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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

#16

**SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU
1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11**

INTRODUCTION

This text comes at the end of Paul's rebuke concerning lawsuits among the Corinthian believers. Paul reminded the Corinthians of their position in Christ and with that position came the ability to handle such trivial matters with wisdom and dignity. Paul also encouraged the believers to accept injustice rather than disgrace the name of Christ by taking their disputes before unbelieving judges. At the heart of the Apostle's commands was the reality that the Corinthians had been made new by the grace of God. Therefore, they must not continue to live as they did prior to conversion and this command extended to how they handle disputes. At one time, it was suitable for them to value their reputation and possessions more than they valued the name of Jesus. But God's grace changed them; now the honor of Jesus is everything. In order to stress just how graciously God had dealt with them and to emphasize how graciously they should now deal with one another, Paul reminded the Corinthians of who they were apart from God's grace and who they are in Christ.

1. THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL NOT INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Like everyone, the Corinthians were once unrighteous and under the condemnation of God. Paul offered proof by listing some of their past sins that typified their lives before Christ. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but it is descriptive of those who are outside of Christ. Jesus taught us that these kinds of sins flow out of depraved hearts. He said, *For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders* (Matthew 15:19). This is true because our hearts are corrupt.

Man naturally faces two significant problems: we have inherited Adam's condemnation and corruption [Romans 5:12-21]. To put it another way, God counted all people guilty when Adam sinned in such a way that our legal standing before God is that we stand condemned by Adam's sin. God has credited Adam's sin to our accounts and treated us accordingly. God has imputed Adam's sin to us. Not only do we have a guilty standing before the Lord, but we also have a nature that is sinful because we inherited Adam's corrupt nature. In other words, we come into this world with every part of our lives being corrupted by sin even though we have not yet sinned. Our minds, emotions, and bodies are all corrupted by sin. We are born with a bent toward choosing sinful ways. So we are sinners by nature and sinners by choice. We choose to sin because inwardly we are corrupt. This is why Scriptures call us "spiritually dead". We are so inwardly corrupt, that we have neither desire nor ability to please God [Romans 7:18; 8:8]. In terms of having a relationship with God, we are absolutely unable to bring this about; we are "dead". This is not to say that we cannot make choices in life. We can make choices and we do. But the choices we make will not lead us into a relationship with God. We will make choices that reflect that we are corrupt and that we are slaves to sin [John 8:34]. Paul reminds the Corinthians of this.

2. BELIEVING SINNERS ARE DECLARED TO BE RIGHTEOUS THROUGH JUSTIFICATION.

The gospel cures our two biggest problems. First of all, the gospel frees us from our condemnation. The doctrine of justification explains how this happens (v11). Wayne Grudem defines justification *as an instantaneous legal act of God in which He (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in His sight*. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they possess a righteousness that does not come through obedience, but comes through faith. In other words, the solution to our sin problem as described in Scripture is not doing better works. The solution is to become united with Christ through faith so that His works are attributed to us and in consequence, we gain His righteousness. This is called justification by faith alone.

Verse 11 teaches us that the Corinthians were justified. This is a passive verb. We are not justifying ourselves, but we are being justified. We are not doing this; it is being done to us. When the word *justify* is used, it is used in the context of a legal decision rendered by a judge. The most common meaning of the word *justify* is "to declare righteous". So in this context, to *justify* us, God, the Judge of the universe, makes the legal declaration that believing sinners are now considered to be righteous and therefore, they are not under the penalty of sin.

Does God declare us to be righteous or does He actually make us righteous? In justification, God does not change our inward nature to be perfectly righteous. Instead, He declares that we are to be considered righteous even though we still live in an unrighteous state. The opposite of justifying is condemning. When a judge condemns someone, he does not make that person unrighteous and guilty, he simply declares that the person is guilty and worthy of punishment. The same type of declaration is true when God justifies us. The Judge does not make us righteous, He simply declares that we are righteous and worthy of freedom.

Justification is something that God does outside of us not within us. His declaration of our righteousness does not make us internally righteous, but it does change our standing before Him. We no longer stand before Him as guilty sinners condemned to die. We now stand before Him as pardoned sinners worthy of eternal life.

All of this is accomplished through the perfect life, substitutionary death and victorious resurrection of Jesus. It is by looking to Jesus that we are justified. Why does God choose faith as the instrument that links us to Christ? Faith is the opposite of depending on ourselves. Faith declares that God is the giver and we are the receivers. In this, God is most glorified!

3. BELIEVING SINNERS ARE BEING MADE RIGHTEOUS THROUGH SANCTIFICATION

The gospel not only frees us from condemnation, but it overcomes our internal corruption. Wayne Grudem writes, *sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives*. Sanctification begins at regeneration. In Romans 6, a definitive passage on sanctification, Paul begins his discussion of this topic by saying that we are no longer under sin's power, we have died to a life that is dominated by sin. Isn't that why we get baptized early in our Christian walk? We want to express that we have died to the old way we used to live (illustrated by being taken all the way under the water) and we want to express that God has given us a new life (illustrated by being brought up out of the water). That

is part of what Paul is arguing in Romans 6:3-11. Paul uses that same language here in verse 11; *you were washed and you were sanctified.*

There are many other verses that describe regeneration as the beginning of God's internal work that frees us from sin's mastery. *He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit* (Titus 3:5). And John writes, *No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God* (1 John 3:9). John says that no one who has been born spiritually (regenerated) lives a life that continually is characterized by sin because the Spirit's life within us overcomes the power of sin. Sin's power is in its promises of a better life. Sin promises us that our lives will be better if we will lie, steal, lust, compromise, etc. That is why we sin. We never sin because we feel obligated to do what is wrong; we sin because we believe sin's promise of a better life. So the way God breaks sin's power over us is by making superior promises to us in the gospel and then He causes us to believe those promises by regenerating us. God's promises are far superior to sin's promises and as we are awakened to God's glorious promises in Christ, sin's promises lose their attraction.

God's regenerating work begins our life of growing in holiness by changing our desires. We now desire righteousness more than we desire sin. So we could say that regeneration affects our mind, will and emotions. This is necessary because sin is overpowering. It dominates our minds [Romans 1:21], our will [Jeremiah 44:15-17] and affections [John 3:19-21].

Be careful not to assume that at regeneration sin is not still a very real problem in our lives. Even though we have been made new, that does not mean that temptation and sin leave us alone. We are no longer enemies of God and we are a part of God's Kingdom but we still have to battle this sinful disposition to hate God and choose our own way in life. That will never leave us in this life. Here is an illustration that may help us gain a better understanding of why regenerated people still struggle with sin: A new believer is like a person who has just changed his citizenship from one country to another. He has been granted a new status, new opportunities and certainly, he is grateful for the privileges of his new standing as a citizen. But this does not mean that he will not struggle in making adjustments to living as a citizen of his new country. He will struggle to learn the language and customs and daily life will be very demanding until he is more at home in this strange place. At times he will instinctively revert back to living as he did in his former homeland. This is very illustrative of the Corinthians and us. We have had our standing changed (justification) and we now desire to live as our new King instructs us and we are very grateful for all that has been given to us. But we struggle to adjust to this new way of life even though the Spirit works within us to assist us. We have natural inclinations that go against the laws of this new government and while life is good in our new home, we sometimes long for the ease and comfort of our old homeland.

Regeneration makes sanctification a real possibility in our lives, but we will not perfectly embrace all the demands of the Christian life. We will find the commands of God strange and difficult even though we desire to obey them. But the good news is that sanctification increases throughout life.

CONCLUSION

Paul teaches us that we must see identifiable progress in holiness. The Corinthians were not progressing as they should. What about you? Do you see definitive progress in holiness? Does the list in verses 9-10 characterize your life? Can you see the evidence of *washing* and *sanctification*? Justification precedes, but cannot be separated from, progressive sanctification. May God greatly increase our desire for holiness.