

## "What Life Looks Like Lived by the Cross" 1 Corinthians 4:6-13

### Introduction

- I don't know if you've heard about this. But all around the country honeybees are dying. Over the past six months beekeepers throughout the country have reported losing 50-90 percent of their honeybees.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in October 2006, beekeepers from 24 states reported that hundreds of thousands of their bees were dying and their colonies were being decimated. Surviving colonies are so weak they can't do the work of pollination. There have been congressional hearings in Washington about it. The economic impact is potentially catastrophic. Scientists are baffled. About the only thing they know is what to call it; they call it CCD or Colony Collapse Disorder.
- Did you know that divorce is more common among born again Christians than in the general American population? In 1999 a national survey found that the percentage of born-again Christians who had experienced divorce was slightly *higher* (26%) than that of non-Christians (22%).<sup>2</sup> What's even more shocking is that 90% of all divorced born-again Christians divorced *after* they accepted Christ.<sup>3</sup> Colony Collapse Disorder.
- For those who consider themselves evangelicals, defined in this survey in slightly more narrow terms as those who believe Jesus lived a sinless life, that eternal salvation is only through grace, not works, that Christians have the responsibility to evangelize non-Christians and that Satan exists; among this group, among evangelicals, the divorce rate is 25% -- exactly the same rate as for the total population.<sup>4</sup> Colony Collapse Disorder.

### Proposition

- **Our lives as Christians should look different than they look**
- In 1968 the average church member gave 3.1 percent of their income—less than a third of a tithe. In 1990 that figure dropped to 2.66% or about one quarter of a tithe.<sup>5</sup> Evangelicals as a subset were slightly better giving about 4.27% of their income. In 2002 a study indicated that only 6% of born-again adults tithed. Again, evangelicals fared slightly better, 9% of evangelicals tithed.<sup>6</sup>
- What does this mean? To quote [Ron Sider](#), "If American Christians just tithed, they would have another \$143 billion available to empower the poor and spread the gospel."<sup>7</sup> Studies by the United Nations suggest it would take about \$70-\$80 billion a year to provide basic healthcare and education for all the poor of the earth. That means if Christians just tithed, they could foot the entire bill for the healthcare and education of every poor person on the

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<sup>1</sup> *The mysterious deaths of the honeybees* by CNN's Amy Sahba, March 29, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 21-22.

earth and still have an additional \$60-\$70 billion leftover to do evangelism.<sup>8</sup> Colony Collapse Disorder.

- **Our lives as Christians should look different than they look**
- Since 1993 2.4 million young people have signed a pledge through the [True Love Waits](#) program to wait until marriage to engage in sexual intercourse. A study was done by Columbia University and Yale University to track how those teens were doing. For seven years researchers tracked twelve thousand teenagers. In March 2004 the results of the study came out. 88% of those who made pledges reported having sex before marriage.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that the sexual promiscuity of evangelical youth is only a little less outrageous than that of their nonevangelical peers."<sup>10</sup> Colony Collapse Disorder.
- **Our lives as Christians should look different than they look**
- In 2001 a study found that the rate of cohabitation—living with a member of the opposite sex without marriage—is only a little lower among born again adults than the general public. 25% compared to 33% nationally.<sup>11</sup> 13% of evangelicals say its okay for married persons to have sex with someone other than one's spouse.<sup>12</sup> And the percentage of Christian men involved in pornography is not much different than the unsaved world.<sup>13</sup> Colony Collapse Disorder.
- **Our lives as Christians should look different than they look**
- In 1998 a study was done to determine which groups in the U.S. were most likely to object to having black neighbors. At 17% Baptists and evangelicals were among the most likely groups to object to black neighbors.<sup>14</sup> Colony Collapse Disorder.
- **Our lives as Christians should look different than they look**
- A 1999 study reported in the *Journal of Family Issues* that "husbands who attended conservative Protestant churches or held conservative theological views were no more or less likely to engage in domestic abuse than others."<sup>15</sup> Colony Collapse Disorder.
- **Our lives as Christians should look different than they look**
- The church is sick. Theologian [Michael Horton](#) sums up our predicament. He says, "Evangelical Christians are as likely to embrace lifestyles every bit as hedonistic, materialistic, self-centered, and sexually immoral as the world in general."<sup>16</sup> Colony Collapse Disorder. Do you disagree? I can barely keep from crying as I think about how on the whole, collectively, our lives as Christians, the church is basically no different in appearance than those who curse the name of Christ. We have lost our distinctiveness. We have become salt-less salt. The distinct, invaluable, precious colony of the church is collapsing under the sheer weight of its own sin.

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 21-23

<sup>10</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Horton quoted in Ron Sider's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, p. 17.

## Transition

What I hope to accomplish this morning is a reminder and repentance. As Christians, we're called to be different. I want our church, our colony, to be different. I want your life and mine to look and feel radically different than the life of our non-Christian neighbors. It has to be—for their benefit and ours. **Our lives as Christians should look different than they look.** Please do yourself a favor and open your bibles to 1 Corinthians 4:6-13. If you don't have your bible politely ask your neighbor to share with you. I want you to see from this passage...

## Organizational Sentence

- **Two ways of life**

## Transition

The **first** way of life comes from verses 6-8, and 10. It's the same old same old. It's the way the Corinthians were living and it's the life we as evangelicals are living now. The **second** way of life comes from verse 9 and 11-13. It's where we need to be. There Paul describes his life. It's the way of the cross.

## Background

- Before we look at these two ways of life I need you to understand one simple thing about this passage. It is rife with irony. There is irony in the way Paul describes the Corinthian self-perception. And there is irony in the way Paul describes his life and the life of the apostles. You miss the irony and you'll miss the point of the passage.

## Transition

Again, the reason I think we look so much like the world is because we've rejected the way of the cross. There are two ways to live. We must choose the road less traveled. **Our lives as Christians should look different than they look.**

## Main Points

- The way the Corinthians lived, the way we live, is described in verses 6-8 and verse 10. It's the same old same old. Listen. *Now, brothers, I have applied these things [about being a servant if you'll remember last week] I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? 8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings--and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!*
- Oh the irony, right? The Corinthian's self-perception was mistaken to say the least. They believed they had all they could ever want spiritually speaking. The word Paul uses to describe their condition in **verse 8**, *you have all you want*, is a word used to describe an overfed, satiated, glutted farm animal.<sup>17</sup> Fat porkers, they had wisdom! Look at **verse 10**.

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<sup>17</sup> Thisleton, p. 358.

*You are so wise in Christ.* Baloney. You're strong. You're honored. Hogwash! They had gifts! So much wisdom, so many gifts, so much strength, so much honor they were in fact rich—fat, rich kings.

- Again, it's not true, remember, Paul's using irony. *How I wish that you really had become kings*, verse 8. Hey Corinthians. Wake up. You're not kings. You're not wise. You're not strong. You're not honored. You may think you have everything you want, but you don't. The Corinthians believed they had arrived spiritually. They thought they were the talk of the town. And as a church, they were the talk of the town. But for all the wrong reasons. Paul's whole argument in the first four chapters is this. If the Corinthians had all this so called wisdom and all these gifts then their lives should have been different. But they weren't. He called them worldly in 3:1. Basically there was no difference between them and the outside world. In fact, in certain cases they were more depraved than the non-believing world around them. Look at 5:1. *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans.* What is absolutely striking about these verses and the first four chapters in general is that the viewpoint of the Corinthians, how they perceived themselves and the world, and their behavior was virtually identical to that of natural, unsaved people.
- This is us. If there is a shred of accuracy in the statistics I gave you a few minutes ago, this is us. We are overfed, overstuffed, gluttonous Christians who have everything we could ever want physically speaking and spiritually speaking. And yet, on the whole, we are no different than the rest of the world. I don't know about you, but speaking for myself, knowing what I know, **my life as a Christian should look different than it looks.**

### Transition

The reason I think we look so much like the world is because we've rejected the way of the cross. "For Paul to be a servant means to be a servant of Christ Jesus. It means to go the way of the cross. As the poet put it: 'it is the way the master trod; should not the servant tread it still?'"<sup>18</sup> If you were to apply the cross to life, verse 9 and verses 11-13 is what you'd get. It's the life God calls all Christians to live. Listen. *For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. 11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.*

- Listen to how [Eugene Peterson](#) translates these verses. I love his words. *It seems to me that God has put us who bear his Message on stage in a theater in which no one wants to buy a ticket. We're something everyone stands around and stares at, like an accident in the street. We're the Messiah's misfits. You might be sure of yourselves, but we live in the midst of frailties and uncertainties. You might be well-thought-of by others, but we're mostly kicked around. Much of the time we don't have enough to eat, we wear patched and threadbare clothes, we get doors slammed in our faces, and we pick up odd jobs anywhere we can to eke out a living. When they call us names, we say, "God bless you." When they spread rumors*

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<sup>18</sup> Fee, p. 166.

*about us, we put in a good word for them. We're treated like garbage, potato peelings from the culture's kitchen. And it's not getting any better. This is the way of the cross.*

- I don't know about you, but, for the most part, what we've just read does not describe my life. Deep down, when I read these verses I know my life should look different than it does. Before the Lord whom I love deeply, I'm ashamed. When I first began to study these verses last week, I wrote them off as not applicable. Paul's description was unique to him as an apostle I reasoned to myself. I'm not an apostle therefore these verses don't apply to me. And then I read verses 15-16. Look at verse 15. *Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.* I think these verses, not necessarily the specifics, but these verses in principle describe the kind of life God expects all Christians to live. He expects us to die to self in every way and live for him instead. That means when confronted with the desire to gratify ourselves with sensual thoughts and desires we must die to self and live for Christ. That means the moment every ounce of our being wants to give in the complacent, comfortable, pleasurable thing we must die to self and live for Christ. That means when we start daydreaming about what we can spend on ourselves we must die to self and live for Christ. The reason our lives are no different than the rest of the world is because truth of the matter is, when it comes right down to it, we are self-seeking, self-preserving, self-centered, self-absorbed, self-admiring, self-assured, self-conceited, self-promoting, and self-sufficient which makes us self-destructing.
- I think what Paul was urging the Corinthians to do was abandon their same old same old way of life in favor of applying the cross, the wisdom of God, to their lives so that they might truly be wise and mature and spiritual. In other words, if they lived like Paul then they really would be rich, they really would be wise, they really would be honored, they really would be kings. Somehow, in God's economy, the way of the cross, the way of the servant, the way of suffering is where life is really at. And if we really want to call ourselves Christians—and do the name justice—then our lives have to change; we've got to start living differently—like Christ. 1 Corinthians isn't the only place you find these kinds of words. Romans 8:17 *Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.* Luke 9:23 *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.* Philippians 3:10-11 *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.* Perhaps. Just perhaps if we were a little more like our Lord Christ these verses wouldn't sound so foreign.
- As we think about how our lives must change, let me add some caveats. When we read these verses I think it's easy to slip to the extremes. Either we're overrun with guilt on the one hand or we use these verses to cultivate a martyr complex. I think both are wrong. There is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ. For those who fall short of this way of life and yet long to be more obedient, there's grace—not guilt. And on the other hand, we are not to go seeking after difficulties and sufferings. We're to be obedient. And if in the process of being obedient and debasing self and living for Christ by the way of the cross we encounter sufferings and difficulties and weakness, then so be it. At a bare minimum though, **our lives as Christians should look different than they look.**

## **Conclusion**

- When a passage of scripture seems so far removed from the present reality, the only proper place to begin to change is in repentance and contrition at the foot of the cross. I don't exactly know what the next few minutes are going to look like...