

Title: 1 Corinthians Rebooted

Text: 1 Corinthians 13.6

Theme: How to live like Christ in Corinth

Series: 1 Corinthians #73

Prop Stmt. Love is free to celebrate the good.

Read Text:

This morning, our text is v.6 and I am planning on getting there, but I want to step back for a little bit from the trees and look at the forest again. For over two years we have been studying the book of 1 Corinthians, a letter written by the Apostle Paul under the direction of the Spirit of God, to a group of believers in the city of Corinth, located just south of Athens. Paul had gone to this very corrupt city and in the midst of this social mess, he was used by God to bring a number of these people to faith in Christ. Coming to faith in Christ changes your life – forever. But it does not change everything instantly. You still have some old habits and ways of thinking that need to be dealt with. So, this letter was written by Paul back to this church because they had some problems that needed to be addressed. Their problems look just like our problems. So, the placement of this book into the Bible was ultimately the providence of God so that we would be able to study how followers of Christ are called to live and do this thing called life. So, for the past couple of years, we have been working our way through this book. During this time, God has been pleased to bring about some growth in our lives and in our church family. Those of you have been attending in the past few weeks, and months were not exposed to the initial sermons that helped establish the context of this book and the occasion of its writing. And those of you who were here, have probably long since forgotten. So, with a view toward helping you recover or understand some of the dynamics of the original audience even while we gain some more insight into our own context, I am taking you on a bit of a tour this morning, anticipating and planning that the bus will find its way to 13.6. But, this tour will not be a review so much of history and geography of Corinth as it will be a fresh look at some of the intangibles that we discover that we share.

A local high school had a talent show. The kids who presented their talents were judged on the basis of the audience approval. Talent at this level is, it seems, at the mercy of the personality of the performer. A quiet kid who can play cello will receive a tepid response of applause, while a funny and popular kid who can make sophomoric noises with his armpit can expect a standing ovation. Is that response an accurate reflection of talent? No, but it is an accurate reflection of what people perceive as being valuable. In some ways it is like the movie that has a pathetic and confusing plot, poor acting and lame dialogue, but the special affects are awesome!

The Roman historian Cicero had a student named Quintilian who wrote about life and culture in the Corinthian era at precisely the time of Paul's ministry with and to these people. Quintilian lamented the fact that when some people engaged in public speaking in those days that the audience responded "with a storm of ready-made applause." Event coordinators have known this for centuries. Do you want to pump up the crowd? Pay some people to applaud and sprinkle them among the audience. The power of suggestion

will help create an atmosphere of excitement. But the casualty of such a setting can be truth and talent. But, if “the crowd goes wild” then most people really don’t care about the content or the skill as long as the reaction was deemed sufficient. When hype and image rule the day, then people have no basis to measure true talent or true logic, or even truth.

Image consultants would be a popular profession in Corinth. Your aura and reputation carried much more influence than your true character. How many times have we observed this story take place? A prominent athlete has a high profile domestic problem. His points per game, or other statistics, suffer along with his reputation as the matter grinds its way through the legal process. As a result of this public relations nightmare for him and his team, he is no longer marketable to Nike, Adidas or other corporations willing to pay enormous dollars for an athlete’s endorsement. In order to recover the lost reputation, the athlete needs an image makeover. The steps are rather predictable. 1) Check yourself in to a rehab center or contact a high profile therapist who specializes in anger management. 2) Call a press conference and publicly apologize if you have done anything to offend someone. Put on a conservative suit with minimal jewelry. 3) On Thanksgiving, go to a food kitchen and help serve soup, and make certain that the cameras are filming. 4) Appear in a Boys Club or United Way commercial for free. 5) Give some money to a charity. 6) Do community service, or speak about your problems at a local high school and tell the kids to not follow your example, as you are chauffeured away in a stretch limousine. Once your image has regained star status, your agent can once again demand top dollar, and if you can sell the shoes, the corporations will once again line up at your door. Now, I am not suggesting that every high profile person who has had a personal meltdown has been that crass and predictable. I am suggesting that we have a cottage industry of image consultants who are hired by attorney’s to help improve the perception of their client before a trial. And even more I am suggesting that the public’s willingness to be influenced by hype and buzz fuels a media machine that is used to manipulate perception. After all, perception is reality, isn’t it? No, not necessarily. Actually, perception is simply one’s view of reality, God knows the true reality.

The more I learn about the Corinthian culture, the more I realize how similar we are. There are the obvious things like affluence, immigration, transitory relationships, trade and commerce and even having a rather fleshly and provocative mist that seems to hang over and dampen everything, is something we can relate with. But, the similarities between the two worlds go deeper than that. Corinth was a home to religious pluralism. Everybody was free to believe and follow whatever worked for them. In addition to that old ways and traditions were being thrown away as new social constructs and orders were emerging and changing the way life had been done.

For example, Corinth was a much bordered, heavily cliquish, and socially aware culture. You knew who was rich and who wasn’t; who was popular, chic, and trendy, and who was so yesterday and passé. You knew who carried the popular esteem of the culture and since the culture rewarded special affects over substance, the people in the church were themselves tempted to follow the person who was showy even though shallow. Into this mix was a group of people, that we will call new money. Corinth provided a unique

opportunity for former slaves, and poor people to get ahead and some of them did. These people, who used to be from the other side of the tracks, now were bent on proving to others that they really belonged in the upper echelons of society. This new money had something to prove and image really, really mattered. Welcome to Corinth. The people were so immersed in this that this for them was normal. They were trained by their world to place more value upon hype than reality and as a result they, like today would line up behind performers whom they would applaud for their trendiness and hype and to some level, maybe their talents, but not necessarily for their character. It was important that you liked who everyone else happened to be liking at the moment. As soon as the wind of popularity began to shift, you had better make certain that your sail was up so you could direct your boat with the new flow. The fear of being socially disapproved was an enormous factor in that culture. And this fear made them so susceptible to placing value and importance on things that in and of themselves were so shallow, fake, and in reality, nothing but smoke, mirrors, lights and special affects.

If you want to know what water is like, don't ask a fish, since that is all that a fish knows. A fish cannot tell you what it is like to be wet since a fish has never been dry and cannot tell the difference. That is how a particular culture affects its people. We are immersed in it, and cannot objectively tell how it has affected us, since we cannot see ourselves outside of it. Like us, the people in the church of Corinth were so influenced by their culture that they brought these influences with them into the church. Some of them saw the church as a new context in which to live out these Corinthian values, and I am certain that many of them had no idea how ingrained the Corinthian culture was embedded into their lives. Therefore, they loved the showy gifts. They thought that the gifts like tongues were very impressive. They were heavily tilted toward emphasizing public performance over private character. Who cares what a person's private life is, as long as he performs well on stage? Does that sound familiar? Giftedness and talent is more important than character. Hype and image trumps reality. Public response is more important than private truth.

Now, hype and image are thin, shallow and by definition, very emotive. We live in a sound bite society. We feel, more than we think. We watch more than we read. We click more than we concentrate. Therefore, we are highly vulnerable to being misled and manipulated by people who learn how to reach and tweak our emotions or simply impress us with their performance. To these people, the truth of this book and this chapter comes like a bunker-busting concussion bomb. It does not matter how gifted you are in public, it does not matter how thunderous the applause is for you, it does not matter how well the performance went, how impressed the people were, how much people talked about you, or how amazing your skills are, if in the real world that God knows is there, if in your heart of hearts and in your private relationships, you do not love, then the rest of this stuff is garbage and is good for nothing more than being put into a giant pit and burned! Talent and image and performance and applause and sacrifice and pats on the back without genuine love is NOTHING!

There is hype and there is reality. There is image and there is truth. There is public and there is private. There is man and there is God. The top layer is short of substance, and it

is also short on satisfaction. We can be intoxicated and addicted to the top layer, but we will never be satisfied with it. God calls us and enables us to live in the realm where we can know the truth about Him, and about our own hearts and lives. Because of what Christ has done for us, we are set free from trying to prove ourselves to each other and be threatened by or intimidated by someone knowing the truth about ourselves. And you are people who by God's grace love to hear the truth and truly examine your lives to see if you are really longing after Christ. As a reflection of that, you sit and listen and seek to absorb 45-50 minute sermons! These come to you without commercial breaks, background music, and a quick run to the fridge for some ice cream. And in addition to that, you bring your children. Not that they all relish the idea of sitting for that length of time, but in spite of that they are learning listening skills that will serve them well and skills of logic and concentration that help them see through the empty hype of the image world and truly see the real world. Also, you are convinced that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God and you desire for your children to grasp the gospel. Bless you.

Now, we are almost ready for v.6. This verse is in the middle of chapter 13, which is in the middle of chapters 12 and 14. In chapter 12, Paul is exposing the hype and image conscious thinking of the believers in Corinth. You think you are so spiritual because your church speaks in tongues? You think that you are impressive because you are the loudest one in the bunch? You think that this makes you a cut above? You think that God feels lucky to have you on his team? Listen, you want to know what matters, you want to know what is important, forget the tongues thing, instead, focus on what really matters!! Now, we are almost ready for this verse. But go back to v.4 we see that Paul gives us the two general descriptions that categorize the properties of love. Love is patient and love is kind. Because it is patient and kind, there are things that it does not do, because if it did them, it would not be patient and kind. Then we read the things that love does not do. It does not envy or boast. It is not proud, rude, self-seeking or easily angered and it keeps no record of wrongs. In v.6, we are given a contrast. The last negative description of love is given, and then in contrast to that, we see what love does. Verse 7 essentially finishes out the list of descriptions of what love is. In a sense, v.6 is a hinge, that helps us see the contrast between what is truly love and what are the impostures.

1. **Love does not delight in evil.**

The word that Paul uses here for evil involves more than just moral injustice. Granted, love does not relish in tragedies and evil actions. But everything that Paul is pointing out in this chapter is done with a view toward the Corinthian church. The word that he uses is a broad term that can cover many situations. Based on what was happening in Corinth, I submit three examples.

A. **Love finds no pleasure in the wrongdoing of others.**

The court system in Corinth was skewed so that the rich could take advantage of the poor and take their property and rights. Some scholars think that this is part of what Paul was

addressing back in chapter 6. The rich were overlooking the abuse that some of their buddies were doing because it was simply part of the system. That is not love!

B. Love finds no pleasure in another's loss of esteem.

As we looked at in the introduction, one's image was an enormous issue in Corinth. Because of that, people then, like today, tend to view others competitively. Parents can view their children's peers as threats. If your daughter beats my daughter out for 1st chair in the band, or a spot on the cheerleading squad, or basketball team, how do I respond when she gets her instrument stolen, or sprains an ankle?

If something bad happens to your family and people are talking about it, and there is some shame that is brought to you because your picture ended up in the newspaper, internally, how do I respond? Love finds no pleasure in another's loss of esteem. But that is difficult isn't it?

C. Love finds no pleasure in the weakness or failure of another.

This aspect is really tough to do. When someone messes up, (or is caught) naturally you think that since you look better by comparison, that you are better. Yesterday, the two of you looked like equals. Internally you did not really like that person, but no one knew it. Today, some weakness or failure has been exposed. The contrast makes it appear that you have advanced, when in reality the other person has stepped back. You have not necessarily stepped forward, but you think that you have.

But, when someone's weakness or failure is exposed, it gives you a chance to think or say, "see, I told you so." Parents, this is particularly difficult with our kids. We can warn them, and when they mess up, we have an opportunity to point out that we are right, and they are an idiot, or we can put on a demonstration of love. For example, let's say that your kid just got his license and you think he drives a little too fast. You tell him, "Hey, when you get into an accident and lose your license and get fined \$500, don't come crying to me, cause I told you so." But, he ignores your counsel, and one day you find out, he took a corner too fast, and got into an accident and really messed up his car and someone else's. Now, you are thinking. "I have been waiting for this" – why? This is an opportunity for vindication. Here is your chance to prove that you have been right all along. (roleplay) "Hey, way to go Dale Earnhart!" That was a brilliant move, absolute genius. You like paying deductibles? You like just watching your checking account fly right out the window for insurance premiums? You like working in order to pay for a new car? I hope so, 'cause buddy, you have messed up big time, but it's not like I haven't been saying this all along – right? Right? Look at me, when I talk to you! Did I not say that this was going to happen – huh? Yea, I did, but did you listen to your dad? Of course not, I'm an idiot, I have no idea what I am talking about. Well, look who's the idiot now, man you have really messed up big time.

You won the battle, but you just lost the war. Instead of that, love finds no pleasure in the weakness or failure of another. What if, in that moment of consequence, you said,

“Son, this is a heavy load that you have to carry as a result of this accident, and I wish that you did not have to go through this. I wish that you had heeded my counsel. I do not relish the opportunity to lecture you and prove to you how right I am. But, I do pray that the pressure that you have brought on yourself will bring about some humility and a willingness to listen to sound counsel. God gives us counselors for our protection and benefit. I need to think and live within His counsel and so do you. If you will learn that through this, then in the bigger picture of life, this accident will be of help and we can both find a measure of comfort in that, although I think we would both agree, that there has to be an easier way to learn this lesson.

2. **Love rejoices with the truth.**

Love does not ignore problems. Love is not syrup that covers obvious problems and attempts to pretend that they do not exist. You do not have to choose between being loving and being right. But, please do not forget the entire context. This chapter is written to people who were in the middle of power-play relationships. People were threats, their achievements were hard to swallow for those who wanted to advance themselves, even at the expense of others. Paul is showing that true love does not look at relationships and opportunities to get your way or manipulate responses. Love is not self-seeking. When you are able to live for the God-honoring pleasure of others, then you are set free to pursue the truth in a way that it is disconnected from a power-play agenda.

For example, you are at work and there is a job posting for a position above yours with greater seniority, pay, and benefits. You and a co-worker are the most in-line for that. If you see your co-worker as a threat, then you do not want the truth about her qualifications and skills and achievements to be noticed. However, if you understand that love is not self-seeking, then you are free to speak the truth about her qualifications and may be able to recommend her to the position if in being objective you acknowledge that she is better qualified. “True disinterested integrity is free to seek truth, without anxiety about what it helps or hinders in one’s personal agenda.” (Thiselton)¹

You are free to be able to joyfully celebrate the truth. You are not threatened by the achievements of others. You do not have to use manipulation and coded words to get your way. You are so free to be honest and open because you have placed the honor of God, and therefore, the welfare of others ahead of yourself.

If there is a problem, love wants to help, not hurt, nor flaunt the other person’s weakness. If the situation is good, love wants to celebrate and throw a party. But, people who live in fear of others are in bondage to that fear and end up hiding the truth. A person who lives in fear is bound to that interest and that interest clouds their judgment and their freedom to love. Love wants no hidden agenda that covers the truth and makes it appear to be something that it is not. The person who has entrusted himself completely into the hands of God has nothing to fear since God already knows the truth and has accepted the believer into Christ. Perfect love, drives out fear. There is no fear in love.

¹ Anthony Thiselton, NIGTC, Commentary on 1 Corinthians, p. 1055.

What does this have to do with Christ?

Christ does not delight in our weakness and failures. He died for us because of them. His unswerving commitment to us, gives us the freedom to speak the truth to Him and receive His love. He knows it all, already.