

The Church's Place in *Picturing* Christ's Face
1 Corinthians 1–10 | 11.20.2016 | Body Life @OBC

In the Southern Hills of Germany there is a tiny village with a worldwide reputation.

Its name is Ober-ammer-gau . . . and during the Bubonic Plague, its people vowed to God if he protected them from the Plague, they'd put on a play depicting X's death / resurrection . . . to honor his mercy.

Since that fateful vow in 1634, the people of that small village in the mountains of Bavaria, have kept their word.

Famously, they have performed their Passion Play 102 times. The next rendition is scheduled for 2020.

Tickets are now available should you be interested.

There is so much right with Ober-ammer-gau and so much wrong.

The history, identity, and blessing of this people centers on the cross of Christ.

In this way, they are ostensibly a Jesus-centered people . . .

Their present reputation and future orientation are both aimed to dramatize the gospel.

Yet, for as much as this passion play marks their identity.

It seems this PLAY . . . has overshadowed the truth it communicates.

It may be a small distinction . . . but one that is SIGNIFICANT.

Instead of gaining a reputation for Christ's work in their midst . . . the town is now known for their dramatic production for God.

Even as . . . the facts of the gospel are set out on stage . . .

. . . I wonder how many miss its true import ??

. . . How many have replaced faith in Christ with a theatrical performance?

I can't answer for them . . . but . . . I can say in our country

It's very possible to talk about God, love, grace, Jesus. . . and still miss it!

I was reminded of this yesterday . . . as 2 Jehovah's Witnesses visited my house!

Blinded by false teaching. . . they look at the Bible but don't SEE what it says.

They go tell people about their faith . . . but they tell a message which denies who Jesus REALLY IS . . .

For both of these groups . . . they are so close and yet so far.

And the same can be true for any one of us . . . or all of us . . . apart from God's grace.

Indeed, many churches believe and teach the right gospel . . .
. . . but then turn to their own wisdom when they order their worship and evangelism

While believing what Scripture says about Christ and salvation, they do church in their own way . . . looking for creative ways to enhance the gospel.

But friends . . . the gospel does not need enhancement!

The church does not NEED to put on passion plays . . . IT IS A PASSION DRAMA.

Think about it . . .

When a **child** repents of his sin & comes to faith in Jesus, they're participating in an age old drama . . . where a lost sinner is rescued by X's blood & joined to God's family.

When a **woman** submits to baptism, she receives the same kind of watermark that God's people have had from Noah to Moses to Israel to Jesus to the disciples in Acts.

When a **church** gathers in the name of Jesus Christ under God's Word, they foreshadow the final assembly that Jesus will gather in the New Jerusalem.

AND When we eat & drink the **Lord's Supper** . . . we not only remind ourselves of Christ's death, we proclaim through bread and wine. . . the gospel of Jesus Christ.

All of these things DRAMATIZE the gospel . . .

And it is this gospel drama in the local church . . . that we find in **1 Cor 1–10**.

In this way . . . we might say . . . **1 Cor** was given B/C that church needed ‘acting lessons.’

They had been called into the kingdom, justified by faith, set apart by the Spirit . . . **BUT** B/C they held fast to the ways of Corinth . . . Christ’s presence was unclear

While their life together was meant to picture Christ and dramatize the gospel . . .
. . . it actually pictured the culture and cravings of Corinth instead.

So Paul writes . . . to direct the people he loved HOW to dramatize the gospel!

To unite last week’s message to this weeks . . . we might say:

Inside the FRAME of membership, we find a PICTURE of Christ’s redeemed people.

Only . . . the picture isn’t static . . . it’s a motion picture of life in Christ.

INDEED, this is why God saves us . . . to be a people

. . . who display his manifold perfections thru our unity, holiness, and love.

AND . . . not surprisingly, unity, holiness, and love are the three key ideas in this book.

Listen to how one commentator describes 1 Corinthians:

When [Paul] was facing the most normal of problems (division in the church, worldliness, selfishness, . . .) he reached for deeply theological responses. Paul called the Corinthian congregation to be not divided but united, not worldly but holy, not selfish but loving.

BUT . . . That’s not the surprising part. The surprising part is how he argued this with them. He called them to forsake divisions, because God is one. He called them to forsake sin, because God is holy. He called them to forsake selfishness, because God is loving.

In all of this, the governing presupposition is not that the church should operate by a rule book of spiritual manners and etiquette, but that the church is a living reflection of the living God. . . . His church, therefore, should reflect his own character; we should be united and holy and loving or else we lie about him! (Dever, *12 Challenges*, 10).

What a thought! The church is not just a Tupperware container preserving the elect. It is **movie trailer** God uses to draw his children to glory!

LOW . . . the church is created to display the power of the gospel . . .
. . . and so the church must consider how to do church.

And today, I want you to summarize 1 Corinthian 1–10 under the 3 main points in his letter – unity (1–4), holiness (5–7), and love (8–10).

Gospel Unity

The first place we see the effect of the gospel is in chapters 1–4.

For instance, in chapters 1–2 . . . we find the Triune God bringing salvation to his ppl.

In **chapter 1:26–31** . . . Paul speaks of God's calling. It is not based upon any qualification in the believer, but totally in the unconditional grace of God.

Paul assigns this calling to God, which is a personal reference to the Father.

Thru the preaching of Christ crucified (1:18 & 2:2), the Father calls his children home. Which brings us to the second person of the Trinity—the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

In **2:1–5**, we hear Paul speak of his insistence of proclaiming Christ, and nothing but Christ – **READ 2:2**

As an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1), he had one mission – to make Christ known.

Thus, when he came to Corinth, he preached X crucified, buried, raised on the 3rd day

And what happened when he called people to believe in that message?

F and S sent HS . . . to give eyes to see Christ's beauty and hearts to believe on him.

This is Paul's point in **2:6–15**. The Spirit is the one who makes God known to man.

Indeed, apart from the Spirit all of us are left dead in our sins.

But when Christ is preached and the God is pleased to send his Spirit, the power of God is manifested, and the church is unified by the God who is Three-in-One.

Truly, it makes sense that the God who has existed in perfect unity, who is One in essence, would create a people unified in his Son.

Later in the letter, Paul will return to this unity through the metaphor of the body.

Just as there many parts in the human body, but there is one body; so there are many parts in Christ's body . . . but there is only one body, one Christ, one God.

And thus Paul begins the body of his letter, retelling the work of God in the gospel.

The goal is to give theological grounds for the unity . . . lacking in the Corinth. church.

Notice . . . P doesn't aim for UNITY thru cultural preferences or the felt needs of the C's **Rather, he goes straight the gospel and the way each member of the trinity works in our salvation.**

From this Theological Foundation . . . he turns to the building materials of the church.

In chapter 3, Paul confronts the immaturity of the Corinthians and the way they are divided by various teachers.

In vv 5–6 he responds . . . **What then is Apollos . . . READ**

He downplays his own importance and stresses that he and Apollos have the same objective—to build up the body of Christ **through faithful preaching of the Word.**

For Paul, **the preaching of the Word . . .**

. . . is how the church comes into existence.

. . . it's how the church continues to be built up.

. . . and it's how the church stays unified.

It's not enough . . . to have morality, generic God-talk, nebulous commitment to love;
we need the gospel.

On Thursday of this week, I had three conversations that reminded me of this fact:

First conversation . . . was with a father who told me about his church. He praised his church for its structure; its moral formation of the children . . . but no mention of the G.

Second conversation . . . was with an elderly man at the gym. He spoke of “the Lord,” but when I asked who his Lord was . . . the name Jesus was nearly absent.

Third conversation . . . was with a Sunday School teacher from another church. He told me about a lesson he gave about God's love . . . it was powerfully received. But I wondered . . . was the cross mentioned ??

I'm not trying to pick . . . but I am grieved so much Christian talk is Christ-less:

Yes, **moral formation** is important . . . but it doesn't have the power to unify the church. Because eventually . . . we will disagree on how certain principles are applied.

Generic God-talk may be better in the world than outright atheism . . . but in the church bumper sticker slogans will not empower reconciliation and self-sacrifice.

Emotional experiences of God's love are great ... **IF** they're grounded in X's cross . . . but if they are just emotional experience without the cross . . . such love sours.

Morals, civil religion, cross-less love-talk are JUST NOT powerful enough to unify the church.

Only the gospel of Jesus Christ is . . . able to bring lasting unity

And thus Paul turns to his own example in chapter 4 . . .

to show just how much the cross has shaped his life . . . and should shape all our lives

Listen to his words . . . **READ 4:10–13**

Paul is so satisfied with the love of God found in the gospel of Jesus Christ . . . he is willing to be treated like the refuse of the world . . . so that others might know his love.

Just consider . . . the way such an approach to life creates unity.

The **gospel-minded man** does not think highly of himself . . . but instead is willing to be maligned and misunderstood so that others would be built up

The **gospel-minded woman** does good works because of God's grace . . . not she is trying to keep up appearances.

The **gospel-minded church** does not fracture when opposition or disagreement comes . . . rather they press into the Word, prayer, and one another.

They weigh everything against the central feature of their life – the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And when this is central . . . all other differences are seen for what they are.

Hence, the G creates a unity that dramatizes the reconciliation offered in X.

And when this happens . . . the world takes notice.

In a church where the gospel is thick . . . there begins to exist a unity that the world cannot take away or reproduce.

But . . . it is a unity they can see . . . AND WANT

And so it creates an environment where people want to hear the Gospel.

Gospel Holiness

UNITY is not the only gospel fruit . . . HOLINESS is another.

. . . And it is the one fruit we need most today.

Not unlike the church in Corinth . . . there has grown up in the American church a pride surrounding **self-centered authenticity** . . .

Meaning: Instead of living out their new nature in Christ;

. . . many Christians believe **authentic** living is found by embracing the ongoing presence of sin in their lives.

SO . . . they praise the Lord for his pardoning grace . . . but continue to hold on to various sins under the category of acceptable “struggles” . . .

As a result . . . many in the church live with a relativized view of sin:

Addressing this point, Brett McCracken, author of *Hipster Christianity* writes:

“It’s almost as if our sins have become a currency of solidarity—something we pat each other on the back about as fellow authentic, broken people. But sin should always be grieved rather than celebrated, . . .

“Brokenness is an interesting word because if it’s sin, we should call it that,” . . . “I only feel sorry for broken people. [But] God [in his holiness] is MAD at sinful people.

This is not the way you make friends today . . . but read the Psalms:

Psalms 5:5 – The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Psalms 11:5 - The Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.

[These words of judgment are not eliminated by the gospel . . . they show the need for the gospel . . . which pardons sinners *AND* provides a new heart that loves holiness].

McCracken goes on:

Wounded-ness and brokenness are ASPECTS of our sinful condition, but they tend not to emphasize the 'I'm giving God the finger' part of it.

We've become too comfortable with our sin, to the point that it's how we identify ourselves and relate to others.

But shouldn't we find connection over Christ, rather than over our depravity?

Have seen this attitude ?? This penchant for authenticity over holiness?

I know I have. I've seen it in others . . . and most sadly, I've seen it in myself.

I speak too easily of brokenness and not sinfulness.

I can treat sin too lightly— my sin and the sin of others.

And thus I need Paul's rebuke . . . I must not be arrogant.

Look at 1 Corinthians 5:1–2 . . . **READ**

You are arrogant! Why don't you mourn?

Paul begins this section on holiness, by confronting the Corinthians low view of sin.

He gives them a severe test in chapter 5 . . . Will they supremely value God's holiness or will they protect their place and position in Corinth?

Paul calls them to exercise discipline against a man, presumably a leading figure in the church or in Corinth . . . and he presses them to pursue holiness.

Next, in **chapter 6** he reminds them God has given them sufficient wisdom AND that they who have been bought with a price . . . are called to live like it.

And then . . . in **chapter 7** . . . Paul gives more positive instructions concerning how men and women might please the Lord with their sexuality.

In previous weeks . . . we covered all those points . . . and you can find them online . .

Today, it is worth recalling the gospel HINGE on which all of this turns.

READ 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 . . . **Three points**

1. The unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom.

He doesn't make a distinction between unbelievers and believers . . . or between unbelievers who are unrighteous and believers who are unrighteous.

Rather . . . he simply says all those whose lives are marked by unrepentant unrighteousness . . . will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The point being . . . there is no category for believers who are unrighteous.

Leads to the question: **What is unrighteousness?**

2. Unrighteousness is a pattern of unbelieving sin that results in *porneia* . . . v. 9b–10.

In this list, Paul is not singling out any one sin . . . rather he's listing all sins which will not inherit the kingdom of God.

And why will they not inherit the kingdom ??? Because their life is marked out by unrighteousness . . . and not faith.

REMEMBER: Faith results in love, service, and good deeds. Unbelief results in selfishness, self-centeredness, and these sins.

So these acts of unrighteousness are evidences of a greater problem – a heart that is fundamentally at odds with God.

TSID: These judgment earning sins are evidence of sinful pollution in a person's life . . . but ultimately upstream, the headwaters of sin is an impure heart of unbelief!

The failure to believe in Christ . . . is just as damnable as any outward sin . . . but we can't see the heart . . . only the pollution that it produces.

And thus . . . Paul's list . . . reveals those who live lives of unrepentant sin—WHETHER THEY CALL THEMSELVES XIANS OR NOT—will not inherit KoG

God will not turn a blind eye to your sin . . . he will either extinguish his wrath on you in hell . . . OR . . . he will wash you, sanctify, justify through his SON.

3. The Gospel cleanses the unbeliever . . . by creating faith in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Don't miss the Trinity here . . . the Father washes, sanctifies, justifies "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit." **So... the gospel comes w/ full power of God**

BUT . . . even more . . . don't miss the effect of the gospel.

It not only pardons sin; it also cleanses / sanctifies.

That is . . . it sets apart the believer to walk in holiness.
There is no saving gospel . . . that leaves a sinner in his sin.

There would sooner be a fish without gills, than a Christian without holiness.
Yes, it is Christ's righteousness . . . not ours that enables us to stand before God.

But the same God who justifies freely . . . creates in us a love for holiness.
He removes the heart of unbelief . . . He gives us a heart of faith.
Thus holiness is not a burden to the Xian . . . rather, with the HS, it is his or her joy.

Authenticity about one's sin is not a mark of true Christianity . . . **growing holiness is** . . .
And thus . . . only as we labor in holiness . . . can we display the power of the Gospel.

Gospel Love

Finally . . . the same gospel which produces unity and holiness . . . also produces love.

In 1 Corinthians . . . this is seen in chapters 8–10 . . .

In ch. 8 and 10, Paul calls the Cs to use their freedom to serve others, not self.

The Corinthians have gotten this backward . . . some worship idols and others to lacerate the consciences of their brothers with their freedoms.

Paul says to all of them . . . glorify God by serving one another.

Think not just of your stomach . . . but of the body of Christ. This is how you love!

And in the middle of this instruction, ch. 9, Paul gives his own example

He zealously abandons his own freedoms . . . so that others can benefit.

Chapter 9 tells of how Paul DRAMATIZES the gospel in his own way of living!

Because of God's grace and love . . . he is constrained by the love of God to share Christ with everyone . . .

Look at 1 Corinthians 9:15–23 . . .

These are the verses we read earlier . . . and they are where we conclude.

Paul sees his reward chiefly in terms of the freedom to preach the gospel

And in terms of the final judgment . . .

His singular aim in life is consistent with the gospel he has believed . . . and thus he lives to see as many people come to faith in Christ as possible.

This is the defining mark of his life . . . it is what shapes every square inch of his love.

For him . . . love is not defined by experience or feeling but by God's Word.

And thus **as he says in Galatians 2:20**

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Or again in 2 Corinthians 5:14

The love of Christ compels us . . . to share Christ with others.

Indeed . . .

The genesis of our love is God's love . . . demonstrated in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's point in **ch. 9** is that just as Christ laid down his life to serve others
. . . So Paul is laying his life down for others.

And in 11:1 . . . when he finishes this section, he calls you and I to imitate him.

Can you imagine . . . what this would look like in a church?

If everyone was putting others first, seeking the needs of others, . . .
. . . outdoing one another in showing honor, and speaking truth in love?

If everyone was doing this . . . it would look like a FLASH MOB in a crowded mall.

If you have ever seen a flash mob . . . all of a sudden the group of apparent strangers
breaks into song and dance . . . and they begin a highly-choreographed dance.

The same is true in the church . . .

In the company of a local church . . . we who largely live our lives in the marketplaces
of the world . . . break out in song and service . . . such that we show that . . .
THOUGH WE ARE IN THE WORLD . . . WE DANCE TO A DIFFERENT BEAT

Our other-worldly rhythms display the choreography of our Lord.

Or better . . . our love displays the gospel that we have believed together.

This is what the gospel does

In God's love... we receive amazing grace... and by God's forgiveness we love others.

As Jesus said . . . **those who have been forgiven much, love much!**

This is why Paul loved so much . . . he never got over God's forgiveness.
Rather . . . God's grace propelled him to lay down his life for others.

And so . . . in 1 Corinthians . . . and in all his letters . . .

. . . he stresses Spirit-empowered, Christ-like love.

Which brings us back to the church's calling to picture the gospel.

As a church we do not simply gather together

. . . to worship the same God, at the same place, at the same time

We're not patrons who agree to meet, greet, eat once a week at the same restaurant.

No . . . if we are assembling as the Lord intends, we are . . .

A theater of the gospel . . . a company of Scripture-saturated performers,

. . . in which every member plays an important part . . .

. . . and every member is contributing his or her spiritual gift to build up one another.

Over time . . . this commitment to one another pictures Christ to one another and the world.

Or at least . . . This is the way God intends his church to display his unity, holiness, and love

It is not thru star-studded Christian celebrities . . . who individually 'awe' the crowd.

But through a troupe of humble but holy, lowly but loving children whose unity is singularly attributed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In truth . . . we don't need to put on a dramatic presentation like the town of Ober-ammer-gau

. . . we already ARE a theater for the gospel.

. . . the only question is "How good is our acting?"

. . . And what can we do to improve our lines

. . . and better display HIS unity, holiness, love?

Paying attention to what Scripture about the church is a key part of that . . .

. . . But even more important is our ongoing gaze at Christ himself.

. . . For indeed, he is the One who gives us our Script . . . and the cast the of characters he wants us to serve . . .

. . . And if we hold on to them—the Gospel and God's people—we will by his grace manifest his unity, holiness, and love . . . **and there's no better drama than that!**