

CHURCH IMPROVEMENT THE JOY OF ADDING ON I COR. 10:31-11:1

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

INTRODUCTION

We are finishing our five week series entitled, "Church Improvement: Building a Church that Delights in God and loves people" today by looking at another of our core values. The value we are looking at today is our desire to see people who do not go to church come to our church and so learn to trust and follow Christ for a lifetime. There are 85,000 people living within a circle that has downtown Janesville at its center and a radius of eight miles. At least 50,000 of those people have no significant affiliation with any church. If, as the Bible clearly teaches, Christians love to spend time with other Christians and they love to worship God regularly, then we can only conclude that the majority of these people are outside of Christ and heading for an eternal hell.

In John 10:14-16 Jesus says this, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." The main thing I want you to hear in this statement is that Jesus has other sheep who are not of this sheep pen. When he first spoke these words he was referring to the fact that his sheep were not just going to come from among the Jews. He meant that there were many people who are non-Jewish that he is going to save. All of us in this room who have placed our faith in Christ are among those to whom he was referring. This statement also applies now. There are more people in our community that Jesus is going to save. His plan is for them to hear his voice and to come follow him. He does that by connecting them to his church, of which we are one. I cannot think of any reason why we shouldn't believe that Jesus plans to use us in saving more of his sheep here in Janesville.

As most of you know, I became a Christian through the ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ and then I spent 20 years serving with CCC on college campuses. A conversation I had with a Christian student in the fall of 1988 captures the dilemma every thoughtful Christian must face in regards to the work of sharing the gospel with those outside the church. On this particular evening we canceled our regular large group meeting and sent our students out in pairs to find another student at the UI with whom they could go through a four point outline of the gospel. We paired older, experienced students and staff with those who had little or no experience in sharing Christ. I was paired up with Lesen and we went over to the student union. We eventually found a student who was willing to let us share with him. We had a polite conversation but he was not interested in Christ at that time. On the way back to our meeting room Lesen asked me a question. She said, "People who do not know Christ are going to spend eternity separated from God in hell. I live in the midst of thousands of people who do not know Christ. In fact the majority of them do not even know that the only way to heaven is through trusting in Christ. I know the gospel. So, why shouldn't I stop being a student and spend all my time sharing the gospel with those who don't know? How can I call myself a Christian and say that I love people if I spend so many hours going to class and studying and doing all the other stuff I do, when there are so many around me who are going to hell and don't even know it?"

These two facts; the only way to heaven is through trusting in Christ and there are thousands of people in our community that don't know this, has led many churches to define their primary purpose in terms of reaching as many people as possible with the gospel of Christ. Every thing that these churches do must be tested by the question, "How will it help us to connect with lost people and share the gospel with them?" This is the environment I both helped create and lived in for 20 years. But over the course of those years I was forced to ask some questions: "Is this how the Bible describes the purpose of the church? Is it true that the only Christians who are really following Christ are those who spend all their time (or as much as possible) telling others about Christ? Is it the primary job of Christian leaders to motivate and equip every Christian to engage in the work of

evangelism? Should you feel guilty if you are not trying to talk to everyone you are with for a few moments about Christ?”

These and other questions drove me to make some observations about how the NT describes the purpose of the church and how it relates to those outside the church.

1. You cannot read the NT without seeing that the church grew numerically through the message about Christ being proclaimed to all who would listen. Consider just these two statements from the book of Acts. They describe what happened after Peter preached the first Christian sermon: “With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3000 were added to their number that day.” (2:40-41). “And the Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved.” (2:47). The picture of the church in the NT is one of regularly adding people to its number through the conversion of those outside the church.
2. However, when you examine the teaching of the apostle’s on how to live as a Christian you will look long and hard to find any commands to share the gospel. This became one of the most confusing things to me. I spent lots of time trying to talk Christian students into taking the initiative to share the gospel with their classmates and fraternity brothers, everyone they could possibly talk to. I regularly rebuked students for not aggressively sharing the gospel with everyone who would listen. When I compared how much I talked about doing evangelism and how little Paul did, I came to realize that there was something wrong with my view. The emphasis in the NT is on Christians living like Christ, not doing evangelism. I’m going to say something that maybe won’t mean anything to some of you but I know there are people in here who need to hear what I’m going to say. There is no necessary correlation between being a mature, faithful Christian and how many times you share the gospel with neighbors, co-workers or strangers.
3. In the NT, the work of evangelism is a community affair in which we all play a part but we don’t all play the same part. It is obvious that lots of Christians in the NT were involved in proclaiming the gospel. But it is equally obvious that not every Christian did or was commanded to go out and preach. When I consider how much time I spent talking students into going into full-time Christian work and that I am not aware of a single time that Paul told the Christians in the churches he planted that they should quit their jobs and come be missionaries, I’m ashamed. I believe that God wants some from among us to go be missionaries. I believe he is calling some among us to engage in confrontational evangelism, but not all of us, not even the majority of us.

This leads me to the passage I want to discuss with you today. This passage in 1 Cor. 10 answers a very important question, “What kind of a person and what kind of a church does God use to find his lost sheep?” Here is a command that is related to my role in the salvation of others. Notice what Paul says in v. 33 and v. 1. “For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many so that they may be saved. Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.” Paul is commanding us to emulate his behavior, which is Christ’s behavior, for the purpose of helping others to be saved. In other words, we are to be concerned about the salvation of others and there is a way of living that reflects that concern. It is living like Jesus. So in this passage Paul tells us that....

MAIN POINT

The person or church that influences others for Christ imitates the life of Christ by...

I. Living for the glory of God (v. 31)

The difficulty of doing topical sermons immediately confronts us when we come to v. 31 because it begins with a “therefore”. The 4 verses we are going to look at are the conclusion of an argument that Paul began in chapter 8, verse 1. Paul describes, throughout this section, how a Christian ought to live in light of the fact that we are accepted by God not on the basis of our lifestyle but on the basis of our faith in Christ. So we have great freedom in Christ to adopt a variety of lifestyles. However, just how much freedom do we have? His main concern is with how a Christians conduct reflects upon Christ and how it influences others, both Christian and non-Christian. So he sums up his argument by telling us to live like Jesus lived and giving us two principles to govern that behavior.

The first of those principles is that we are to live for the glory of God. First let's make sure that we all see how much of life is to be lived for the glory of God. He says, "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do". There are three things that we need to think about in relation to this:

1. There are activities that cannot ever bring glory to God. Paul has mentioned some of them a little earlier in the chapter. Look at vv. 6-10 where Paul uses the example of the people of Israel to show how not to live (read the verses). Disobedience to the clear commands of Scripture can never be done for the glory of God. You can't lie to the glory of God. You can't have an affair to the glory of God. You can't steal from your employer to the glory of God. You can't have sex with your girlfriend or boyfriend to the glory of God.
2. If it's not explicitly prohibited in the Bible, then anything in life that you do can be done for the glory of God. Eating, drinking, playing with your kids, studying for an exam, hunting, fishing, reading, watching TV, playing video games, shopping, everything that is not sin can be done for the glory of God.
3. There isn't any activity that automatically is for the glory of God. Everything you do, not just the explicitly sinful things you do, has the potential to dishonor God. Eating, drinking, watching TV, praying, reading the Bible to your kids, sharing the gospel with a stranger, helping your neighbor fix his roof, giving money to ECHO, being a missionary, preaching a sermon, whatever you do has the potential to dishonor God.

Obviously, the critical thing for us to understand is what does it mean to do something "for the glory of God"? First we have to understand what Paul means by the phrase, "the glory of God". The glory of God refers to the greatness of God and especially to the many ways that he shows off his greatness. Psalm 19 tells us that the "heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands." In the same way that a painting shows off the greatness of the artist who painted it, so the created world shows off the greatness of God. But the glory of God is most clearly seen in his great saving work in Christ. The NT most often refers to God's greatness in the way he saves sinners through the death and resurrection of his son. In fact, in 2 Cor 4:6 Paul describes becoming a Christian in exactly these terms. He says that in our conversion God gives "us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." We see in the crucified Christ the great love of God shining forth for sinners.

Let me try to show you the greatness of God in saving us through Christ with this illustration. Every human being is born as a sworn enemy of God. We hate him, his rules and his demand that we submit to him. We joyfully participate in the great rebellion led by Satan. We stubbornly refuse to submit and actively seek to promote our own rule over our life and the lives of others as we are able. We hate all that God loves and seek to destroy every reminder of his presence in the world. Though he gives us everything we have we act as though all that we have belongs to us. Then one day he captures us and brings us into his courts. We are dragged before him cursing him and his arrogant demand for our submission. We expect as God's enemy, to be put to death. However, as we see the sword of execution in the hand of God raised to bring justice upon us, the Son of this great king stands before his Father and says, "Kill me instead of him and then make him your son for my sake." And so the Father kills his Son in our place and gives us all the rights of a son. However, our hatred of him is so great that we will have none of it. We curse him as a fool for killing his son and count the death of his son as meaningless. You see, our rebel heart must be changed before we will ever see the death of the son as an act of love. So, through his great Spirit this great king changes our heart so that now, rather than hating him we hate our sin and rebellion. Instead of loving our own way, we love him and his ways. We are aware of how right it would be for him to destroy us forever. We fall in worship as we see that he killed his son instead of killing us. We are amazed that he has turned us into his beloved sons and that he treats us, for the sake of his son, as if we had always been obedient children. Why does this king treat rebels like this? Because he loves to show off his grace by loving those who are not worthy of his love. His greatness is most clearly seen in his love for sinners and his power in transforming rebels into loving children. This is the glory of God in Christ for which we are to live.

Therefore, when a person lives for the glory of God, he or she lives in a way that shows off the greatness of God, especially his greatness in the person and work of Christ. The skit we did shows, in a silly, but accurate way what it means to live for the glory of God. All of life is oriented around Christ. He is the focus of our love. He is the source of our happiness. He is the topic of our conversation. We would rather lose everything than lose him. We evaluate everything we do in relation to whether it will help us to know, trust and love Christ more or not. There are things we will not do because they would dishonor Christ. We care about what others think of Christ because

we cannot bear the thought of anyone or anything casting shame or doubt upon him. So we are careful about how we live around others. We yearn for others to join us in being impressed with Jesus and living for his honor.

Practically, how do we do this?

1. We live gratefully, giving thanks for all the gifts God gives to us.
2. We live freely, able to joyfully use the creation but not enslaved by any part of it. When any one of us asks the question, “what must I have to be happy?”, the answer comes back simply, “I must have Christ and all that God promises to be for me in him.” Your anger is your best tool in determining whether you are living contentedly. How do you respond when things don’t go as planned, when you don’t get what you want? If you find anger arising in you, you can know that your hope is not fixed in Christ.
3. We live in joyful suffering. This is a fact of the Christian life that is seldom discussed in American churches. Yet it is one of the predominant teachings of the NT. While I am beginning to understand the principle, I am a long way from living it consistently. I want you to listen to how John Piper describes how glad suffering brings glory to God. (Read pp. 104-105 in “Let the Nations Be Glad.”) When I maintain confident hope in God and joy in adversity I magnify the sufficiency of Christ. When I gladly give up rights and possessions for the love of God, I magnify the ability of God to be my all.

There is only one kind of Christian. It is a person that is delighted with all that God is for us in Christ and delighted to show off this great mercy in how she lives. It is a life that is full of gratitude and contentment and glad suffering. It is not surprising to me that we in the church have such a hard time talking with those outside the church about Christ when we hardly ever talk with one another about Christ. The most important thing we can do as individuals and as a church is plead with God for a vision of his greatness in Christ’s dying and rising for sinners. When we are overwhelmed with the lavish love of God in Christ, living and speaking for his glory will be the natural result.

The person or church that influences others for Christ imitates the life of Christ by...

- ◆ *Living for the glory of God*
- ◆ *And by...*

II. Living for the good of others

First, notice that when Paul is thinking of the good of others, he is always thinking in terms of their eternal good. He would not understand any church that engages in serving others without the eternal well-being of those being served in view. There are lots of problems in the world and many people in need. However, the church’s job is not to fix all the problems but to serve people so that they will be saved. If that is not the end at which you are aiming you are not aiming at the end for which God sent Christ and created the church. It is not our job to stop abortion, to get prayer reinstated in the schools, to make sure all the homeless have homes to live in, to feed the hungry as simply ends in themselves. We are to seek the good of others so that they might be saved. We seek the good of others in order to show off the greatness of God in Christ.

Second, notice that Paul identifies three classes of people we are not to offend, Jews, Greeks and the church of God. In other words, we are to work for the good of all kinds of people. We should not make a distinction between serving Christians and non-Christians. We should not make a distinction between people based on race or creed or gender or age. There is a strong tendency in churches who focus on reaching those who don’t go to church to imply that those who don’t attend church have more value than those in the church. In other, more tradition bound churches, it is only the needs of those in the church that receive consideration. Paul calls all of us to see that our lives impact everyone we relate to, non-Christian and Christian. I believe this lack of distinction in Paul is due to his view of the church. It is made up of all God’s sheep, some of them are already in the fold and some are not. The job of the church is to make sure that all the sheep make it home to heaven and so it matters how I treat them all, regardless of whether they are inside or outside of the sheep pen at the moment.

Third, notice that Paul uses three phrases describing how Christians are to live in their relationships. In v. 32 he says we are to “not cause anyone to stumble”, in v. 33 he says, “even as I try to please everyone in every way”, and

“I am not seeking my own good but the good of many”. These are synonymous phrases and as we look at them we will discover what it means to live for the good of others.

The first phrase tells us how not to live. We are to make sure we are not offensive to others. There are two things that Paul does not mean. First, he says in 1 Cor. 1:22-23, “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” In other words the gospel is offensive to non-Christians but that doesn’t mean we should stop sharing it. Second, Paul is not saying we should not offend non-believers who want us to participate in sin. 1 Peter 4: 4 says, “They (non-Christians) think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation and they heap abuse on you.” If your non-believing friend wants you to cheat on the test or help him steal some tools from work or go to a sexually explicit movie, you should offend him by saying, “No, I won’t do that.”

What is he telling us not to do? In our relationships with non-Christians don’t live in such a way that they will not consider Christ because of how you live, when how you live is not commanded by God. I’m going to give some examples. The danger of doing so is that you will turn them into some kind of law or that because I didn’t mention the way you are being offensive to non-Christians you won’t think any of this applies to you. This requires careful thought and self-examination. For example, to communicate that no good Christian can vote Republican (or Democratic) is causing an unnecessary offense. To communicate that if you are a Christian you cannot wear pants if you are a woman is to cause an unnecessary offense. To tell people you are a Christian while you are smoking a joint or getting drunk or watching pornography is to cause an offense. You will lead people to believe it is possible to be a Christian and engage in willful sin, which it is not. You are offending non-Christians unnecessarily if you make something other than their sin and Christ as the Savior for sinners the main issue in your discussion with them. When you communicate that a person cannot be a Christian and believe in evolution or believe it’s OK for women to be pastors, you are causing an offense. In other words, when you make secondary issues the main issue, you are offending non-Christians in the wrong way.

In your relationships with Christians don’t engage in behavior that will either entice another person to sin or that will cause them to abandon Christ by abandoning his church. For example, don’t serve a recovering alcoholic wine for dinner when she comes to your house. Don’t go to a movie that has sexually explicit scenes with a Christian friend you know is struggling with pornography. Don’t make disparaging remarks about people of other races, gender or economic class. Don’t treat those who struggle with sins different than the ones you struggle with as though they are somehow less spiritual than you.

When Paul says we are “to please everyone in every way”, what does he mean? Again it is necessary to point out that Paul says several times that he doesn’t please men. In 1 Thess. 2:4 he says, “On the contrary we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.” How can he say here that he tries to please everyone in every way and in many other places he says he never tries to please men? The answer is in the motive. If you are trying to get people to like you so that they will not persecute you, then you are trying to please men for the wrong reason. If you are trying to not offend others and to serve them so they will listen to the gospel you are doing what Paul commands.

What gives me such great encouragement from these four verses is that the task of working for the salvation of others is not complicated. If you and I will live for the glory of God and not be unnecessarily offensive and seek to please people by serving them we will be used by God in the salvation of his sheep both inside and outside the church.

Tell Fran and Tina’s story or John Thornburg (Emphasis needs to be on all the ways these people thought wrong and lived wrong and yet how knowing Christ has changed everything.)

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- ◆ *Living for the glory of God*
- ◆ *Living for the good of others*

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