

Streetsville United Church
Sunday, January 18, 2009
Rev. John Tapscott

"WE ARE NOT FREE AGENTS"

1 Corinthians 6:19,20

The Christian faith at heart is counter-cultural. The Church takes its cue for living from Christ and the Gospel, not from culture. In fact, the early Christians living in the Roman Empire were the most counter-cultural of all. They refused to make the required public pledge of allegiance "Caesar is Lord". For Christians supreme honour and authority could only be given to Christ. And for a time they paid a great price for their cultural resistance. Christians were definitely not invited to give the invocation at the inaugural of a new Emperor. Of course, it was far more serious than that. Many paid with their lives for being Christians. Ironically, the way Christians cared and supported one another through that dark time helped spread the Christian faith. "Look how those Christians love one another," the pagans said, and they were drawn into the community of Christians.

But sometimes the church is not very distinct from the culture in which it lives. The values Christians live by differ little from the values of the secular world. One Christian writes: "An alarming trend to many of us who love the Church is that of making the church conform to the prevailing culture. There are those who would urge on the church a cultural captivity, who would let the Church reflect society, let the world write the church's agenda." Yes, it is a danger now, just as it was in the early church.

The new Christian church at Corinth was in the fresh bloom of faith. Evidence of the Holy Spirit abounded. But members were still being influenced by the Greek culture. Greeks tended to strictly divide body and soul. The soul was important; the body was not. And since the soul had been saved by Christ, these Christians argued that they could do whatever they liked with the body. But Paul said, "No! You're thinking like the culture; not like a Christian." Christians followed the ancient Hebrew teaching that body, mind and soul are connected and affect one another. This Biblical thinking is actually supported by modern psychology. So Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6 about our physical bodies. "The body is not meant for fornication but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. Our bodies are members of Christ. Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." Then Paul sums up in verses 19 & 20, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body."

This teaching was a much needed corrective for Christians in Corinth. It's much needed in the church today. For culture teaches us to say, "I belong to no one but myself; my life is mine and I can do with it what I like." And we are often influenced by this thinking. But Christians must say, "I am not my own. I have been bought with a price. I have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. I am a child of God." Christ died and rose again for us, and through faith in Christ and baptism, we have been grafted into God's family. Pauls says that "we are united to the Lord; we are one Spirit with him...you are not your own; you were bought with a price." To know this about yourself and to live according to it is counter cultural. Now the world says that we are giving up our freedom and independence. In a way it's true. In Christ, we are no longer free agents. We're not free to do anything we please and to sign with the highest bidder. But Christ's way actually brings us true freedom and true blessing. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price."

First, belonging to God through Jesus Christ gives us a great purpose.

Rick Warren (who incidentally is giving the invocation prayer at President-elect Barak Obama's inauguration) begins his book "The Purpose -Driven Life" by saying, "It's not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your personal fulfilment, your peace of mind, or your happiness... You were born by God's purpose and for his purpose."

Paul tells us that our high purpose is to "Glorify God..." That was the role of the Hebrew people - that's why God chose them - to glorify God, to give witness to his existence, to be a light to the nations. It was true for Jesus, too. In all he did, Jesus sought to glorify God and point to the reality of the Father. As those who belong to God through Jesus Christ, that's our purpose, too. To glorify God means worshipping God, praising God, thanking Him, serving others in His Name, pointing others towards God and His Son, and promoting the Kingdom of God.

Did you read the other day about the atheist group in England that has rented space on the side of city buses for their message. 800 buses, including 200 in London, now have a message on the side raising doubts about God's existence. One reads "There's probably no God. So stop worrying and start enjoying your life." You could say that they are doing the opposite of what our purpose - they are, if I can put it this way, - **un - glorifying** God.

I don't care what your particular job and role in life is - your purpose as a Christian is to be a positive witness to the living God and his Son Jesus Christ.

You are a vehicle which says to the world, "God is". Ask yourself, are people more likely to believe in God and trust him because of what I do and say? If the answer is "Yes", then you are fulfilling your God-given purpose. You are glorifying God. If it's "No" then you need to re-evaluate your life and your priorities. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price." We belong to God through Jesus Christ; therefore we have a great purpose - to glorify God.

Secondly, to belong to God through Jesus Christ gives us boundaries for living.

A day after those recent terrible avalanche tragedies in B. C., newspaper photos showed skiers still going beyond clearly posted boundaries to ski in avalanche-prone areas, thereby putting themselves at great risk. It's a parable for our times, for everyday we can see what happens when people go beyond God-given boundaries. But Christians are different; we belong to God and therefore we recognize and respect God-given boundaries.

Now there are two areas in which I think we Christians have to be careful, two areas in which the world tempts us to go beyond the bounds. One is money; the other is sex. Now that I have your attention, let me deal with money first.

There are two Biblical injunctions that should guide us in our use of money. One is from Romans "Owe no one anything, except the continuing debt to love one another"; the second is from Philipians, "Be content with what you have.." The two are related.

Now most of us take on debt at various times in our lives, for good reasons. Our parents and grandparents took on debt, too, but they strived for that day when they owed no one anything. But today we're encouraged to take on more and more debt and never look to the day when we can pay it off. I often get unsolicited offers of credit and credit cards. Our culture wants to keep us in constant debt. But excessive debt at a personal and corporate level led to the current economic melt-down. As those who belong to God through Jesus Christ we learn to be content with what we have. We avoid piling up debt for things we can get along without. And we have more to support worthy causes, including the work of God's Kingdom. We work towards that day when we owe no one anything. That's real freedom. "Be content with what you have...owe no one anything..." Those are God's boundaries with regard to finances.

And the issue of sex. Some of the Corinthians said that having sex with a prostitute was no big deal, but Paul was saying, "It is a big deal, and it is wrong. Don't think you can just causally join yourself to a prostitute or to anyone else with no consequences. You become one flesh with the person you

have sex with.”

Today casual and uncommitted sex is glorified in the media. Of course, they never show the results - broken homes, broken kids, broken hearts, disease. For sex is never casual. It is powerful, physically, spiritually and psychologically. And when it happens outside of a committed marriage relationship then there is ripping apart that happens, if not physically, then mentally and spiritually, when man and woman go their separate ways. Tape which is used over and over loses it's ability to stick. And if you engage in casual sex, you eventually use up your stickiness, so to speak. That's why people who engage in promiscuous sex before marriage often have sexual and other problems when they do get married. It's much harder for them to really "stick" in the one flesh relationship God intends.

Let the culture say what it wants. We think and act differently. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." We say that sex is a gift from God for the bonding of a man and woman in marriage and for the building up of society. We uphold faithfulness in marriage. And we say to the culture "Look at the consequences of going beyond the boundaries God has given us." And we need to tell young people that there is a special joy and bonding that comes to a couple who respect God's boundaries.

Of course, we are merciful. We are full of compassion, not condemnation to those who fall short. And that includes ourselves, for Jesus' teaching indicates that we all need forgiveness in this area. We believe no one is beyond redemption and that the fallen can be forgiven and raised up. Our God loves giving second chances. But God has not changed his mind about what is best for our bodies and neither should we. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price." This truth gives us a great purpose; it gives us boundaries for living; **and finally it gives us great security.**

Paul writes in Romans, "If we live we live to the Lord; if we die, we die to the Lord, so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." Martin Luther said, "My comfort in life and in death is that I belong fully, body and soul, to my Saviour Jesus Christ." Such security can never be bought or earned. It is a gift we receive in unity with the Lord, who himself died and was raised by the Father to everlasting life. As Paul says, God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

When my grandmother was 95 years old, she went to the hospital for the last time. She was physically ill, though still mentally alert. But her spirits were down, sensing that she would never go home again to where my grandfather

sat waiting for her. But two days later a visitor quietly entered the hospital room and saw my grandmother sitting up in bed, smiling and singing to herself words to the old hymn, "Safe in the Arms of Jesus." And in a few days she passed into the everlasting care of our Heavenly Father.

The culture may laugh at the Christian faith, but it can never give us that kind of security or that kind of confidence to face what lies ahead. That's why our faith in God and in his Son Jesus Christ is so precious. That is why we give our best efforts to serve and glorify God. "You are not your own; you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body."