

## INTRO:

Alright friends, come on back...I hope that gave you a chance to connect. AND that you'll continue that connection within a Missional Family Meeting, since as we say, THOSE are really where we're able to "*connect around good news and help others do the same!*" ...Parents, at this time, feel free to dismiss your kids with ***Caroline*** - (PAUSE) -

So let me invite you to imagine something: Imagine first, two brothers: One is wasteful, exploitative, and licentious. The other: rigid, moralistic, and uptight. So two VERY different brothers/VERY different personalities/VERY different sets of problems...Imagine as well, two sisters: One is a productive, but anxious busybody who never rests; the other, more of a free-spirit bordering on lazy...And then imagine finally, two Americans: One, a practicing homosexual and proud of it. The other a practicing church-goer and proud of IT. The former trusts his feelings/the latter his actions.<sup>1</sup> Got it?...Now let me ask: Would it surprise you to know that in the Scriptures, Jesus not only spoke TO folks like each of those BUT invited each to see that as different as they might be from each other, their need to trust HIM was exactly the same.

Last week, we began a two-week mini-series surveying the Apostle Paul's ***First Letter to the Corinthian Church***, and in-so-doing MAKING the case that while each of us exhibit different symptoms with respect to the conditions that drive us and problems that ail us, the Gospel/***the Good News of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension for our past, present and future freedom***, when that is brought to bear ON our problems/whatever they are, REALLY can unlock em. Cuz of course last week we saw Paul do exactly that with 3 very specific problems the Corinthian Church faced. AND we're gonna see him do it again today with 3 more - the hope in all this being, that AS you see the Gospel inform problems like these, you'll come to see that it TOO has the ability to inform YOUR problems, IF ONLY you'll learn to appropriate it by faith...So let's pray, and then we'll look at 3 more problems the Corinthian Church faced, and how the Gospel both addresses and redresses em! ***Let's Pray... (ABCs + Diving Board)***

## TEXT:

So if you're taking notes, here's ***Problem #1 Today: The Problem of Frustration with Your Station/Frustration with Your Station***: And by "station" I mean, your season or lot in life. Cuz beginning in ***ch. 7*** Paul says in ***v.1***, "*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote...*" Pause there! The Corinthian Church had written to Paul regarding various issues. Remember, this is a church consisting almost entirely of new Christians, situated right in the middle of an incredibly pluralistic city. So it's not surprising to think that these young Christians/like all of us struggled and needed guidance on things/ranging as the rest of ***ch. 7*** shows, from marital issues, to single life, to various other stations IN life. Just to name a few: things like husbands and wives maintaining a healthy/FREQUENT sex life together...Spouses working to avoid divorce in culture where "no-fault" divorce was basically a given...Gender roles for healthy marriages... Additionally, you got questions about singleness, since obviously, in a church like the Corinthian one, you'd have a lot of young, urban professionals wrestling with things like sex outside of

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<sup>1</sup> Description adapted from <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2009/11/the-gospel-is-the-antidote-for-everything/>

marriage or dating non-Christians. So just all kinds of questions that those of you that are married/single KNOW can be FRAUGHT with anxiety/frustration...Just the other day, I was talking to a neighbor in Starbucks and she told me how before a couple weeks ago, she'd known about people having mid-life crises, where ya know, sometime in their 50's or something, they start questioning their purpose and such. Well she looks at me and she says, "*I'm 36 and I'm doing that now. I guess it's one of these frustrating quarter-life crises.*"

The Corinthians were no different. And rather than giving em some garbage pop-psychology like, "*just do you or discover your passion,*" Paul brings the Gospel to bear ON their frustration. Look in **vv.17,20-24**. He says, "*Only let each person lead the life the Lord has assigned to him... Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. Were you a bondservant when called? Don't be concerned about it. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity... You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.*" Now I know at first glance some of us read that and think Paul's against human betterment or personal advancement. But ya gotta understand, he's not saying, that if we have opportunity to advance in some area of life, we should reject it. He actually says the opposite in **v.21**; not to mention, Paul was himself, one of the most ambitious men ever to walk the earth. ***His emphasis is NOT on the station of life, but your frustration WITH the station.*** He's saying REGARDLESS of what station of life/season of life you find yourself in right now, you can actually live WITH contentment and WITHOUT stress in it!<sup>2</sup>...***Wouldn't that be nice?***...And here's how: By understanding, as He says, "***that God has bought you at a price!***"/bought you at a price! ***You can be content where you are/even if it's not where you wanna be because God spent a ton to make you His!***

Let me explain: The Gospel of Jesus Christ is really the good news of your gracious acceptance...but NOT because of your effort or record/as in all other religions, but because of JESUS' - Jesus living the life you should live, and then dying to pay the penalty you owe for the rebellious life you DO live. WHICH means you see, God has, really scandalously, provided for your acceptance, BEFORE you were acceptable!...So no matter what season of life you're in God IS PLEASED with you! Think about the impact that simply ***Accepting your Acceptance/*** Accepting your Acceptance would have on your station in life! How your frustration with being single, married, single again/in ANY season of life, would change if you KNEW you were held by a love that's already yours!

**Second: The Problem of Freedom and Rights:** In **ch.8 v.1** Paul begins by saying, "*Now concerning food offered to idols...*" AFTER WHICH he goes on to address the fact that a problem had arisen as some of the Corinthian Christians began to believe they had a ***right*** to eat food that had been used, in some way, as a part of a pagan ritual, while OTHER Corinthian Christians believed such food was off-limits/they weren't ***free*** to eat it. And that might not sound like an issue to us, but within Greco-Roman society, pagan rituals were the norm/you almost couldn't escape em. And during these rituals, various meats would be offered on an altar. And

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<sup>2</sup> W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 233.

what would happen was the meat would be divided into three portions: one to be burned, a second to be given to the priest, and a third to the offerer. And if the priest didn't use his portion, it was then taken to the meat market to be sold...which happened frequently. So the kinds of problems Christians faced, for example, were wondering things like: was the meat they purchased spiritually contaminated. Had the pagan god had any effect ON the meat? Or just, would eating meat like that in anyway affirm an un-Biblical practice?<sup>3</sup> And again, those might not sound like big questions to us, but if replace the word "*food*" or "*meat*" with say... "*masks... vaccines...mandates,*" I think you'll see that the issue's really less about food and more about ***freedom and rights.*** Are we free to choose whether eat, wear, abide...or not?

Which is WHY Paul's application of the Gospel here is so relevant. Cuz look at what he says, ***ch.8 vv.8-9*** and ***ch.9 v.19:*** "*Food* (or masks, vaccines, political stances, etc) *will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak...For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.*" And the key verse there is ***v.8***, "*Food will not commend us to God...one way or the other.*" And the reason that's key is because it's a clear reference to the Gospel; SPECIFICALLY the fact that, you understand/because of Christ, you are forgiven, adopted into God's family, and ultimately saved NOT by your ability to put together a record of righteousness and GIVE it to God as it were, BUT by Jesus' ability to put together a record and GIFT it to you. THAT AND ONLY THAT is what "*commends*" anyone to God! So practically, here's what that means: It means/and I know this might rub some of you the wrong way but: it means your performance/your behavior/good OR bad/certainly with respect to hot-topics like food, masks, politics, etc WILL NOT and CANNOT "*commend*" you more or less to God! I've said it like this to you before: *In Christ, there is nothing you can do so well as to make God love you more. But ALSO nothing you can do so poorly as to make God love you less.* The scandal of the Gospel is in many respects that God loves BOTH the saint & the scoundrel/the religious and the irreligious/the conservative and the liberal. And that's BECAUSE God's love FOR and acceptance OF anyone has never been predicated on our performance or behavior, but Jesus'<sup>4</sup>! And so ***Jesus is***, you could say/write this down, ***the end of striving and beginning of serving!*** *The end of striving and beginning of serving...* It's like at your work: If your boss so perfectly approves of you that NEITHER your positive NOR your negative job performance can cause him to change the way he feels about you, what does that do for you? It frees you up right? Frees you from, in any way, having to strive or be self-serving in your job...WHICH MEANS then, if you're not having to be self-serving, then you're now free to what?...serve others right?...As Paul says, "*be a servant to all, in order to win some.*" ***You see?***

I'll give ya a really basic application of this. Where I come from alcohol is a kind of hot button issue/but you can insert basically any topic in place OF alcohol here. But anyway, right or wrong, people have strong opinions about whether, AT legal age, you should drink or not. Cuz on

<sup>3</sup> Explanation of pagan ritual practice derived from insight in W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 238.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from J.D. Greear's "Gospel Prayer" - <https://jdgreear.com/the-gospel-prayer/>

one side you got folks who completely abstain USUALLY out of a good motivation to ensure that they don't fall/or cause others to fall into the trap alcohol dependency. And of course, that's more-than-valid concern given that AUD/Alcohol Use Disorder sadly, impacts OVER 25% of the population/1/4th of us!<sup>5</sup> So I've heard this camp passionately argue things like, "*if I knew that having a dog in my house would mean getting bitten 1 out of every 4 times, I'm not gonna keep that dog in my house.*" And honestly, it's not a bad argument!...But then on the other side you've got folks who will just as passionately and reasonably argue for the freedom TO drink...of course in moderation, because there's absolutely NO good argument for drunkenness as aChristian. The Scriptures are very clearly against that. ***So which is it? Free to drink? Or not?*** And years ago, this issue actually became somewhat personal for me. I grew up in a family with some history of alcoholism and so was always a bit leery of drinking. Moreover, I have extended family, who strongly believe that to partake in alcohol AT ALL is itself sinful. But at the same time, I was working for a company and had come to be good friends with a group of about 10 co-workers/none of em Christ-followers, all of em 21 years and older and not opposed to drinking. Like it was just part of what they did together. And one of the things the Lord began to do was gave me an opportunity to share Jesus with em. Actually, for over a year, we met at my house every Tuesday night, grilled-out, drank a beer together...and studied the Bible. And that was kinda the pre-req: A couple guys were in charge of bringing the meat, another couple in charge of the drinks, and I was in-charge of bringing the...Bible Study/you can tell who the cool one in the group was...But what was great was God really changed many of those guys' lives!... Unfortunately though, some of my extended family got wind of all this and honestly got pretty upset, cuz in their minds, not only was I allowing alcohol in my house, I was partaking...And it'll tell ya: It really threw me, cuz of course, I didn't wanna upset family/certainly didn't wanna come off as being cool with something someone might consider sinful. AND YET, at the same time, I knew that if I went to these guys and said "*sorry boys, but you're not allowed to drink in my home,*" not only would that have been unloving to them, cuz it woulda been effectively imposing a kind of legalistic "law" on em, but I knew it was gonna kill our ability to hang out, study the Scriptures together and ultimately see God change their lives. ***So what would you do?***... Well, I'll tell ya what I did and you can judge for yourself whether it was the right move or not, but I prayed about it and asked God to help me know how to live out Paul's words here; specifically, how to be, as he says, on the one hand "*free from all,*" which is to say not worried about the opinions of others/even my family, knowing that NOTHING I did or didn't do would change how God felt about me...BUT on the other hand "*a servant to all - BOTH my family AND my co-workers - THAT I might win them*" - point em all more to Jesus. And so I'll tell ya, for better or worse, what the Lord lead me to do was two things: ***One***, not do anything different with my co-workers. Keep opening up my home, practicing hospitality and even getting my church at the time to give me \$1000 so I could provide food and drink free of charge for the guys for about 6 months...which is another story, but basically, I went to my Pastor and Elders and said, "*Guys, I'm good friends with 10 wonderful non-Christian guys. But no matter how many times I invite em, they're not coming to church on Sunday. But they will come to my house and study the Bible. I need you to give me 1000 bucks so I can love them well by buying good food*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://drugabusestatistics.org/alcohol-abuse-statistics/>

*and drink to keep studying the Bible with em.*" And they actually did it! Gave me \$1000 check the next day! Which by the way, is one of the reasons we ear-mark money in our church budget every year that is reserved for you/your Missional Family to love and serve your neighbors with the Gospel. Only pre-req. to utilizing that money is YOU believing using it to love others in Jesus' name, and then asking! So I didn't do much different with my guys.

But then **Two**, I did call my family. And I explained to them what God was doing in these guys and how I really wanted to be focused on, as Paul says here, "*doing whatever necessary to win em to Jesus,*" BUT I also explained that I understood their concern and wanted to lovingly serve them too EVEN if it meant giving up my "*right*" to drink as it were. And so I told em: that since alcohol seemed to be a kind of as Paul calls it, "*stumbling block,*" I would respectfully abstain from any and all alcohol in their presence. And by God's grace, that's what I've done for the last 13 years - even, by the way, when it's meant dumping out the fridge in advance of a family member staying with us or something!

Here's my point: Whether it's alcohol, masks, vaccines, mandates, entertainment, food or any other NON-SIN cultural issue, the way you find the ability to live free, meaning NOT live the way you want, but live the way you ought - in service to others - is if you see that ***Jesus is the end of striving and beginning of serving.*** That in Jesus nothing you do or don't do will "commend" you more or less to God! You're as loved by God as you ever could be, and therefore FREE from striving...and free FOR serving!

***Finally and Very Briefly: The Problem of Hope:*** And I say "problem" cuz I think we all agree, the last 2 years have provoked in many/maybe YOU a sense of hopelessness. I think Macklemore articulated the sentiment of many well when he sang in his song *Next Year*; "*It feels like God group-texted the world and dumped us all*"...The Corinthians' were no different. They too struggled with hope; specifically, is there any hope after death? As Paul says in ***ch.15, v.12***, "*Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there's no resurrection OF the dead?*" Many in the ancient Greco-Roman world, including in the church, believed that death simply extinguished life OR at best led to a kind of permanent, but immaterial existence. So similar to today, the concept of a physical, embodied existence after death was considered laughable by many.<sup>6</sup> And so knowing that AND knowing that your understanding of the future WILL determine your hope in the present, Paul addresses the resurrection. He says ***vv.1-8, 14***, "*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you're being saved. For I delivered to you, he says, as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was RAISED on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he APPEARED to Cephas (that's Peter), then to the twelve. Then he APPEARED to more than five hundred at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he APPEARED to James, then to ALL the apostles. Last of all...he APPEARED also to me...And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain*

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<sup>6</sup> Understanding of afterlife in Greco-Roman society from insights on 1 Cor. 15:1–58 in ESV+

*and your faith is in vain.*" And what's interesting in that is, you see, Paul doesn't talk about the value of Jesus' resurrection...Or, other than a passing reference to "*dying for our sins in accordance to the Scriptures,*" doesn't give any kind of real theology of the resurrection...And nor does he really share how he feels ABOUT the resurrection - ALL things you'd expect from someone trying to prove...a resurrection...No what Paul does is simply say, "*Jesus is resurrected, cuz He appeared to bunch of people/I'll even name some of em. Go check it out yourself. After all, most of em are still alive.*" **You see that?**

Cuz here's the point Paul's ultimately making: Your faith/hope in a resurrection and the things that follow a resurrection, like a new humanity, renewed world without death, decay, injustice, and suffering - that hope isn't based on opinion or advice, but on verifiable, historical events! That's why we call the Gospel "good news" rather than "good advice"...And Friends you understand, that makes all the difference in the world with respect to your hope, cuz it assures you, as Jonathan Edwards said, that, **One**, your bad things WILL turn out for the ultimate good... **Two**, your truly good things, like God's love-for and adoption of you, can never be taken away... **Three**, that the best things for you are yet to come<sup>7</sup>...And **Four**, that all you have to live with that kind of hope is simply decide if you believe the news or not? Paul simply brings the resurrection facet of the Gospel to bear on the Corinthians' wavering hope!

### **CONCLUSION:**

So you see, last week it was the Gospel being brought to bear on consumerism, sexuality and relational discord. This week it's our frustrations, freedoms and hopes. That's a pretty wide-ranging set of issues right?...But that's kinda the point! Paul's trying to show us that the Gospel/***the Good News of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension for our past, present and future freedom***...it's like this grand diamond/more magnificent than the Hope Diamond, because with the diamond that is the Gospel, you can turn its facets to shine on any issue/any problem and TO that problem bring clarity. As Tim Keller says, "*The gospel is the way that anything is renewed and transformed - whether a heart, a relationship, a church...or a whole community.*" As we've been saying, it's the skeleton key! Now, does that mean it'll IMMEDIATELY fix everything in your life? Not necessarily. We know from Paul having written 2 Corinthians that while a large portion of the Corinthian Church DID in fact repent, and trust in the Gospel and see a number of their problems fixed, the WHOLE church definitely didn't! But that was never the assumption. The Gospel being like a "skeleton key" doesn't mean that all your problems will IMMEDIATELY be fixed. Rather, it means that when brought to bear, the Gospel has the ability to UNLOCK any problem, thereby giving you and me the opportunity to take a "step of faith" you could say, through the door OF those problems. After all, an open door is of no use unless you step through it/in our case unless you appropriate the Gospel by faith! ***Will you trust today that the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus is sufficient for any past, present, or future problem you could face?...Let's Pray...***

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<sup>7</sup> Edwards cited in <http://chrisbrauns.com/2010/03/tim-keller-if-you-can-sink-this-deep-into-your-heart-youll-be-an-unsinkable-person/>