

Christ & Him Crucified

(4) The Community of the Cross: (a) Christian Cross-Culture Defended

Introduction

What Does Union with Christ Look Like?

- A. We now have reached the fourth and final section in our series (though we will be spending a couple weeks here).
1. We've noted (1) The Centrality of the Cross—that the cross of Christ is God's solution to man's deepest problem, and therefore Paul decides (and so should we) to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.
 2. We've seen (2) The Conquest of the Cross—all that Jesus accomplished for us and gives to us freely when we are brought into union with Him by faith.
 3. Last week, we looked at (3) The Calling of the Cross—pressing in deeper to the question: "How did this union actually get forged between us and Christ?" And we concluded from a close look at the text that it is "because of [God] that [we] are in Christ Jesus" (1:30). He has sovereignly called us by His grace from the graves our unbelief and into union-fellowship-life with His Son. So we give thanks to Him always for this miracle of grace that we've received.
- B. But now we must ask the question: What does union with Christ look like...in our lives today? How is it supposed to evidence itself in our thoughts and actions and lifestyle? We were not given the spoils of His conquest to put in the bank and withdraw upon entrance into heaven. His goal has been to create a new humanity, a humanity following behind this Second and Last Adam, and this is to affect us on Sunday, and Monday, and Tuesday, and every day of our lives. So what does union with Christ look like?
1. It has been the main thesis of this series that we are to be a cross-centered church that we might become more and more of a cross-cultured church—a church whose culture is patterned after the cross. In other words, we don't just speak about the cross, we look like it!
 - a. This morning I will attempt to defend the idea of this Christian cross-culture. Next week, with all of 1 Corinthians as our text, I will attempt to put it on display for us.

The Text

1 Cor 4:8–13

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.

The Outline

A. You will notice that we have moved on from the text we've been reading each Sunday for the past 3 weeks (1 Cor 1:17-2:2). But we are not so much moving on from it as we are building up on it. Paul lays a foundation in those opening chapters that sets up his discussion in the rest of the letter. The theological discussion of the cross has been moving towards radical application. He gives such high-level theology in order to deal with ground-level everyday life issues. As one of my professors would say: "All theology is practical theology." It all ought to move us somewhere. And I'm saying that cross-centered theology should lead us to cross-cultured application.

1. So this morning, as we make our way through our text, attempting to defend the Christian cross-culture, we will make note of 4 things in particular: (1) A Striking Contrast; (2) A Surprising Parallel; (3) A Doctrinal Divergence; and (4) A Cruciform Imitation.

(1) A Striking Contrast

Kings or Scum?

A. In our text, Paul sets up a striking contrast between the Corinthians ("you" in our text) and the apostles ("us apostles" in v. 9 and "we" elsewhere in our text). It is not difficult to see. Let me gather what is said about each group and make some interpretive observations.

THE CORINTHIANS

1. Beginning with the Corinthians, how is their situation described?

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! (v. 8a)

- a. The first thing to note is the timestamp: "Already"—repeated in 2 of the 3 sentences. And even in that 3rd sentence, "Without us" is really just another way of saying "already." Only here it brings into view the fact that what for the Corinthians is an "already", for the apostles is a "not-yet."
 - i. This will play in huge later, as it is not so much what the Corinthians have that is the problem as it is when they are claiming to have attained it.)

- b. The word translated “all you want” here is used to denote satiation, particularly with food—they have eaten enough; they are full (cf. Act 27:38). No needs here.
 - c. And this idea is only amplified by saying that they have already “become rich” and “kings.” They think they are already reigning.
2. We are meant to hear the beatitudes echoing behind this description, alerting us to Paul’s sarcastic rebuke. For the Corinthians are not hungering and thirsting for righteousness, they are full; they are not poor in spirit, they are rich; they are not mourning or meek or persecuted, they are kings. They’ve arrived. Something is wrong here!
- a. We are looking at a deadly situation like that of the church in Laodicea to whom Jesus says these startling words:

Rev 3:16–17, 21

¹⁶ I will spit you out of my mouth.

¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

...

²¹ The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

- i. There is still conquering to be done. What are you doing sitting on your thrones...already?!

PAUL & THE APOSTLES

1. Then in v. 9 he formally introduces the apostles and starts to invite the contrast:

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.

- a. While the Corinthians are claiming to already be kings and to have gone on ahead without the apostles, Paul emphasizes that he and the apostles are “last of all.”
 - i. They are not sitting on thrones like kings they are being exhibited like criminals. The language here points us toward the Roman practice of parading condemned criminals before the public gaze as objects of derision, perhaps even pointing more specifically to doomed gladiators that were brought into the arena to die before an audience.

(1) Something is wrong here. While the Corinthians are claiming to be kings in this world, Paul is saying he and the

apostles are like the ones that the kings in this world put to death.

2. As we move into v. 10, the contrast is sharpened:

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;

^{13a} when slandered, we entreat...

- a. While the Corinthians are claiming to be wise, the apostles are fools for Christ's sake.
- b. While they are claiming to be strong, the apostles are weak.
- c. While the Corinthians are held in honor and glorious, the apostles are dishonored.
- d. While the Corinthians are full, satisfied, the apostles hunger and thirst.
- e. While the Corinthians are robed as kings and living comfortably in their palaces, the apostles are poorly dressed, beaten, and homeless.
- f. While the Corinthians are sitting on their thrones letting others serve them, the apostles are laboring to the point of weariness with their own hands, like slaves.
- g. And where kings gather armies to attack and defend themselves from their enemies, the apostles bless and endure those who revile and persecute them.

3. And then the contrast reaches its climax!

^{13b} ...We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

- a. While the Corinthians have already become kings, the apostles have become, and are still, scum and refuse. The words point us to the filth that is removed during a thorough cleaning and then thrown out.

(2) A Surprising Parallel

We Know...But Do We Know?!

- A. Underneath the surface of this striking contrast we are invited, perhaps surprisingly, to make another comparison. But here we are dealing not with contrast and difference, but parallel and similarity. While Paul and the apostles might not look anything like the Corinthians, they look an awful lot like their Savior and His cross!

1. This link is first hinted at in 2:3-4a where Paul writes: “I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom...”—the one proclaiming the foolishness and weakness of the cross, seems to embody his message in his manner.
2. But this subtle hint back in ch. 2, reaches a fever pitch here in ch. 4. Don’t miss this! Consider the connections:
 - a. WE KNOW that He was sentenced to death as a criminal and paraded through the city and crucified on a hill for people to watch and mock.
 - b. We know that His crucifixion was foolishness and weakness to natural man. No one saw what God was actually up to in it!
 - c. We know that He was held in disrepute, that “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him”; that “He was despised and rejected by men...” (Isa 53:2-3a).
 - d. We know that on the cross He cried out in thirst for something to drink but was given only sour wine.
 - e. We know that He was stripped naked and exposed, put to shame on that cross.
 - f. We know that he was beaten, in the ESV: “buffeted.” For that same Greek word is used to describe what the Sanhedrin, the leaders of his own Jewish people, did to him on the night he had been handed over by Judas: “They spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him (Mat 26:67).
 - g. We know that He was homeless, for “foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Mat 8:20).
 - h. We know that He labored like a slave. For “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mat 20:28).
 - i. We know that when He was reviled and persecuted and slandered, He blessed: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luk 23:34).
 - j. And, finally, we know that He became the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. He was treated like the filth of our own sin on that cross, so that in His being beaten and bloodied and discarded into death, we might be washed clean!!!
3. We know all of this. This is our gospel. But maybe we didn’t know that we are called to look like this as well! The parallels are crystal clear. The cross is not only the way of salvation it is the way of life in this world. Being cross-centered should lead us to be more and more cross-cultured. People should look at my life and see the glory of His cross.

B. So why this long catalog of sufferings in our text? Why do this Paul?

1. It’s not because (1) he’s bitter and wants someone to acknowledge that he’s gotten the short end of the stick. It’s not because (2) he’s arrogant and trying to show off how much greater of a Christian he is. (3) It’s because he’s desperate for the Corinthians to wake up to the way they’ve been deceived: “This is what union with Christ looks like on this side of heaven! It looks like what He looked like when He was here: namely, it looks like the cross!”

(3) A Doctrinal Divergence

Already or Not Yet?

- A. Now, both the Corinthians and the apostles are claiming Christ (“fools for Christ’s sake”; “wise in Christ” [v. 10]). So what accounts for this striking contrast in the way they each are claiming union with Christ is manifested?

1. I said earlier that the issue of timing would play in big in this discussion. Recall Paul’s emphasis on the timing of things back in our text. While he highlights that the Corinthians have “already” become kings, he emphasizes, contrary to this, that the apostles have become and “are still” (v. 13), even “to the present hour” (v. 11), scum and refuse.

The Corinthians have moved on into glory and honor, but the apostles are still stuck in humiliation and shame, bearing in their bodies the marks of Jesus (Gal 6:17).

Why?

- B. So what underlies the Corinthians’ “already”? Where did they go wrong? Doctrine matters.

1 Cor 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?

1. What precisely the Corinthians believed at this point is unclear and we don’t have time to wade into the discussion. What is plain is that, somehow, their understanding of there being no physical resurrection of believers, led them to look for physical glory, honor, riches, fullness, already, in this world, rather than anticipating it, waiting for it, pressing on towards it, in the world to come.
 - a. Hence, there slogan could be: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” (15:32). It’s all about this life. It’s as if they are trying to pull the new heavens and earth back into their experience under these heavens on this earth. But, according to Paul, we are not yet there.

- C. Now, we must read the Corinthians’ “already” against the Apostles’ “not-yet” (as I read here I will draw our attention particularly to the timing of these things according to Paul):

1 Cor 15:20–26

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits (pointing us to idea of beginning as a sign of more to come) of those who have fallen asleep.

²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

1. And then we see in vv. 27-28 proper order is restored until God is “all in all”, and the universe is finally put right-side up!
 - a. It’s at this point we are told later, that believers will be raised from the dead and “inherit the kingdom of God” (15:50), and “put on” (like a king puts on his royal robe) “the imperishable” and “immortality” (v. 53).
 - i. Then we will be kings. Then they will reign. Then those apostles who have been the scum and refuse of this earth will find their names written into the very foundations of the new earth (Rev 21:14)!
 - ii. But until then “I die every day!” (15:31).

Crucifixion by Resurrection

A. The power of Christ’s resurrection life streams back to us from His throne by His Spirit into this fallen and flipped (upside-down) world, and when it does, we find that it doesn’t nullify our own cross-bearing, it empowers it. Resurrection, in an inverted world, looks like crucifixion. The new birth prepares us for death. We are a new humanity in an old world. He calls us out of it but leaves us in it! And if they hated him they will hate us also (Joh 15:18-19)! Therefore our foolishness is our wisdom, our weakness is our power, our shame is our honor, our suffering is our glory.

1. As Paul says later to the Philippians: “I count everything as loss...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phi 3:8a, 10-11)!!!
 - a. The power of His resurrection enables me to share in His sufferings that I might at the end, be resurrected with Him in glory. So what does union with Christ look like in this world? Suffering unto glory, crucifixion unto resurrection.

(4) A Cruciform Imitation

A. Now up to this point, some of the more crafty among us might be trying to wriggle off the hook of my arguments. I see Jesus suffered like this, and now I see the apostles were to suffer like this, but I don’t see where it says that I am to suffer like this?! For this, we only needed to keep reading...

“I urge you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Cor 4:16). Or later: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1).

- B. It occurred to me last night in my study around 1 AM that the most important part of my preparation to preach is the last step in it. Application. This is where things get personal. This is where we realize not engaging in a mere Bible study. God is here, and He wants our hearts, our lives. And He’s asking: “Which kingdom are we living in?” Are we willing to be fools for Christ’s sake, weak for Christ’s sake, held in disrepute for Christ’s sake, etc.? Do we want his resurrection power to make us like Him in His death so that we might know more of Him for ourselves and show more of Him to the world?
1. When you are slandered at work or at home, do you lash back in your own defense? Or, knowing the great acquittal that you have in the courtroom of heaven, do you see it as an opportunity to display the glory of the cross?!
 2. Or with your money, when things gets tight and someone expresses a need, do you purse your lips and make up an excuse? It doesn’t fit within the budget. Or, knowing the riches of your inheritance with Christ in heaven, is generosity your instinct?! I want to show the glory of the grace I’ve been shown!
 3. Or when we come to church, is it about getting friends, finding a clique. Or, knowing the intimate communion we have with Christ and the fellowship with the saints we will enjoy around His throne soon, is it more about seeing new people come in to Him, salvation?!
 4. When the Supreme Court makes another ruling and this one will throw some of us in jail for what we believe, do we change our theological positions. We must have gotten this wrong here. This can’t be what Jesus would want. He suffered so I don’t have to. Or do we hold to the clear teaching of Scripture and suffer well with Him?!
- C. This is when we hit our knees and beg God, “Please grant me your resurrection power that I might walk this crucifixion road!”
1. But anyone who’s ever really felt this tension will want to close his prayers the way Paul closes this book: “Our Lord, come!” (1 Cor 16:22b).