD of Heaven and earth—was being made to

²² They justified their behavior with this cultural slogan in v.12 “All things are lawful for me...” Notice it’s in quotation marks. This was not Paul’s doctrine, but a doctrine of the worldly Corinthians [How could it possibly be Paul’s doctrine? He just said in the previous verses all the unlawful things that would not inherit the kingdom of God (cf. v.9-11). This slogan is used two more times in 10:23.] Paul quotes this slogan to show the utter foolishness of it. [Noteworthy: Hodges says this is Paul’s language, but he used to in application to ceremonially unclean meats; and the Corinthians then applied it to their sexuality. cf. Hodges, pg. xix]

²³ *ESV Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2008), pg. 2198

look like He solicited harlots. Were this to continue Jesus would be indistinguishable the goddess Venus or any of the other pagan deities found in Corinth.

Crisis 4: They trampled on the consciences of the weak

Please turn with me to chapter 8. The issue here is food sacrificed to idols. Some within the Corinthian assembly were mature enough to know that an idol has no real existence. Look at **v.4-6**

“Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”

Ok, so all idols are false, therefore to buy and eat the food offered to them in the meat market was no big deal. What’s the problem? Look at **v.7** “*However, not all possess this knowledge.* But some, through former association with idols, eat food *as really offered to an idol*, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.” Meaning even though it wasn’t sinful *in itself* to eat the food, they thought it was sinful, and therefore it really became sin to them. **Romans 14:23** says “But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” The crisis was that these stronger Christians were trampling these weaker Christians. They had correct knowledge but they were more concerned with their individual rights than they were about the tender—howbeit misinformed—consciences of their brothers. As a result Paul tells them in **v.11** “And so by your knowledge this weak person is *destroyed...*” The church was literally leading it’s weakest members into sin.

Crisis 5: They were doctrinally careless

Please turn with me to **15:12**

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, *how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?*”

Now consider carefully what some of these Corinthians were denying. They weren't denying Christ's resurrection. The context leading up to this makes that clear. He tells them in **v.4** that Christ “was buried, [and] that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” And then Paul affirms that they believed this, in **v.11** he says “so we preach and *so you believed.*” So they weren't denying Christ's resurrection specifically. Rather they were denying that believers generally would be raised. That's why he says in **v.12** “how can some of you say that there is no resurrection *of the dead.*” What happened? Well either because of embarrassment of the doctrine *itself* or because of their desire to be novel and eloquent in their sophist culture, they became doctrinally careless. This is a vital lesson for all of us. If Paul planted the church in Corinth in 50 A.D., and then *at the latest* wrote this letter in 55 A.D., it took less than 5 years for many members in this church to go doctrinally astray. They had the Apostle Paul *himself* teach them, and *yet* they began to question one of the cardinal doctrines of the christian faith—the resurrection of the dead. Beloved that can happen here. We are not safe left to ourselves. We are no different than they were. And our culture is identical to theirs. This type of doctrinal carelessness is what shipwrecks the faith of many (**1 Timothy 1:19**). This type of doctrinal carelessness is what spreads like gangrene in the church, and upsets the faith of many (**2 Timothy 2:17**).

How do we cure these crises?

Now these five crises of the Corinthian church 1) their self-righteousness; 2) their refusal to practice church disciplines; 3) their sexual immorality; 4) their trampling on the weaker brother's conscience and 5) their doctrinal carelessness had Paul deeply concerned. How does he respond? How would you respond?

What cure would you offer each of these crises? This is such a vital test of our understanding the Christian faith. Because even as truly born-again Christians who love Jesus Christ, who follow Him, who desire to bring Him glory—we can still get this wrong. That’s our **second point**, there are always crises happening in the church—in the ancient church and the contemporary church—and the questions is, how do we cure them?

III. The Cure for Corinth

The first heresy of any church

The first heresy that any church ever commits is so subtle that most of us simply miss it. And it’s because most of us miss it that it so prevalent in many Bible believing churches. What is the first heresy a church commits? Simply this: it’s believing that the gospel is what saves us, but that we “mature by trying to live according to biblical principles.”²⁴ Or we could say that the first heresy a church commits is the belief that the gospel saves us, *but it is not* what sustains us. You see the problem is *not* in what this heresy affirms. This heresy affirms the faithful message “that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners...” (1 **Timothy 1:15**). This heresy affirms the right things, but it *omits* that it is this same gospel that sustains us, what holds us up, what causes us to persevere to the end. This is why examining how Paul addresses these crises as a whole is so helpful. We see that in every case, he uses the gospel as the cure. He didn’t offer them some other solution. In every case he exposed how some facet of the gospel was the cure to the crisis they faced.²⁵ Consider the five cures that Paul brings.

²⁴ Keller, pg. 48

²⁵ “It is more accurate to say that we are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on (see Rom 12:1-2; Phil 1:6; 3:13-14).” Keller, pg. 48

1. The gospel cure for self-righteousness

What is the worldly solution to cure the self-righteous boasting that was taking place in chapter one—“I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos”? Well the moralist would say “Some people *just are* inherently superior than others.” The relativist would say “No one is superior to anyone else, but all are equally good and right.”²⁶ How does Paul answer? With the gospel doctrine of election. Look at **v.26-30**

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But *God chose* what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; *God chose* what is weak in the world to shame the strong; *God chose* what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, **so that** no human being might boast in the presence of God. *And because of him* you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Do you see? We have no ground to inflate ourselves over others. Paul calls us foolish, and weak, and low and despised, and yet God elected us to salvation anyway. Election is the ultimate destroyer of self-righteousness, because you had nothing to do with it. This is how the Canons of Dort define election:

“Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free, good pleasure of his will, he chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in their common misery. He did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the

²⁶ This dueling of the moralist vs the relativist came from Keller’s *Center Church*, pg. 48ff

mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation.”²⁷

Do you see beloved? By looking at the gospel doctrine of election, the only one we are left to boast in in the LORD.

2. The gospel cure for a lack of church discipline

What is the worldly solution to cure this lack of church discipline in chapter five? Well the moralist is going to respond with a harsh authoritarianism disciplining every infraction of God’s law and shunning all offenders. The relativist is going to disregard authority all together claiming that every Christian has equal authority in the church. How does Paul answer? With the gospel. **First**, church discipline was aimed at this man’s salvation. Look at **5:5** “..you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” Paul wanted this man’s soul to be saved. **Second**, church discipline is required because of what Christ accomplished for us. Look at **v.7** “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” This is an OT allusion to when the Jews would clean their houses of leaven during Passover week, symbolic of putting away sin. Paul is saying ‘Look, Christ—the true and better Passover Lamb—has already put away your sin. If you allow sin to reign in the church you are in an utterly contradictory position.²⁸ For a Christian to continue to live in bondage to sin is to deny the reality that Christ put an end to sin. Therefore purge out the evil because you have already been made clean.’ Church discipline is a declaration that what Jesus accomplished for us is true.

3. The gospel cure for sexual immorality

²⁷ Article 7: Election

²⁸ Help here from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 6: The New Man*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2015), pg. 160

What is the worldly solution to cure this sexual immorality and prostitution that was taking place in chapter 6? “The moralist tends to see sex as dirty, or at least as a dangerous impulse that leads constantly to sin.”²⁹ The relativist sees all forms of sex as healthy self-expression that shouldn’t be suppressed. How does Paul answer? With the gospel. Specifically the doctrine of our union with Christ. Look at v.15 “Do you not know that your bodies *are members of Christ?*” v.17 “But he who is joined to the Lord *becomes one spirit with him.*” End of v.19 “You are not your own.” Oh how precious. Do you see what Paul is doing? He’s *not* giving these Corinthians tricks or strategies or tactics in order to avoid sexual immorality. Consider how different that is today from what we hear in Christian circles about how to fight lust. Much of what we here is reduced to a technique. That is not where Paul goes at all. He is reminding them of what happened to them when they became Christians—they have taken on a whole new identity. Dear congregation, becoming a Christian is *not* becoming a better versions of ourselves. The pagan world can do that. They can offer you a Christ-less type of morality. I am not becoming a better version of Josh Bales. I am becoming Josh Bales-in-Christ. **Galatians 2:20** “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” What good would it be for Paul to get the Corinthians to stop visiting the prostitution house if they did so apart from this truth? He would have simply trained them to turn their idolatry to something else. But instead he unpacks the most precious truth in the gospel, that they have come into union with the Son of God. They are no longer *just* themselves.³⁰ Why should Christians avoid sexual immorality? Because they have become partakers of the Divine nature (**2 Peter 1:4**) Because they have died, and now their lives are hidden with Christ in God (**Colossians 3:3**).

²⁹ Keller, pg. 49. I think Keller is spot on here since some of the Corinthians reported to Paul in their own letter “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (1 Cor. 7:1).

³⁰ Here’s how the Puritan John Owen describes our union with Christ:

Q. What is our union with Christ?

A. A holy, spiritual conjunction unto him, as our head, husband, and foundation, whereby we are made partakers of the same spirit with him, and derive all good things from him.”

John Owen, *The Works of John Owen Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2017), pg. 489

Beloved you are something different altogether. We must start there. We just are “inhabited by Another self, a better self who can act in [us] to bring about real goodness.”³¹ Understanding our union with Christ brings real power against sexual immorality.

4. The gospel cure for those with a weaker conscience

What is the worldly cure for walking with brothers and sisters who have a weaker conscience in chapter 8? The moralist would demand that every man's conscience be the same as his. The relativist denies the reality of a conscience, we are just biological machines with no invisible spirit. How does Paul answer? With the gospel. Paul says in **8:12** “[in] sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.” How is trampling the conscience of my brother sinning against Christ? Because **v.11** my “...brother [is the one] for whom Christ died.” To have no regard for my brother’s tender, even if misinformed conscience, is to disregard what Christ did for Him. Jesus paid the debt of sin that He didn’t owe. As the Belgic Confession says “He paid back what he had not stolen.”³² He was scourged so viciously that his bones were visible—**Isaiah 52:14** says “his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance.” Nails were drilled through His bone and flesh. A crown of thorns was pressed into His skull. A spear was thrust in His side. He hung suspended in the air—rejected by man and damned from heaven—unfit for either. He endured all this so that your bother could be forgiven for his sins and be brought to God. Will you now cause this brother to sin because his conscience is misinformed? Will you trample over the one for whom Christ died? That is the gospel cure for Christians with different consciences than we. How can we cause them to suffer, since Christ already suffered for them?

5. The gospel cure for doctrinal carelessness

³¹ Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ: Paul's Gospel and Christian Moral Identity*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Academic, 2019), pg. ix

³² Article 21: The Atonement

What is the worldly cure for doctrinal carelessness that was taking place in chapter 15? The moralist/fundamentalist mindset is to make every doctrine of equal and supreme importance so that any disagreement make you a heretic. The relativist/postmodern mindset is deny any type of meta-narrative—an overarching doctrine that binds all people to it—but rather that each tribe and people group must decide their own truth. How does Paul answer? With the gospel—specifically the resurrection of Christ. Picking up in 15:13-19

“...*if* there is no resurrection of the dead, *then* not even Christ has been raised. And *if* Christ has not been raised, *then* our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, *because* we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise *if* it is true that the dead are not raised. For *if* the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And *if* Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. *Then* those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. *If* in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

Paul’s basic logic here is that doctrines share an inter-relationship with one another. No doctrine ultimately stands alone. To tamper with one is to tamper with all. James P. Boyce, founder of Southern Seminary once said “The omission of a single fact, however small, must affect the whole universe of doctrine.”³³ Doctrinal carelessness or doctrinal indifference—if left uncorrected—will ultimately lead to a corruption of the gospel.

Dear congregation, this is why I said that the first heresy a church commits is a subtle omission that the gospel is what continues to sustain us. Affirming that Christ saves us in the gospel is essential. But it is equally essential that we affirm that Christ continues to sustain us in that same gospel. “We are saved by

³³ <http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/boyce/aos/chapter01.htm>

believing the gospel, *and* then we are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply.”³⁴

Application

What crises are you facing in your life?

If you are an unbeliever the greatest crisis you face is the wrath of God. Do you think what you see in society today is troubling? This is nothing. Merely birth pangs. The real crisis is the coming day of judgment. The Scripture asks a very sobering question: “Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?”³⁵ You need Jesus Christ. You must be united to Him by a living faith. Jesus is not one Savior among many saviors. He alone can cure your sin problem. He alone can wash you as white as snow. The command and promise of Scripture is this “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”³⁶

Dear believer, what kind of cure are you seeking for your crises? Are you seeking a cure that can meet the crisis. The Puritan Thomas Manton urges us to consider that the cure must be in proportion to the crisis. He said that “A drop of honey is not enough to sweeten a [tub]³⁷ of vinegar.”³⁸ Or to use a different analogy, the heavier load you are towing the more horsepower you need under the hood. What I suggesting is that you need to set before you some aspect of the gospel that is adequate to meet the crisis you face. That’s what Paul does in Corinthians. He displays Jesus Christ in the exact way that the

³⁴ Keller, pg. 48

³⁵ Isaiah 33:14

³⁶ Acts 16:31

³⁷ original “hogshead”

³⁸ Charles Spurgeon, *Flowers from a Puritan’s Garden*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), pg. 61

crisis requires. And then meditate on how Christ cures that crisis. “What feeding is to the body, meditation is to the soul.”³⁹ Your body sucks the nutrients out of the food you eat for energy. And through meditation, your soul sucks the truths out of the gospel that you need for life.

Are you feeling spiritually dead? Meditate and suck the spiritual marrow out of **Colossians 3:4** “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Are you in a season of spiritual darkness? Drink in **John 8:12** “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Whatever your crisis is, Jesus Christ is the answer. Go to Him.

³⁹ Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man Vol. 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, Reprint 2010), pg. 462