Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Sins of the Saints
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 80-26

Let's bow together in a word of prayer, as we look to God's word in preparation for sharing together.

"Lord Jesus, we ask that You would be present in this hour; that You would be our teacher; that You would cause us to let Thee within our hearts and examine ourselves; that anything standing between us and Thee might be removed; that we might be to the praise of Your Glory and that we might know the fullness of Your blessing. These things we ask in the name of the One who loved us and gave Himself for us, even Jesus, who, indeed, paid it all. Amen.

I've been thinking the last week or so about the spiritual warfare of the believer. I had occasion last week to be involved in a Bible conference and teach Romans 6, 7 and 8, and it put me back through the whole issue of spiritual warfare, and I was reminded again of the fact that Paul expresses, in very wonderful and spirit-filled terms, what all of us experience when he says, "The things I want to do, I don't do. The things I don't want to do, I find myself doing. In my spirit, I love and long for the law of God, but in my humanness, there is the principle of sin, which debilitates that deep longing to do what God would have me do," and he cries out, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death;" perhaps borrowing his imagery from a Pagan custom of strapping the victim to the murderer.

Head to head, shoulder to shoulder, thigh to thigh until the decay of the dead body ultimately took its toll on the one who took the life. Paul the Apostle felt as if he was strapped to something dead and something decaying and something that polluted his purist and deepest and Holiest intent. All of us understand that. We all are engaged as believers until we come to the redemption of the body in a spiritual warfare between our redeemed nature and our ever-present and ever-corrupt flesh.

From time to time, it may be helpful for us to do a bit of an inventory on just exactly where the battleground really lies. What are the sins of the saints? What are those sins that the writer of Hebrews says, "So easily beset us." Well, as you know from our study this morning, I've been looking to the Epistle of 1 Corinthians, and I would invite you, at this point, to open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians, and perhaps, just for a few brief moments, we might together examine the sins of that church, the sins of those saints and see if it doesn't help to sort of puree the cross our own plate of confession, if you will, those things we need to deal with.

You will also remember that in 1 Corinthians Chapter 11, the Apostle Paul gives to that church, and only to that church and all of his Epistles, instruction regarding the Lord's Table. It's fairly apparent from reading the Epistles that of all the churches to which Paul wrote, this church most desperately needed to come to the Table of Confession. They most urgently needed to face their impurities and deal with them at the foot of the remembrance of the cross.

Their sins, the sins of the Church of Corinth, are not unlike the sins of the church of today and even our own fellowship. I guess the Church of Corinth needed, because of these sins, to come to a place of purification at the Lord's Table; so do we. And so just as an overview, I'd like to remind you of the kind of sins that beset the saints for which confession must be made and for which the Lord's Table becomes the hallowed place where those sins should be abandoned.

Starting out in Chapter 1 after the introduction, we are introduced to the first in the category of the sins of the saints. Beginning in Verse 10, Paul writes, "I beseech you or I beg with you or I plead with you, Brethren, based on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; that is who he is; that you all say the same thing; that there be no divisions among you, but that you be literally knit together with the same mind and the same judgment." Obviously, one of the sins of the early church was the sin of division, divisiveness, not unfamiliar to us.

I talked to a lady this morning who said that she had just been converted. She gave a wonderful, wonderful testimony of having been converted out of Judaism. She gave this interesting testimony. She said, "I was wonderfully saved through the love of Christians, only to enter the church and find out that Christians didn't seem to love each other after all."

I'm not so much talking about ecumenical movements. I'm not even talking about large groups being content or able to love other large groups. What I'm talking about is attitudes between people, and the Apostle Paul longs that the Corinthians be knit together in commonness, without division, having the same mind, same judgment, but they avoid those things which lead to contentions, and in Verse 12, He mentions, and what also is mentioned in Chapter 3; that some are saying, "I am appalled." Some are saying, "I am of Apollos;" others, "I am of Cephas," and some even, "I am of Christ;" factions, groups more identified with some teacher than the truth itself or none of those would disagree on the truth; each yet had a distinct personality.

In Verse 13, He says, "As Christ divided, was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" He goes on to say how happy he is that he baptized none of them but Crispus and Gaius. The implication here is similar to the one in Chapter 3, beginning at Verse 3, where He talks about strife, division and goes on again to talk about Paul and Apollos and so forth.

I suppose we could say that the church then and the church now is probably guilty of following men and movements more than truth. I received a letter two days ago in which a man said, "I listened to

you radio program, and I could tell that you disagreed with Brother so and so. How dare you disagree with Brother so and so, who is obviously a man of God and whom I follow very closely."

That doesn't seem to me to be the issue, whether I disagree with Brother so and so or he disagrees with me. The issue should be whether each of us agrees with what? The Word of God. I suppose it's built into our humanness and by design from God that we be followers of men. How else can righteousness be passed from one generation to the other unless there are models in each generation by which men and women can pattern their lives?

That's the strong side of that, but the weak side of that is we tend to find ourselves more identified with the men and the movement than with the truth itself, and I suppose somebody might criticize me as being maybe more guilty than others of creating such affection, such a following, and let me say it so that no one ever questions it. It is not my intention that anyone should ever follow me, but that they should follow the Word of the Living God, and where I would deviate from that; I would press it upon their hearts, should that be the case; that they should follow the Word and totally ignore me.

It is a sin of the church today that we follow men more than truth. I think we need to examine our own hearts. We have created a generation of heroes. For the first time in the history of the church, many of our heroes are not Bible teachers or preachers, and that is brand new. We now have a group of heroes in Christianity who are famous for being famous and nothing else.

And the church has fallen, as it were, to worship at the shrine of a whole new kind of hero, who is not tested by his integrity, personally, or by his ability to adequately and accurately communicate the Word of God.

A second sin that surfaces in 1 Corinthians; it certainly has paralleled to today, and we could say much more about the first, is this one. It comes in the same chapter beginning in Verse 18. You know it well. I won't read it all, but the implication here is that the Corinthian church was still hung up on human philosophy. They somehow were not really ready to set aside human wisdom in favor of the wisdom of God, and so in Verse 19, they are reminded that God will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing, the understanding of the prudent. In fact, "God is made foolish the wisdom of the world," Verse 20 says.

"The wisdom of men is nothing more than foolishness with God." There is, I believe, still in the church a preoccupation with consulting human wisdom that really, in my judgment, as I told you several months ago, betrays a lack of confidence in the sufficiency of the Word of God.

There is this sort of underlying feeling that the Bible lacks sophistication for a contemporary culture, and that causes pastors, instead of reading the Word of God to know how to build a church, to read books on management as if the world had come up with the secrets to be applied to the Kingdom.

There is a certain playing around with the wisdom of the world that betrays this lack of confidence. It was so in the Corinthian church. It is still so. We live in a society which has made education of God, a deity. We bow to the shrine of education, and, for the most part, education tends to be a propagation of human wisdom, human philosophy, human viewpoint, human analysis. Some of it is true; some of it is not. Usually, all of it is presented as if it were truth.

It's very intimidating to reject it, to deny it in this sophisticated culture, and so there is pressure for us to apply the thinking of man to the Work of God. I think we need to be very, very careful in examining our own hearts to be sure that we are not at all coming short in our confidence in the sufficiency of the Word of God for every spiritual need.

There is a third thing that begins to be surfacing in Verse 26, another sin that mark the Corinthian Assembly, which I think, today, marks the church as well, and I guess we could call it pursuing worldly fame or prestige. He says there, "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble. God has chosen the foolish of the world to confound the wise. God has chosen the weak of the world to confound the mighty and the base of the world and the things that are despised. God has chosen even the things that are not to bring to nothing, the things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence."

There is a kind of a strange preoccupation among many Christians, driving them to pursue worldly fame, worldly prestige. In Chapter 4, Paul talks about the Apostles being the off-scouring, the garbage, the refuse of the world; those who were rejected by the world. It seems as though now, Christians are very anxious to have wide acceptance with the world, and what usually happens in that process is the mixing and mitigating and compromising of the Message.

Certainly, it happened in the Corinthian Assembly, and so they are reminded in Chapter 2 that "Paul does not come with human wisdom. He does not come trying to gain reputation with men, but rather only to declare Jesus Christ." He says in Verse 6, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect, but not the wisdom of the sage nor of the princes of the sage that come to nothing. We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the ages unto our glory, which none of the princes of this age knew."

I received an interesting letter this week, inviting me to a very high-level, important meeting in Washington D.C. to discuss the Word of God, and I looked over the program, and there was a list of people who would be speaking on the Word of God, and it included Senator so and so and Senator so and so and Senator so and so, and I scratched my head and said, "If we're going to have a high-level conference on the Word of God, it would seem to me that a better choice than a group of politicians might be a group of Bible scholars." But I don't want to introduce a foreign element into the discussion.

It's almost as if we have come to the conviction that there is more to be gained through political power than through the power of the Word itself, and we trust more for the future of the Bible in legislation than we do in proclamation.

And then a fourth sin that surfaces here, and I'm just touching lightly on these things, appears in Chapter 3, and, obviously, to all of us, He's speaking here of carnality. We could call it fleshiness; we could call it shallowness, a lack of depth in understanding; we could speak about a form of Christianity that has an entertainment mentality; we could talk about the shallowness of people's understanding of the Word of God, their contentedness with very minimal understanding of very profound things.

Paul says of the Corinthians, "You are fleshy. I can't feed you meat. I have to give you milk because you're not able to handle meat, you're so shallow." The sins of the saints include the tendency to follow men and movements instead of the truth, the consultation of human wisdom that may betray a lack of confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture, the pursuing of worldly fame and prestige, which ultimately ends in mixing the message and having more confidence and what might be gained by a worldly reputation than what might be gained by a faithful, uncompromising proclamation of truth.

The sins of the saints also embrace the area of spiritual shallowness, fleshiness. Fifthly, a preoccupation with self-esteem, a preoccupation with self-image, a preoccupation with feeling good about you all the time; Chapter 4. I love this. Verse 3: Paul says, "It's a small thing." In this whole context, he's talking about self-evaluation. He says, "All I want to be known as is a third-level galley slave, Huperatase, Verse 1, "an under-rower."

I don't want anything like fame coming my way. I'm not looking for anything except that I be counted as faithful because He says in Verse 3, "With me, it's a very small thing. It's very inconsequential to me that I should ever be evaluated by you or by any man's judgment." And then. . .I love this. Yes, I don't even judge what? Myself. You want to know why? Because I'm biased in my own favor; no question about it. I'm not even objective about myself.

There's no preoccupation here with self-esteem. There's no preoccupation here with self-image or self-glory. He says, "I want to be known as a third-level galley slave, who pulled his ore; that's all. Don't build a cathedral and name it after me. Don't call me a saint; don't name a city in Minnesota after me; don't do that."

Just write down on my epitaph, "He pulled his ore." That's enough. And I'm not concerned what you think about me. I'm not concerned what men think about me. I'm not even concerned what I think about me. Well, that's a selfless viewpoint.

Verse 4 says, "Because I don't know anything against myself, I've gone down the list, and I can't find anything against myself that is a continual problem, yet that doesn't justify me because the only one who really has a right to judge me is." . .whom? The Lord. So I don't judge anything and neither should you before the time, and the Lord will come and bring to the life the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the councils of the hearts. That's motives because motive is the real test of character.

God will reveal motive, and then every man will have implied a just and fitting praise from God. Now he says to these proud, egotistical Corinthians in a sarcastic way, "You've got a great self-image," Verse 8, "Now you are full. You are rich. You have reigned as kings. Aren't you something?" And then he says, "I would too, God, you did reign. I would; you did reign."

Verse 10, he says, "You're wise, aren't you? And you're strong, aren't you? And you're honorable, aren't you?" In other words, this sarcasm here is "You think you're something, and we're fools, and we're weak, and we're despised," and that's okay. There's a real integrity in Paul's willingness to wait for the evaluation of the Savior on his life.

There's no preoccupation here with how he feels about himself. There's no preoccupation here with reputation. There's no desire to lift up and push up and bolster and inflate himself. There's a genuine, honest evaluation of his giftedness paralleled by a wonderful and beautiful humility.

Another one of the sins of the saints comes in Chapter 5, and we discussed it this morning. That is the church is tolerant of sexual evil. The Corinthian church was allowing within their congregation someone who probably was representative of a lot of other people, who was engaging in a form of incest, having an ongoing sexual relationship with his stepmother. The church, instead of mourning over it, was arrogant, Verse 2, and doing nothing, and as I said to you this morning, it is absolutely appalling to me how ramped sexual sin is in the church, even among leadership in the church and how very little is done about it in so many places.

But how foolish can the church be in not considering what he says in Verse 6; "permeating influence." When you have a shortage of pure and Godly people, you don't accommodate the shortage by changing the standard. You hold the line. The church has failed to do that. The church will fall victim to its tolerance of sexual evil.

There is in Chapter 6 another sin that marks the saints. It is a vengeful attitude toward one another. It is curious to me that, of course, we live in a very litigious society. That means we like to litigate or we like to sue each other. Lawsuits are flying around all over the place. They number in the millions. The backlog in the courts is staggering. We are a society that has been told it so long and so faithfully that we must demand our rights. We have created such an isolationist mentality. We have made heroes

out of Rambo and people who wreak vengeance. We are now going to reap the result.

With everybody out for vengeance, we are going to see more and more of this. Obviously, some years ago, this began to be an issue in the church. When we were studying 1 Corinthians Chapter 6, I met with Sam Ericson, who's now the Executive Director of the Christian Legal Society and the Head of the Center for Law and Religious Freedom in Washington, and, as you know, for years, was on our staff here and is a dear friend.

And we said, "Sam, how can we stop Christians from suing Christians?" In direct violation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, Verse 1 says, "Dare any of you having a matter against another; go to law before the unjust and not before the saints." How can we stop Christians from suing each other? And he said, "You know what we need to do? We need to get a Christian conciliation service. We need to get some Godly men together who will arbitrate," and we decided that's a great idea, and then, they won't have to go to the courts.

They can come to this arbitration, and the saints, Verse 2, "We're going to judge the world." Ought to be able to judge these issues here, and, "If we're going to judge angels, we ought to be able to handle the things that are here," he says in Verse3. Why would we take judgments for which we have the Word of God and hand them over to the world that does not have the Word of God, and should we find that justice there that we cannot obtain? He says in Verse 6, "Brother goes to law with brother and even before unbelievers," and you're at fault.

So Sam really instituted the Christian Legal Society's arbitration conciliation service. It is fascinating to me that what started as a way for believers to find resolution has now become so widespread that the conciliation service is in cities all over this country and has become almost another form of court. What has happened is the vengeful, litigious attitude among Christians has just found a new arena of expression, and we haven't been able to deal with the heart attitude that says, in Verse 7, "You'd be better off to be defrauded than to seek vengeance."

If we were to compare Romans 12, Paul writing, "This is; look, vengeance isn't yours;" it's whose? It's mine. Couple of weeks ago, a man came up to me, and he was just seething, and I could see it on his face. He said to me, "I want you to meet my wife," and he introduced me to his wife, and they were a very lovely young couple, and he said, "I want to ask you what I should do." I said, "Well, what's the issue?" He said, "My pastor; I caught him having an affair with my wife." She kind of dropped her head. She said, "Yes, it's true." She said, "I exposed him. He's denied the whole thing. He will not admit it."

She is one of three women. All of these women are now testifying that this has happened. He said, "What should I do to him? How can I expose him? What can I do? We can't just let him go on. He's in the same church. He's doing the ministry there, and everybody thinks everything is fine, even though

it's been exposed. They all want to believe him. What do I do?"

And I said, "How about this? Nothing." I said, "How about cultivating a love relationship with your wife, rebuilding your marriage and going on with your spiritual life and growth and leaving that to God?" I said, "By the way, He will handle it much better than you." And he understood that.

There was just this retaliatory spirit. I don't blame him for feeling that way. We have to understand that vengeance is a sinful attitude, and yet it is so prevalent, so prevalent, even among believers.

In Chapter 6, beginning in Verse 9, He points out the sin of fornication, as I mentioned earlier also, tragically common in the church. The ninth sin that I noted in just studying through 1 Corinthians comes in Chapter 7, and this was just a broad category. We'll call it confusion and violation of God's principles for marriage.

In Chapter 7, it is obvious that in the Corinthian church, they didn't understand marriage and its proper place. They didn't understand singleness and its proper place. They had a lot of confusion about the physical relationship within marriage and what was allowable and what was not, and He had to remind that they were not to withhold one from the other except for prayer and spiritual exercise.

There was a misunderstanding of the role of widows. There was a misunderstanding regarding the remarriage of those who were divorced. There was a misunderstanding of the proper role of a virgin. All of that related to marriage had to be corrected and is done in the seventh chapter, and I'm sure we would all agree that it is remarkably parallel to the sins of the saints today, who have so violated and so repeatedly violated on a wide scale, the marriage principles which God has ordained.

Chapter 8 brings up another sin of the saints, and that is that sin of selfish lack of love and care for others. Here in Chapter 8, Verses 1 to 13, He talks about not doing something that offends your weaker brother, not in itself a sin, but offensive. He says, "Don't do anything by your liberty," Verse 9, "that becomes a stumbling block to them that are weak. Don't eat meat offered to an idol if it causes someone who has just come out of idolatry to be offended and stumble."

Verse 13: "If food makes your brother offend," He says, "follow my testimony. I will eat no food, no meat, while the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend." It is characteristic of many Christians that they're going to live the way they're going to live no matter what anybody thinks, selfish, indulgent, lack of love and care for others; no thought for how one may offend another; whereas we should be preoccupied with that for the sake of the weaker brother.

Chapter 9 points out the sin of a lack of personal discipline. Paul slows down here and says, "I have certain rights. I choose not to exercise them. I discipline myself for the accomplishment of my goal."

Down in Verse 19, he says, "I become whatever I need to become to reach whoever I need to reach." Beginning in Verse 24, he says, "I run to win the prize. I beat my body to bring it into subjection. I don't want to become disqualified."

The whole chapter, really, is about a discipline to ministry, a disciplined attitude, a disciplined mind, a disciplined body to accomplish spiritual goals, and you know much about me; that I'm a firm believer and advocate, as I have many times from this pulpit done so of the matters of personal discipline. Cultivating Holy disciplines in our lives are essential to spiritual growth.

The 12th sin of the saints in Corinth; it parallels today, comes in Chapter 10, and in Chapter 10, He talks about lusting after worldly things. He uses the illustration of Israel. They were lusting after evil things, Verse 6, lusting after wealth; lusting after prosperity; lusting after the former things they had in their past life, materialism.

I see the health, wealth, prosperity deceit coming under this category, a preoccupation that which fulfills my temporal desires. He even speaks again about fornication, complaining in Verse 10 because you don't have everything you think you need. Very often, prayer is nothing more than complaining, so the sins of the saints embrace things now that certainly were characteristic then.

Further, in Chapter 10, notice Verses 16 to 22. We don't have really time to develop that, but here, it talks about people who came to the Lord's Table and also went to Pagan temples to worship idols, and he says in Verse 21, "You can't drink the cup of the Lord and drink the cup of demons. You can't be partakers of the Lord's Table and of the table of demons." This, obviously, is the sin of compromise.

This is Mr.Facing Both Ways, as John Bunyon called him. The sin of the one who is not Holy and totally and singularly devoted to Jesus Christ.

Chapter 11 introduces the sin of perverting male and female roles. In Corinth, they needed an instruction on the fact that the husband was the head of the wife, the man being the head of the woman, even as God was the head of Christ, and He goes on describing some details about that clear to Verse 16. We, in this day, are facing that very issue again as to the proper role of men and women, not only in the world, but even in the church.

Then launching into the section on the communion, beginning in Verse 17, He calls the church to deal with these sins. Then in Chapter 12, and just briefly, I'll mention two more to you. In Chapter 12, 13 and 14 is the perversion of spiritual gifts. The perversion of spiritual gifts, in three chapters, 12, 13 and 14; he details how the Corinthians had perverted the spiritual gifts, twisted them as to their proper intent and use and priority and had to be corrected for that.

Then, finally, in Chapter 15, He speaks about the resurrection of Christ and deals with their errant theology. They were being bill-taught about the resurrection, some of then denying the resurrection from the dead. Errant theology; bad doctrine, false teaching.

Now, what do we see. . .and let me just briefly summarize. Parallels all the way down the line, the sins of the saints encompassing following men and movements rather than the truth, consulting human wisdom as if the Word of God was inadequate for spiritual resources; pursuing worldly fame and prestige, and; therefore, mixing and mitigating and compromising the Message. A church characterized by shallowness and fleshiness, lacking depth and understanding and judgment with a great preoccupation for being entertained more so than being informed.

A preoccupation with self-esteem, self-image and reputation; the sin of the church being tolerant of sexual evil; the sins of vengeance and an attitude toward others that seeks revenge, sexual sin; confusion and the violation of marriage, principles and vows and covenants; selfish lack of love and care for others, which says, "I'll do what I want with my liberty. I really don't care how it affects anyone else;" the lack of personal discipline that knows nothing about bringing the body under subjection to the renewed mind.

The sin of lusting after worldly things, materialism; the sin of compromise, which tries to come to the Table of the Lord, and then go out to the table of demons as well; the sins of perverted roles for men and women; perversion of spiritual gifts and sins of errant theology.

All of these are the sins of the saints, and within every category, there are a myriad of things. It's my prayer tonight that as we come to the Lord's Table; that we will perhaps do a little inventory on our own hearts, and if we find ourselves or if we met ourselves in any of these categories; that we would confess that before the Lord.

And then, not only do I want you to confess your sin as an individual and me as well, but somehow, in the spirit of the disciples prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses." Let's together embrace the church, as it were, even as Daniel when praying in the ninth chapter of his great prophecy, put himself in the middle of the sins of his people, though he, himself was not guilty. Somehow, let's identify ourselves in a manner of solidarity with the whole of the church and call on God for the cleansing of the whole for His glory.

Let's bow together in prayer.

"Oh, God, may Thy spirit speak to us; that we may speak to Thee. We have no merit. Let the merit of Jesus Christ stand for us. We are undeserving. We look to Thy tender mercy. We are unworthy. We look to Thy surpassing grace. We are full on infirmities. We are full of sins. Thou are full of

righteousness and full of grace. We confess our sin, Lord; our frequent sin, our willful sin, and we acknowledge that all of the powers of our unredeemed flesh are defiled; that there is a fountain of pollution deep within our nature.

There are chambers that cast up foul images before our minds. A walk through the depths of our heart is a walk from one odious room to another, a no-man's land of dangerous imaginations. Oh, God, when we pry into the secrets of our fallen nature, how far short of Thee we are.

And, Lord, we confess for ourselves and for our church; that we are ashamed that we are what we are; that we lack fruit and so often produce thorns and thistles; that we can be a fading leaf that the wind drives away; that we can live often as bare and barren as a winter tree, so unprofitable.

We wonder, Oh, God, why Thou doest have mercy on us. Thank Thee. Collectively, we thank Thee; that Thou has struck a heavy blow at our pride at the false God of self. And through the confession of sin and kneeling at the foot of the Cross, we, in a sense, lie in pieces before Thee.

And in our brokenness comes our healing. Lord, forgive your church; cleanse Your church; call Your church to the foot of the Cross, to the recognition of sin. And give us that renewed look at the Master and Lord, Thy Son, Jesus Christ. Turn our hearts toward holiness. May our lives speed like an arrow from a bow to the target of complete obedience to Thee.

Save us from the love of the world and the pride of life from everything that is natural to our fallenness, and let Christ's nature evermore be seen in us day by day. Separate us from the old rock, where we have been imbedded so long, and lift us from that quarry to the Heavenly sphere, where we may be shaped into the image of Christ.

We come to this Table, Lord, longing that we should be cleansed as a church, as individuals."

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).