

Articles and Sermons :: Corinthian Christianity Bob Johnson

Corinthian Christianity Bob Johnson, on: 2010/11/14 14:59

I was reading chapter 4 in Corinthians today and read verses 8-13 and was shocked at the comparison Paul gave to the Corinthians of true Christianity, I wanted to learn more about it so I looked an article on it, take a look.

1 Corinthians 4:8-13

Don't I Deserve to be Happy

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Title: Don't I deserve to be Happy?

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:8-13

Theme: Genuine Christianity carries a high price in this world.

Series: 1 Corinthians #17

Speaker: Bob Johnson

Parents, does it not drive you crazy when you give a gift to one of your children for Christmas or a birthday, and the child who receives the gift taunts the other kids? You do not give a gift so your child can gloat, you give a gift for the joy of your child!

The purpose of God's grace and God's gifts are not for gloating or self-exaltation. But, here is where we really begin to see how completely out of focus, these believers in Corinth had become. Many of these believers were convinced that they were a successful, mature and wonderful church. They viewed themselves as the standard by which other people and other churches ought to be measured. This self-centered view of the church and Christianity blinded them to how serious of a problem they really had. Brothers and sisters, this problem is not unique to Corinth at all. Our culture is very Corinthian, and Christianity in our culture, is shot through with the same problems that were affecting the version of Christianity that Paul was addressing in this letter.

The church has historically had a problem with allowing the present circumstances to dictate its view. When things were bleak during W.W.II, many Christians were absolutely certain the world was coming to an end, and it was rather popular to view Hitler or Mussolini as the antichrist. During the cold war, when it looked as if Russia and communism was going to take over the world, prophecy conferences and guys who played the accordion and claimed to have the inside scoop on world events, were the rage. But now, after a time of relative stability, when the big challenge for many is, do I buy a fourth car or a bigger boat, then it is very appealing to form a version of Christianity that supports this. This is essentially Corinthian Christianity and it looks like this:

Using Christianity Teaching:

Discovering the secret code for "Christianity" produces – possessions, health, prosperity, long-life, success, big homes, great careers, healthy children, no problems, no needs, and the envy of others. Do you want to be spiritual like me? Of course you do! Look at how easy life is for me – you want that don't you? It should be obvious that God is blessing me, therefore, I must be spiritual! Because I have discovered the secrets, I am spiritual. I do not have to wait for heaven, I can enjoy the good life, now. In fact, you can have your best life, right now! I HAVE ARRIVED! I am king! Did not Jesus promise that we would reign with Him? We are kings. Did not Jesus promise that we would be set free? We are free. We are in the Spirit. Look at all of my spiritual gifts! We are rich. We rule! I love it, it's all about me, me, me! Besides, don't you deserve to be happy? Doesn't God want you to be happy? Therefore, doesn't God want you to have all of these things so that you can be happy? Focus – NOW! Look at v.8 – How do the first two exclamations begin? ALREADY!

Think with me for a second. What is the huge fallacy in that theology? It preaches that happiness comes from circumstances, instead of a relationship. Using Christianity is the idea that I can use my relationship with God, to get what I really want out of life and that God goes along with that. In this picture, God is a means, instead of the goal.

Now, compare that to:

Following Christianity Teaching:

Following Christianity produces—humility, mourning over sin, meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, mercy, purity, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, persecution, pressure, sometimes death. Christ set the tempo and the apostles kept the pace. The result was, Christ died, most of the apostles were martyred, and many in the early church were severely persecuted. “You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.” (Hebrews 10.34) Focus—FUTURE! Not yet.

Beware of those who attempt to teach about how to use God, to get what you want out of life. People who teach that sort of stuff will often be the most popular because it is a very appealing message. Look at the best-selling books in the religious section. What are some of the titles? “Your best life now!”.... This sort of stuff would have been eaten up in Corinth. The idea that you can use God to get what you want out of life was apparently popular in Corinth, but those who taught it, were not right. The truth is we have not arrived. We do not use God to get our way in life. God is not a code that has to be figured out and then used to achieve “greatness.”

This passage (8-13) is a comparison. Paul is comparing genuine Christianity with “Corinthian” Christianity. Look at how the very end of the book of Revelation concludes. “Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” We look forward and anticipate the coming of Christ, because the world as it is now is not our home and we need the grace of Christ to help us be faithful and persevere until He returns. We wait for our salvation to be completely realized—a “salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1.5). We according to 2 Peter 3.13 are “looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” We look forward with great confidence, because we know that already, Jesus Christ is king, but not yet has his kingdom come. Not yet is his desired will being done on earth as it is in heaven. The bottom line, we are not home yet. When you come to faith in Christ, you become out of step with the world. But, what was happening in the church at Corinth and what is happening right now, is that people who call themselves Christian are trying to develop a type of Christianity in which you can basically have heaven now and later. You can have the good life now. Heaven can wait, when you got life in hand. This passage directed toward a self-centered Christianity is an indictment upon what is being swallowed by believers and promoted by so many. Please look at this text carefully with me this morning, and let the Spirit of God use this to raise your level of discernment because Corinthian Christianity is no different than the world.

1. A “Christianity” that elevates the Christian is not Christianity.

A. It fuels lust. 8, 10

I know that the word “lust” is not in this verse, but the idea is here. Notice the opening phrase of v.8—“Already you have all you want.” The word that Paul uses is a very graphic word that is used for a farmyard animal that is so overfed, that it is bloated. This word is describing an attitude. It is the person who is so full of himself, so gluttoned, so satiated, so stuffed, that he has no need.

a. Lust for prominence

It is a lust for prominence. A Christianity that is used by some people in order to get noticed, to get ahead, to be prominent, is not true Christianity. Paul adds a rather telling statement in v.8 when he says that “You have become kings—and that without us!” In other words, you have made it to the spiritual top without the help of, or without depending on any one else. You did it all by yourself! You are so spiritual, you have outgrown us. He then says in effect, “I really wish that were true.”

b. Lust for power

“You have become kings.” Do you see a problem with that? How many kings can there be? The irony of these words is difficult to overstate. Paul is saying that you guys are so lucky that you are already enjoying the kingdom of Christ on the earth. You have already arrived. You are already ruling. You are already doing, what the apostles have only dreamed of doing, but have not yet achieved. You are on the throne sitting as king, and we (4.1) are mere servants who are here to do your bidding.

B. It fuels pride. 10 (18-19)

“You are so wise.” You are so wise, you are far in advance of any apostle. Obviously, they were not wise, but they certainly thought that they were. What they were calling wisdom was in reality arrogance.

The gospel of God, like all of His gifts, is intended to produce humility and graciousness in our lives. You have heard the

expression, “too many chiefs and not enough Indians?” Well, that is what happens when everyone wants to be in charge and no one wants to serve. Serving is beneath me. Whatever gave you that idea? Because, it is not my gift, or position. I rule!

C. It fuels dissension.

Do you remember v.7? Instead of seeing God as the gracious giver, this view sees self as the one who caused God to give, so self is the hero. What do you have when you put two selfish people in a room with one toy? War!

D. It fuels blindness. (chapter 5)

This idea blinds a person to huge, obvious problems like the ones that we will encounter in chapter 5.

2. Christianity that elevates Christ carries a price.

A. It is a spectacle. 9

For years, Rome lived off of the wealth of the lands she had conquered, and with it, the peoples that she had made her slaves. As a result, Roman citizens were working less and less and had more free time, demanding to be entertained. The Coliseum was a major part of that venue. It was common for a parade to precede the show. If, for example, a Roman general had been successful in battle, then those who were defeated would be dragged through the streets in an effort to show off the booty that had been captured. At the end of this procession would be the losing general or king, who had already been sentenced to death, but was being publicly humiliated before his execution, or in some cases, his death on the arena floor from mauling.

Paul says that is what true apostles are like. We are public objects of derision. We are what a person would see at a theater in order to laugh at and mock.

B. It is a sacrifice. 10-11

The Christianity that Paul speaks of, and the life that he led, makes no sense to those whose purpose in life is to pursue a life of comfort and ease or personal success. The Corinthians were so full, they were bloated, he was hungry and thirsty. Sometimes he lacked for the basic things in life, including food, clothing and shelter. In addition to that, there were times when he was brutally treated.

C. It seems senseless. 12-13a

The language that Paul uses here speaks of exhausting labor. The believers in Corinth were claiming to have arrived, while Paul was on the bottom of the social heap, working like a slave and responding in a way that made no sense to his world. When cursed, Paul's concern is not immediately for himself, but for the reputation of Christ—so he blesses. When persecuted, he does not fight fire with fire, but endures it. When slandered, he answers kindly.

D. It is scorned. 13b

The scum of the earth and the refuse of the world are not the most attractive or appealing labels are they? Can you imagine writing a book on how to be the scum of the earth? The language here, speaks of the wiping of a bowl that has left over residue, and the stuff that is on the rag is the scum. “Up to this moment” Paul is showing that what he is describing is very current in his life. How do you expect to attract people and gain influence with a message like that?

Conclusion:

Jesus Christ—our Leader was crucified. He set the mark, we keep the pace. He came to save us from this sin-cursed, and doomed to destruction world. In rescuing us from our sin, we are sent to help in the rescue of others, not to pursue our own ease.

If you want to attract people to your church, you can create a version of Christianity that appeals to self-exaltation. You can copy the Corinthians and promote or attempt to have a Christianity that uses God to get what you want out of life. And you know what? If you are slick, it will appear to work for a while like a spiritual Ponzi scheme. But, a Christianity that exalts self instead of Christ will not save people. I can speak incessantly on how you can get the most out of life now, or on personal tips for a stress-free week, or the 7 keys to unlocking your potential. I can even use stories of success from the Bible to make us all feel like going out and taking on our world. In so doing, I would be giving you junk food and sweet desserts that would give you a spiritual sugar rush, a spiritual buzz for a few minutes. But you cannot run the marathon before you on cotton candy and M&M's. But if that is the type of Christianity that you want, you are far too easily satisfied. If you think that God's job is to help you get a raise, get new boat, keep your hair from falling out or getting good returns in the stock market, then your view of God needs to radically change. It is true that God loves you. It is true that Chri

st died for you. It is true that Christ is the key for your eternal happiness and present joy. But the call to come to Christ involves a call to come a die. Die to your self. Die to depending on yourself. Die to living for yourself. Die to pursuing your own glory. Instead, for me to live is Christ. I glory in the cross. I live for the purpose of pursuing His glory. And when you are poor in spirit Â– you are blessed. When you mourn over your sin Â– you are blessed. When you hunger and thirst after righteousness Â– you are blessed. When you are persecuted for righteousness sake and learn that his grace is sufficient to carry you through and give you joy even in the darkest part of the night Â– you are blessed. When you learn His songs in the night and laugh the laugh of faith in sorrow Â– you are blessed. When you can run the hill at mile 23 because you trained, and fed on the meat of the Word, then you can finish strong and run to the arms of the Savior who ran first and never looked back. But, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down. There is a time for sitting, but not yet. There is a time for ease, but not yet. This is the time for training and for running. We are not home yet.