

Introduction

1. Over the course of the last eight weeks or so we have worked our way through the first five chapters of this book which are primarily Paul's defense against a host of false accusations
2. As he nears the end of his defense, we see our first imperatives—commands—directed at the Corinthians
3. Paul issues these commands through a series of appeals found in 5:18-7:16:
 - a. The appeals can be summed up in this: an appeal to be reconciled to God and an appeal to be reconciled with Paul and his companions
 - b. In some respects, these cannot be separated because they are too closely intertwined as Paul and his companions were ambassadors for Christ—to be in a strained relationship with Paul and his companions put them at odds with the One they represented (God)
 - c. In 5:18-6:10 and 6:14-7:1 Paul makes some appeals to them regarding their relationship to the LORD (which will be our focus for today)
 - d. In 6:11-13 and 7:2-16 he appeals to them regarding their relationship to himself and Timothy (which we will cover next week)
4. A word about the structure of today's passage:
 - a. The primary appeal (imperative) is found in v. 5:20: **"Be reconciled to God."**
 - b. The rest of the material is supportive:
 - 1) An appeal to not take the grace of God in vain (v. 6:1)
 - 2) An appeal to not too closely associate themselves with unbelievers (v. 6:14)
 - 3) An appeal to cleanse themselves from all defilement (v. 7:1)—both of these two final appeals get to the heart of the matter, the Corinthian's sin as the cause of the strain on their relationship with God

A. Paul appeals to the Corinthians to be reconciled to God (READ 5:18-21)

1. Paul begins our passage today with two declarations:
 - a. FIRST: God had reconciled Paul and his companions to Himself: **"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ..."** (18a)
 - 1) Reconciliation refers to the mending or fixing of a broken relationship
 - 2) The **"us"** here refers first and foremost to Paul and his companions, but ultimately applies to every believer (as evidenced by v. 19 and Romans 5:10)
 - 3) God did this **"through Christ"**:
 - a) By **"not holding their trespasses against them"** (19)
 - b) By making **"Him who knew no sin to be sin [or a sin offering] on our behalf"** (21)
 - c) **"So that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [Christ]"**
 - b. SECOND: God gave Paul and his companions the ministry of reconciliation (18b): **"and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"**
 - 1) Paul explains what this means (19): **"namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word (or message) of reconciliation."**
 - 2) God had made Paul and his companions **"ambassadors for Christ"** (20)

- 3) And, as Christ's ambassadors, God used Paul and His companions to make His appeal to men: **"as though God were making an appeal through us"**
2. Paul took this role seriously, and therefore, pleaded with the Corinthians to be reconciled to God (20b): **"we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."**
 - a. One important thing to note is that **"be reconciled"** is in the passive voice
 - 1) They weren't to reconcile themselves to God, but rather ***be reconciled*** to God
 - 2) God is/has been the initiator of reconciliation
 - 3) Their role was to accept the offer of reconciliation
 - 4) In other words, they were to allow themselves to be reconciled to God
 - b. But why did they need to be reconciled? Weren't they already Christians?
 - 1) Some may have been unsaved and in need of initial reconciliation with God
 - 2) Some were saved but clearly disobedience and engaged in unrepentant sin and in need of restoration (see 6:14; 7:1; & esp. 12:21)
 - 3) Either way, they needed to be reconciled to God to fulfill His purpose: **"so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [Christ]"** (21)
 3. Practical Application:
 - a. If you are anything like me, you go through ups and downs spiritually, times where your relationship with the LORD seems perfect, and other times where you sense some distance between you and God or a strain on your relationship with Him
 - b. Sometimes this is a result of simply getting lazy—we skimp on devotion time, don't pray as often or stop all together, maybe we don't get into the Word
 - c. At other times it's more serious—like involving yourself in sin that drives a wedge between us and the LORD
 - d. Whatever the cause, there are times where we, like the Corinthians, need to be reconciled to God
 - e. It's at times like this that we need to follow the advice of James (James 4:8): **"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."**

B. Paul appeals to the Corinthians not to accept God's grace in vain (6:1-10; READ 1-2)
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1. What does Paul mean by not receiving the grace of God in vain?
 - a. The word for vain here has numerous uses in the NT: empty, without content, worthless
 - b. It can also be used to refer to lacking effectiveness or result
 - c. This is the way Paul uses it in a very similar passage when speaking of the result of God's grace in his own life: (1 Corinthians 15:10): **"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."**
 - d. In other words, when Paul accepted God's grace it had a profound transformative effect on who he was—he was truly transformed by God's grace and was no longer the same person with the same habits and sins
 - e. So, Paul's appeal to the Corinthians was that they take God's gift of grace seriously and allow it to effectively transform them just like it did Paul
 - f. He adds a sense of urgency to his plea with a quote from Isaiah 49:8 and applying it to the current time—In the same way that Isaiah had pleaded with the Israelites, Paul was

reminding the Corinthians that NOW is the time that God had listened to them and NOW is the time that He Helped them and offered them salvation

2. In vs. 3-10 Paul again returns to a defense of his role as Christ's ambassador, but it also serves as an example of not taking God's grace in vain (**READ 3-10**):
 - a. Paul and his companions had given no "**cause for offense in anything , so that the ministry will not be discredited**" (3a)
 - b. They had established themselves as God's servants as evidenced by their very lives (3b): "**but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God**":
 - 1) By their suffering (4-5)
 - 2) By the demonstration of God's grace and power (6-7)
 - 3) By their proven character (8-10)
3. Practical Application:
 - a. Are there times in your life when you take the grace of God in vain? I know there are when I do
 - b. When we do, we are more susceptible to fall into old habits and sinful behavior like the Corinthians did
 - c. Paul wrote that it's the kindness (e.g. mercy and grace) of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4)
 - d. This is why it's critical that we not take His grace for granted by continuing to sin, but rather allow it to transform us and lead us away from sin

C. Paul appeals to the Corinthians not to be bound to unbelievers (READ 6:14-18)

1. Paul now gets to the crux of the matter—the cause of the Corinthians strained relationship with not only the Lord, but with Paul and his companions, had to do with their association with unbelievers (14): "**Do not be bound together with unbelievers;**"
 - a. English translations render this in different ways:
 - 1) NASB: "**do not be bound together with unbelievers**"
 - 2) NET: "**Do not become partners with those who do not believe**"
 - 3) ESV: "**Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers**"
 - b. The words that Paul uses here suggest being wrongly matched or mismatched, a partnering or working together with those who do not share faith in Christ—and this is the key
 - c. The problem wasn't that they associated with unbelievers:
 - 1) In 1 Corinthians 10 he permitted them to buy food in the pagan marketplace and even encouraged them to accept invitations to dinner at the homes un the unsaved
 - 2) In 1 Corinthians 5 he stated that the only way to avoid associating with the unsaved would be to go out of the world which was not what God intended
 - d. The problem was the **degree** and **depth** to which they associated—or participated--with unbelievers in everyday things as referenced in 1st Corinthians:
 - 1) He may have had in mind their propensity to sue one another in the secular courts
 - 2) He may have had in mind their participation in sexual immorality with the temple prostitutes
 - 3) He may have had in mind their mixed marriages (saved to unsaved) or the men's habit of entertaining a wife, a concubine and sometimes prostitutes

- 4) He may have had in mind their willingness to join in the temple feasts where meat was sacrificed to idols as a form of worship
 - 5) Some of these things recorded in 1st Corinthians and hinted at here (14b-16a) **“for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial [reference to the Devil], or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?”**
2. God expects us to be in the world...just not of the world: (16-18): **“For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. 17 "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. 18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.”**
- a. When the Israelites moved into the land of Canaan it wasn't long before they began to adopt many of the cultural and religious practices of the Canaanites—they were supposed to be different, but they became the same as the Canaanites
 - b. In similar fashion, when the Corinthian became Christians and began to follow Christ, they apparently failed to leave behind or abandon some of the unbiblical and sinful practices of their culture, including some of the religious practices
 - c. It appears they were “partnering up” with the unsaved and continuing in things that offended God and ran counter to their calling as Christians

Donny and the Xenos Hot-tub-and-Beer “Bible studies”
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- d. When we do things like this it drives a wedge between us and the LORD because these things offend Him
3. Practical Application:
- a. It's hard to not succumb to norms and pleasures of the society and culture around us
 - b. Some of us weren't saved until later in life which means we have a LOT of practice with those things, and it's hard to give them up
 - c. Plus, because we live in the world, we are constantly bombarded by the things of the world—they way it thinks, the way it behaves, the things it values—and it's hard not to be influenced by them
 - d. But, we are called to walk according to our calling in Christ, to seek the things above where Christ, to be filled and driven by the Holy Spirit
 - e. This means we have to avoid joining ourselves too closely to the world or unbelievers if we expect to please the LORD

D. Paul appeals to the Corinthians to cleanse themselves from anything that defiled them (7:1)
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1. Paul's final appeal in our passage today is for the most part a summary of the above (1): **“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”**
 - a. The motivation for this appeal is the list of promises Paul just mentioned:
 - 1) There are at least four promises Paul mentioned:

- “I will dwell in them and walk among them”
 - “I will be their God, and they shall be my people”
 - “I will welcome you”
 - “I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me”
- b. These were true of Israel as long as they continued to love, honor and obey the Lord
- c. They are also true of us when we do what Paul called on the Corinthians to do: **“let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit”**:
- 1) Notice that Paul wrote **“let us”** rather than **“you”** which indicates that this is an appeal to all Christians. Including himself
 - 2) Both **“cleanse”** and **“defilement”** are loaded religious terms taken right from the old testament:
 - a) To cleanse means to purify something, or make it clean
 - b) To defile means to make something impure or unclean
 - c) Here Paul refers to defiling both the flesh and spirit
 - Things that defile the flesh would include things like sexual immorality, violence, drunkenness, gluttony, and anything else that impacts the body
 - Things that defile the spirit would include things like lying, stealing, lust, covetousness, jealousy, envy, strife, wrath, and others
2. Practical Application:
- a. While in one respect we have already been cleansed by Jesus (past tense), we are called upon to both cleanse ourselves and to allow ourselves to be cleansed (present tense):
 - 1) Past: Ephesians 5:25-27, esp. 26
 - 2) Present: James 4:8; 1 John 1:7-9
 - b. The goal of such cleansing is the **“perfecting [of] holiness in the fear of God.”**:
 - 1) Or as the ESB renders it, **“bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God”**
 - 2) READ 1 John 3:2-11 as concluding thought