

The Changed Life - 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 (Southaven 4/14/24)

We are in week 10 of 12 in our journey through the first half of 1 Corinthians, and Paul is in the middle of navigating some of the major issues that are presenting themselves in the church in Corinth. And, when we think about it (if we step back and consider it as a whole) one of the primary issues limiting these believers from walking in all that God has for them is that they do not fully understand the type of life transformation that took place when they gave themselves up to follow Christ.

In perhaps my favorite passage in the Bible, Peter writes: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... (1 Peter 1:3)**

In this verse, Peter borrows from the words of Jesus to describe what has happened when a person is saved through the work of Christ. We are born again, as brand new as if we just came out of the womb, but the Church in Corinth is battling to live out this spiritual reality in the day-to-day of the physical world. Indeed, they are saints, but they aren't yet living like it. Having all of this in mind, then, the message I want to present to you today, I have titled:

The Changed Life

Because this is (in many ways) what the Corinthians struggled with, and it is what many Christians throughout all time have difficulty navigating. Last week we celebrated the baptism of 10 believers, and I confessed that they were buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life. But what (precisely) does it mean to have new life and what does this new life (this changed life) entail?

Considering this, then, let's look at 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and read verses 9-20. The Bible says:

READ 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

PRAY

This chapter ends with an imperative based on evidence. **So** (Paul writes, because of the evidence that has already been presented because your life has been changed) **glorify God with your body**. And there are two directions that I want to take this idea.

The first thing I want to do is make sure that we are true to the text. Paul is addressing the Corinthians about a particular sin issue. He is talking to them about their tendency to participate in sexual sin and how this is not acceptable. They must glorify God with their bodies, and I would be doing an injustice to the text if I did not cover this.

But there is a second path I also want to take us down. Paul does not address it explicitly, but his theology does. This second path considers the reality that biblical personhood involves a spirit (or soul) as well as a body and that these two things go together. Because of this what we do or do not do with our bodies affects us spiritually. This is not limited to sexual immorality, but it extends to every facet of our life and every facet of this changed life that we are called to as followers of Jesus.

Now, in examining these two tracks of thought, I want us to consider three ways of living that have to do with living the changed life. The first thing I would suggest is to:

Live the life God has given you

In verse 9, Paul says, **"Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom,"** or (in other words) don't you know that the beautiful gift of eternity, the world to come, will only be given to those who are considered to have a guiltless and right standing before God? Only those who are good like God is good will share his dwelling place with him. And in using this term again (the unrighteous) Paul connects what he just said to where he is going.

What I mean is (whether you agree with him or not) from a literary standpoint, Paul really is a beautiful writer. He is a master at tying themes together so that they take you from one to the next without needing hard breaks.

Now, this can be difficult, because it requires attentiveness to see what he is doing, but in the first part of the chapter (the part we covered last week), Paul rebukes the Corinthians for employing non-Christians to settle the interpersonal disputes they have been having between one another. **"... how dare you take it to court before the unrighteous..." (1 Corinthians 6:1)**

And Paul draws back to this term again in verse 9 to connect these two thoughts. Even though he is changing the subject from inappropriate legal counsel to immoral behavior, there is this line of connection, and it is rooted in life change that God has brought about in the Christian. We were unrighteous (and therefore unholy), but we have been sanctified (we have been made holy ones), this new status is a gift of God, and we must live in this new life that God has given us. This is in contrast to those who do not follow Jesus and are not saved.

Again, at the beginning of verse nine, Paul connects his thoughts from the front of this chapter to the end of it. The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom, so why would you make them your judges? (That's verses 1-8) Also, the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom, so do not behave like one of them. (That is verses 9-20):

...Do not be deceived: [he says] **No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males, no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)**

This is meant to correct who they have been using as counselors and also to warn them about the lives they have been leading as Christians. None of these people who they had been using to make judgments in the household of God were a part of the kingdom, and none of these practices can be consistent with those who expect the kingdom to be their home. This is not the changed life that God has given you, in fact, this is who you used to be.

You used to be like this, Paul says, do not submit yourself to those who still are. But also, you used to be like this, let your actions prove that this unrighteousness is only a part of your past. Indeed, **allow your life to tell the story of Christ's work in you.**

Christian, what type of story does your life tell? We talked about this a little bit last week, that the way the church operates should glorify God to the extent that other people see the Father's goodness and want to glorify him themselves. But this is not just an institutional expectation of the church, because the church is not an organization it is an organism, it is a people. Therefore, for the church to function like it should (for the church to give glory to God), we as individuals must live with the glory of God in mind. And so, I ask again, what kind of story does your life tell?

What story does your life tell to the world? Does it tell the story that God has actually changed your life so that you live better, or does it say that your faith has not really made an impact beyond your Sunday mornings? This little light of yours, do you let it shine or do you hide it under a bush (oh no)? If God has changed your life, it shouldn't look or sound the same way that it did before.

And perhaps an even scarier question is: What story does your life tell to God? Knowing that we are saved by faith, do you live a life that says to God that you believe that Jesus Christ is Lord? Do your actions say this along with your mouth, or do you just think: Well, God knows my heart, and it doesn't matter how I live? My friends, be careful not to make a fool of yourself while you think you are mocking God's grace. The judgment of the unrighteous is real, and it is forever.

And because our lives tell the story of our faith to the world and (most importantly) to God (if you are a Christian) then you should live the life God has given you. Paul says you used to be like the unrighteous, but God has washed, sanctified, and justified you.

If God has washed you, live like you are clean. If God has sanctified you, then you should also set yourself apart from those behaviors that are inconsistent with your faith. If God has justified you, you should seek to walk in the righteousness He has attributed to you. We must live the life God has given us, but also, we must:

Kill excuses to live like less

Immature Christians (and maybe even non-Christians pretending at Christianity) always show symptoms of their immaturity or lack of faith. We may do our best to hide it, but spiritual immaturity and fake faith will show themselves to be what they are. There are symptoms, and we can find two of the symptoms addressed here.

When we read through 1 Corinthians 6, the issues of self-justification and a perverted view of grace, they stand out like a sore thumb. And both of these symptoms will hinder your ability to walk with God, they will limit your witness, and they might also cause great personal distress.

Now, self-justification, it is the tendency of humans to take reasons and try to turn them into excuses. We see this in Genesis 3 with Adam, and it's a really childish way of punting on responsibility. God gives Adam a spouse. Eve offers Adam a fruit forbidden by God, and after Adam eats, he says: God, this woman you gave me, she made me do it. You know how women be. - That's the Kortney Fenley paraphrase.

And when Adam says this, he says it as if this excuse will free him from taking responsibility for doing what he knew he shouldn't have done. Like, Eve did give him the fruit (that may be a reason he ate) but regardless of what Eve did, Adam had been clearly commanded not to do what he did, but this is self-justification. It is a childish, "he started it" type of defense, but it takes different forms as we get older: If my mom wasn't so mean... If my boss was more flexible... If my spouse hadn't said it that way... and on and on. We take reasons (things that may legitimately need to be addressed) and we make them into excuses, and yet this does not excuse us.

Self-justification, it will hinder our ability to walk with God, because we will never address sin in our lives if it is always someone else's fault, and unaddressed sin is always a restriction to intimacy with the Father. Self-justification, it will limit your witness because (1) everyone else can see the sin you are hiding from yourself and (2) because (in refusing to take responsibility for yourself) you will find difficulty in calling others to take responsibility for theirs. Also, self-justification could cause great personal distress because **you cannot be both self-justifying and self-aware.** You can only ever truly be

one of those at a time. A self-justifying person is not a self-aware person because they cannot see or come to terms with their own faults and are (therefore) predisposed to repeating their mistakes.

On the other side of this same coin is a person who has a perverted view of grace. This symptom is a more complex, more mature, and (because of this) more devious form of excusing your sin. It does not seek to hide the fact that sin is present, but it tries to manipulate doctrine to say that there is no real sin at all. There is no blame shifting in this perversion of grace because there is no blame to be distributed.

This distorted understanding of biblical grace presents the idea that because Christians are no longer under the Old Testament Law, then we are free to live however we want. It is a perversion that teaches that because Jesus has freed us from the Law by his death then we can do whatever we want without consequence, but this is not true grace. And this is not the only time Paul has to deal with this perversion.

In Romans, in Colossians, and in Galatians this distortion presented itself as well. In Galatians, Paul writes: **For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don't use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love (Galatians 5:13-14).**

And then, in the next chapter, allowing this teaching to also be a warning, Paul writes: **Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. (Galatians 6:7-8)**

In other words: don't get it twisted, biblical grace is not a hall pass that frees you to act a fool. Indeed we have been freed, but this is not the type of freedom we've acquired. We have been freed from sin, not freed to sin.

And this perversion of grace hinders your ability to walk with God, because (as Paul says) God will not be made to look a fool. You can wear your cross necklace and put your bumper sticker on your car, but what you sew is what you will reap. Perverting grace, it also limits your witness because, not only is your integrity compromised, but you will not be able to preach the true gospel. Perverting grace, it may also cause great personal distress because those who do it may come to find that they are not actually saved at all.

Now, I bring these up because we see both of these symptoms (self-justification and a perverted view of grace) present in chapter 6. We see them in verses 12 and 13: **"Everything is permissible for me," but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me," but I will not be mastered by anything. "Food is for the**

stomach and the stomach for food,” and God will do away with both of them. However, the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (1 Corinthians 6:12-13)

Almost all Bible scholars agree that in verses 12 and 13, Paul is responding to a pair of phrases that had become like chants for the Corinthians, and in them, we see both types of immature excuse-making. We see the perversion of grace in the first chant: Everything is permissible for me. And Paul gives two responses: Not everything is beneficial, and I will not be mastered by anything.

What Paul is teaching is that (though Jesus has freed us from the Law), that does not mean that all things are good for a Christian to engage in, nor is there anything the Christian should be mastered by but Christ, and don't you know that whatever we submit ourselves to are those things that are really our masters? If we say we are free but choose to obey our flesh rather than obey Christ, then Jesus is not our Lord, and if Jesus is not our Lord then we are lost. The idea that everything is permissible is not for the Christian an invitation to walk in open sin, but an invitation to walk out the love of Christ.

Also, in this section, Paul addresses another phrase that the Corinthians have made into a chant. They say: “Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food,” and this is self-justification because what they mean is that the body is made to do bodily things. The flesh is made for doing fleshly things. This is more than about just food and stomachs, this is about saying that we should indulge the body in what the body wants because that is what the body is made for.

But the fact is that just because it makes the body feel good to do something, that does not mean that they body should do it. In fact, God will destroy them both. In other words, Paul says: Just because the body can do certain things doesn't mean it should, and doing what you should not will lead to destruction. Adam's mouth was made for food, but the wrong food brought death to the world.

Paul says that the reason for this is that the body is not made for sexual immorality or any other thing but the Lord. God has made the human body so that we would glorify him with it. The body is designed to eat, the body is designed to have sex, but it was designed for God.

And real fast, I said earlier that even though Paul speaks specifically about sexual immorality there is a greater truth that this theology teaches, that if your body is meant for God, it is not just sexual immorality that must not master you. But there are other things that we might do with our bodies that would be inconsistent with our faith.

- Do not be mastered by substances

- Do not be mastered by food
- Do not be mastered by comfort
- Do not be mastered by idolatry

None of these presents an accurate understanding of the gospel, but they prove that we may have not yet learned to walk in the newness of life we have. Now, so far, I've said to do this you need to (1) live the life God has given you and (2) kill excuses to live like less. The last way of living I'd like to suggest is that you:

Live like the One you've been joined to

Or said more accurately, we ought to live like Jesus Christ to whom we have been joined. And in the context of this passage, being joined to Christ takes on unique imagery because Paul contrasts it with being joined to a person in sexual immorality.

Your body is not for sexual immorality (Paul writes), but your body is a part of Christ's body, and if a part of Christ's body then I should not use Christ's body in my sexual immorality. On the contrary, my body is for and belongs to God. And Paul contrasts these two realities, that to be joined to Christ spiritually and to be joined to a person physically, they are not the same yet they are connected.

In presenting this, what Paul is doing is undercutting a very Greek idea that what I do with my body is disconnected from my spiritual life. In fact, Paul is saying it is quite the opposite. Like, we know that when God created humans, He created us as both physical and spiritual beings, and both of those components are meant to work together. Therefore, there is an innate dignity in the human body that we must acknowledge and that should inform the way we treat it.

Whenever the spirit is separated from the body, that is not a good thing because that was never our design, and the Bible promises that (whether we are resurrected when Jesus comes back or whether we are still here) our bodies will be changed just as our spiritual lives have already been changed, and these two parts of ourselves will be joined again forever.

In the meantime, what we do in this body still has an impact on our spiritual lives, because though these bodies are not what they will be, they have still been made into dwelling places for the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we want to live like Jesus.

What I mean is, we want to flee all forms of immorality (just like Jesus did) because Christ has purchased not just our souls but our bodies by his blood. This is especially true as it relates to sexual immorality. And the truth is that this is a battle because in one way or another, we all have an imperfect or slightly dysfunctional view of our bodies and our sexuality. This is highlighted in the amount of conversations (socially, morally, and

politically) that surround the things we do with our bodies. And just like in Corinth, the world today would like you to believe that your body is your own, that it was made for you and for your desires, to satisfy yourself however you see fit, but Christ's blood says that this is not true.

Either you live like you belong to yourself and reap the consequences of that, or you can live like you belong to Jesus and reap the benefits that come with it. And now, coming to a close, the truth I want us to take away is one that (sort of) considers all the last three sermons of this series and it is that:

God has been too good for us to not live changed.

And to take for granted the grace of God reveals that we don't understand his grace. And the church in Corinth, they are struggling. From allowing an illicit affair to belittling his church in front of outsiders, to engaging in a pattern of sexual misconduct, the Corinthians show that they really don't recognize how good God has been to them.

And the challenge to us is that we would be different than they were. We must live a changed life because God has been too good for us not to. And, Christian, the changing and refining of this life, it does not end, it intensifies. Because when we came to Christ, the issues of our disobedience, they were probably on the surface level, but as we acknowledge and allow God to pull away those things that are obviously against his will, we do not stop there.

We must even look below the surface and all the way to the core of ourselves, and we do this because God has been too good for us not to. When we were at our weakest and most desperate position, the Father sent the Son so that the world might see his love on display throughout all eternity.

And this is not even considering all that He has done besides this (that He allows us the warmth of the sun, rain to cool the ground. He gives us food, and shelter, and breath in our lungs), but even more, when we were guilty because of our sin, God so loved the world...