

I.N.I.

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany
February 23, 2014
I Cor. 3:10-11, 16-23

In Christ Jesus, who is the One Foundation that has been laid upon which we build our faith and our life, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

San Francisco has a reputation for being a very liberal city with a large contingent of homosexual activists and pretty open immoral activities that are condoned. But it pales in comparison to what the city of Corinth was like.

The main feature of the city were the heathen temples dedicated to the gods Isis and Serapis, and the large temple of Aphrodite—also known by the Romans as Venus. This temple was built on a hill overlooking the city. Aphrodite was the goddess of love and unchastity—or you could say lust and immorality. In this temple more than 1,000 priestesses served the people as temple prostitutes. Sexual relations with these priestesses was considered an act of worship.

The reputation of a Corinthian man was one of a hard drinker, a womanizer, a live for today kind of guy, with no regards for morals. The term “to Corinthianize” meant to lead a depraved, licentious life—a life without any moral boundaries, given to excessive indulgences in drinking and immorality.

We also heard in the past few weeks in our sermons that the Greek mind of these Corinthians loved a good debate, philosophy, eloquent speakers and worldly wisdom. Corinth had become a large industrialized city with much commerce and trade and was known for shipbuilding. Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Asians, Egyptians, Jews and others filled its streets and homes bringing with them their many religious beliefs, heathen practices and a mixture of cultures.

Into this city Paul came with the simple Gospel message of One God who loved mankind so much that He sent His Son to take our place and pay for the penalty of all people’s sins and--- amazingly, through the power of the Gospel, a Christian congregation was established.

Paul spent 18 months in this city preaching and teaching God’s Word and when he left and got to Ephesus he sent a gifted pastor named Apollos back to Corinth to strengthen the members with continued Gospel preaching.

While Paul was in Ephesus he had heard disturbing reports about the Corinthian congregation and so he penned this letter.

It was not easy being a Christian in such an idolatrous and immoral city. This letter of Paul’s reflects the difficulties this newly founded congregation faced as an island of believers surrounded by a heathen environment.

In the first chapter of this letter we have heard the Apostle Paul tell these members that they were called into Christ’s church and became members of this congregation not because of who they were, but because of Christ, because of His mercy and grace. Therefore their glorying and boasting must be in God not in themselves.

In chapter 2 Paul told them how he approached them in fear and trembling, yet with the one message of Christ and Him crucified—the one message the world does not know on its own. This message is the real wisdom we need to hear and believe and spread.

In this third chapter Paul continues to encourage his fellow believers in their daily faith walk, in their life of sanctification.

In our section this morning which we have entitled

WORDS TO A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

Paul says that **I: We have been founded upon Jesus and His Word.**

We read vs. 10-11: **ACCORDING TO THE GRACE OF GOD WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME, AS A WISE MASTER BUILDER I HAVE LAID THE FOUNDATION, AND ANOTHER BUILDS ON IT. BUT LET EACH ONE TAKE HEED HOW HE BUILDS ON IT. FOR NO OTHER FOUNDATION CAN ANYONE LAY THAN THAT WHICH IS LAID,**

WHICH IS JESUS CHRIST. By God's grace Paul had founded this congregation in Corinth upon Christ and His Word and now Apollos was continuing to build upon that One Foundation.

Paul has a very good reason to emphasize this Foundation for not only is Jesus the Cornerstone upon which the Church rests but His work of redemption is the heart and core of our proclamation. The Bible reminds us: **NOR IS THERE SALVATION IN ANY OTHER, FOR THERE IS NO OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN GIVEN AMONG MEN BY WHICH WE MUST BE SAVED.**

Paul knew that not only in Corinth but everywhere in the world people have been trying to establish other foundations, other ways to eternal life---obedience to the laws of God; self-sacrifice; prayers; offerings; indulgences; false gods; man-made idols. All people will find these foundations to be sinking sand on Judgment Day. As the hymn writer states:

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

When He shall come with trumpet sound, Oh, may I, then in Him be found, clothed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

Paul wants the members of Corinth and us to learn from the heart—there is no other foundation upon which to build our hope of heaven and eternal life but Jesus Christ. Not church membership, not church attendance, not our offerings or prayers, not our good works. Did we all hear that? Do we all understand that? May the Holy Spirit lead us to continue to believe in Christ alone as our One and Only way to heaven.

II: We are God's holy temple.

Then we are God's holy temple. Every believer in Jesus is a dwelling place of the Triune God. God's temple, purified by the blood of the Lamb: holy, sanctified, set apart for God, separated from the rest of the world by the Holy Spirit. We are that TEMPLE! God has placed His name on us! We have been reborn into His family through Baptism. He will not tolerate the defilement of His name or of His dwelling place.

How is His name and temple (our bodies) defiled? By false teaching and impure living. Paul does not mince words: **DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOU ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD AND THAT THE SPIRIT OF GOD DWELLS IN YOU? IF ANYONE DEFILES THE TEMPLE OF GOD, GOD WILL DESTROY HIM. FOR THE TEMPLE OF GOD IS HOLY, WHICH TEMPLE YOU ARE.**

Paul also has good reason to emphasize this. For in the rest of this letter we see Paul rebuking and correcting such wrongs in this congregation as

- 1) The members allowed immorality to stand in the congregation by not taking church discipline against a member who was living in sin against the sixth commandment.
- 2) Some members were angry toward each other and even some were suing one another in court.
- 3) The members were tempted to do in Corinth as the rest of the Corinthians did in regard to sexual pleasures outside of marriage.
- 4) The conduct of the members at their Agape meals was deplorable where some became drunk and pigged out on food while others went without any food.
- 5) There were some who openly doubted the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

All of these moral and doctrinal problems within this congregation threatened every child of God, every temple, every body in which the Holy Spirit dwelled.

Later in chapter 6 Paul becomes very specific in his application of these words. We read some verses from chapter 6: **DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD? DO NOT BE DECEIVED. NEITHER FORNICATORS, NOR IDOLATERS, NOR ADULTERERS, NOR HOMOSEXUALS, NOR SODOMITES, NOR THIEVES, NOR COVETOUS, NOR DRUNKARDS, NOR**

REVILERS, NOR EXTORTIONERS WILL INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD. AND SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU. BUT YOU WERE WASHED, BUT YOU WERE SANCTIFIED, BUT YOU WERE JUSTIFIED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS AND BY THE SPIRIT OF OUR GOD... FLEE SEXUAL IMMORALITY. EVERY SIN THAT A MAN DOES IS OUTSIDE THE BODY, BUT HE WHO COMMITS SEXUAL IMMORALITY SINS AGAINST HIS OWN BODY. OR DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOUR BODY IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT *WHO IS* IN YOU, WHOM YOU HAVE FROM GOD, AND YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN? FOR YOU WERE BOUGHT AT A PRICE; THEREFORE GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY AND IN YOUR SPIRIT, WHICH ARE GOD'S.

III: We should follow God's wisdom, not this world's.

Paul says we must follow God's wisdom, not this world's wisdom. We read vss. 18-20 **LET NO ONE DECEIVE HIMSELF. IF ANYONE AMONG YOU SEEMS TO BE WISE IN THIS AGE, LET HIM BECOME A FOOL THAT HE MAY BECOME WISE. FOR THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD IS FOOLISHNESS WITH GOD. FOR IT IS WRITTEN, "HE CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR OWN CRAFTINESS"; AND AGAIN, "THE LORD KNOWS THE THOUGHTS OF THE WISE, THAT THEY ARE FUTILE."**

The world considers it foolish to believe that the Son of God became a human being to live a perfect life for us and to die the death of a common criminal upon the cross as a payment for the sins of the whole world. They believe they don't need a Savior, they can earn their own way. But their false wisdom is a trap that leads to eternal destruction. For the wisdom of God they have rejected as foolishness, is the only way to heaven.

What a serious warning Paul lays upon the hearts of the Christians in Corinth. What an even more serious warning he lays upon our hearts. For we have the full revelation of Jesus Christ right here in His Word. The Corinthians did not. We have no excuse when we are duped into following the worldly attitudes or worldly beliefs and ways concerning marriage and divorce; adultery and abortion; fornication and false teaching; drunkenness and disobedience, homosexuality and hearing God's Word.

We cannot plead ignorance as if we didn't know what God has to say about these things. If we fall for them, then we have simply let the world's wisdom speak louder than God's Word and listened more to it than we have to God.

But Paul says we don't have to be like the unbelieving Corinthians, we don't have to follow the world that tempts us for

IV: We possess all things!

We read our last verses: **THEREFORE LET NO ONE BOAST IN MEN. FOR ALL THINGS ARE YOURS: WHETHER PAUL OR APOLLOS OR CEPHAS, OR THE WORLD OR LIFE OR DEATH, OR THINGS PRESENT OR THINGS TO COME -- ALL ARE YOURS. AND YOU ARE CHRIST'S, AND CHRIST IS GOD'S.**

Everything must serve God's gracious purpose. The whole world is at our disposal to use to God's glory and to further His kingdom. Christ and God the Father are above us, but everything in and of this world they have given to us to use for their glory and for our eternal welfare. To use according to God's plans and purposes.

Paul says in chapter 10: **THEREFORE, WHETHER YOU EAT OR DRINK, OR WHATEVER YOU DO, DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD.**

We are able to use what we have learned and experienced in the past and in the present and what we hope for in the future for God's glory. We are able to use this world's beauty, resources, technology, and comforts for our earthly and spiritual benefits. Even death itself must serve us, for it is not the end of life, but the beginning of real life, it is merely our gateway, our open door to the eternal Paradise above.

And finally we are Christ's. He is all things to us, we have all things in Him. And Christ is God's, meaning as the God-Man He was the Father's servant, perfectly obeying Him and carrying out the work of the redemption and salvation of all people so we who are in Christ are also of God the Father.

When we belong to Christ, and in Him belong to God, then we have everything we ever need.

Amen.