

## True Christianity: the Transformed Heart

Today we are beginning a new series entitled, “The Marks of a Transformed Heart”. My desire is that we look into what the Holy Spirit is making all those who belong to Christ: into His image. You see, true Christianity is not merely being gifted and successful in ministry. It is not merely being good and moral and externally obedient. It is much more than that. In a sense, it is much more difficult than that, which is why we need the Holy Spirit to be transforming our transformed hearts. True Christianity is a rebirth, a heart transformation of affection and motivation, of desire and of love: Love to God first and foremost, and love to each other close behind.

In this series we will look at the fruit that the Holy Spirit is producing in us and be challenged to consider these qualities from a biblical mindset. Too often we must admit that when challenged by the Word of God that our understanding of patience, joy, and love (for example) have been largely determined by our culture and not by God’s Word. We want to know what love is *according to Christ and defined by God*. We want to know what patience is *according to Christ* and defined by God. We want to know the joy of the Lord, not merely a sugar-coated happiness with things less than Him or an ecstatic feeling that detracts from His glory. Therefore, we turn to Christ and seek that others turn to Him as Savior and Lord, too.

This was a lesson that the Corinthian church needed to hear again, just as it a lesson that I, and you, need to hear again. Corinth was built on an isthmus between two waterways a few decades before Paul wrote this letter. It sprung up quickly because of the location for great commerce. It was, if you can imagine, filled with a certain kind of person. It did not have a great history, storied traditions, or long lines of powerful families who had lived there for eons. It was full of people who came to Corinth to “make it.” They were the ones who pressed for success, longed for reputation, and toiled hard to accomplish their goals. In a way, I imagine it was much like early America, being forced ahead by an air of determination, ingenuity, and a firm belief that you can accomplish your own dreams if you work hard enough.

Success is measured in our society in a similar way as it was in Corinth. We judge our leaders by their accomplishments and their bottom line. We love hearing the story of the person who has come from nothing and made himself something. It is human nature to look upon success and the self-made man with a nod of proud support.

This brief section of the letter to the church in Corinth is a well-known section of Scripture that is usually read at weddings because of its content on love. And when it’s read, the usual reaction is something like this: “Aaaahhhh...” Paul didn’t write this section to give a treatise on love, but rather to hit the Corinthians in the nose with their lack of heart character and the severity of their selfish Christianity. They did not respond with “Aahh” when they heard this letter and I hope that we can see it the way they did today.

1 Cor 13:1-3

They were gifted, but that was useless to them b/c their character wasn’t much. Their emphasis was on performance, not on character. “As long as you perform well, it doesn’t matter what your inner life is like”

1 Cor 13:4-7

I don’t care how talented and/or gifted you are, if you are arrogant, boastful, rude, irritable, resentful, YOU ARE NOTHING!! Not merely having a few personal problems, but NOTHING!!

Two negatives and one positive concerning heart character:

## Heart character is NOT:

### 1. Being Gifted (v1-2)

- a. "have the tongues of men and angels"
  - i. Miraculous gifts (which the Corinthians prided themselves on)
  - ii. Led to pride, as did all the "powerful" and "miraculous" gifts of tongues, prophecy, faith-deeds
- b. "faith to move mountains"
  - i. This type of faith accomplishes great things
  - ii. is a leadership gift, getting people to do things they wouldn't otherwise do
- c. Prophecy
  - i. This is the ability to understand the words of God and communicate them to others
  - ii. direct revelation from God
- d. Fathom mysteries
  - i. having wisdom to know God's mysteries
  - ii. great insight into truth, both general and specific
- e. You can be a miraculous leader, a great worker for God's truth, but you could do all this without being saved!
  - i. "If I have not love"
    1. If love (*agape*) is not the source of my intent and action
    2. Love seeks and works for the best in someone else, what *truly* benefits *them*
  - ii. "I *am* nothing" – these gifts and talents, even used for God, don't mean that I am a Christian, or a mature one
  - iii. These aren't bad gifts, but it is not the gifts that are of central importance and worthiness, it is the character of love as the source and motivation of said gifts
- f. Jonathan Edwards, "Many bad men have had spiritual gifts (Matt 7:21). It is possible to have gifts of the spirit but not special saving work of the spirit in the heart. Gifts of the spirit are excellent things, but they are not things that are inherent in the nature as true grace and holiness are. Gifts of the spirit are then, as it were, precious jewels which a man carries about him, but true grace in the heart is, as it were, the preciousness of the heart itself by which the soul become a precious jewel through the Spirit of God."
  - i. Why would God let His power and work come through unsaved, immoral, or spiritually weak Christians?
    1. God is a gracious and loving person. How bad off would the world be if only mature Christians accomplished goodness in this world?
  - ii. It seems to be possible for a person to do *great things* for God and not have any inkling of transformative grace in their own lives
    1. It is possible to mistake gifts for grace, mistake your talent and achievements for character and the seal of God's acceptance.
      - a. Charles Templeton – colleague of Billy Graham and eminent evangelist turned atheist upon rejecting the veracity of Scripture
    2. We acknowledge and praise great giftedness more than we acknowledge and praise great character in the church. (Taking a new believer with a great speaking gift, and make him a teacher.)
- g. Am I hiding behind the good things I do for people, behind people saying "you help me so much?" Am I hiding behind my talents and performance? Inside, though, I am resentful, I do keep a record of wrongs, I'm joyless. My ego is no different, etc.

## 2. Being Good (v3)

- a. v3, give all I have to the poor, deliver my body to the flames
  - i. As opposed to being gifted, this is focused upon moral superiority. "I don't have the flashy talents, those aren't important, what is important is doing good."
  - ii. There are no talents here
- b. Paul slams the virtue list just like the gift list.
- c. How can this be? Doesn't virtuous behavior matter?
  - i. Paul is going deeper than outward morality and restraint of the heart into the very core of the heart in order to make sure the selfish motives of our heart is being eroded by the Holy Spirit.
    1. Restraint of the Law vs. Renewal of the heart
  - ii. It is possible to have great gifts or to do great virtuous works (sacrificing your time, sacrificing your money, sacrificing your life) and have it be nothing.
    1. Rather than "I am nothing" like in v2, it is "I *gain* nothing." These works gain one nothing, because these works are not about goodness, not about Christianity, not even about God...they are about me!! They don't please God, they don't build character, and they will not be remembered.
  - iii. If you do things to get a sense of worth: to say I count, now God is smiling at me, now I know I'm a good person, they are worthless.
- d. Love: to serve another instead of yourself.
  - i. Even if you're incredibly generous to someone, if you're doing it to count: now God loves me, or now I'm a good person, or now people will see how good I am, it's all about you.
    1. Look out for the counterfeit of love: self-interested service and "niceness"
    2. Selfish affection: Rescuing someone but really rescuing self. Attracted not to person, but to how this person's love makes you feel about yourself. Co-Dependence
  - ii. How do we know if it's about me? Look at the text:
    1. This list of love is a list of character (not the ten commandments). This is who you are in private, in your inner person that people don't see.
      - a. Are you selfish, vain, complaining, resentful
      - b. In your inner thoughts, are you harboring bitterness because nobody recognizes you or somebody else got the glory?
    2. Real love doesn't ever give up.
      - a. You know if it's true love when you have loved deeply, and suddenly it's over.
      - b. Family:
        - i. addict and spouse – the spouse "loves" the addict and takes care of him, but studies show that if the addict recovers a high percentages of these marriages will then fail. Why? Who was it about?
        - ii. Divorce – people fall madly in love, utterly in love, and over the years one of you loses looks, gains weight, etc. Your love falls away, you start to look at other people. Why? That person *met a need*, it wasn't love.
    - c. Friends: betrayal, foolishness, consistent sinfulness
      - i. Your friend betrays you, again, and stabs you in the back. You cast them aside and want nothing to do with them ever again. Why? Was this about them or you?
      - ii. Your friend is foolish, making unwise decisions over and over again, maybe even sinning against you over and over again. You've had enough, they are

not emotionally safe to be around anymore, so you refuse to have anything to do with them. Why? Is this about your or them? Is this love?

- e. Do not mistake *being good* for an *inward change of character*

## Heart Character is:

### 1. Being Graced

- a. Inner character comes from a complete change in the way we approach God.
- b. v1, clanging cymbal and noisy gongs
  - i. pagan worship
  - ii. gods had to be attracted, impressed, and favor had to be merited
- c. We can still do these *Christianese* things in a pagan manner, and it is just as useless and sinful as pagan worship
- d. It is possible to be *Christiandy* and not be a Christian
  - i. I'm going to do all these things so that I count with God
  - ii. The Gospel teaches that we do things because we already know that we count with God.

### 2. Loving Like Jesus Loved

- a. Jesus is the pre-eminent Lover, the source and exhaustion of what it means to love
- b. Pleasing Self Pollutes Love
- c. John 7:2-9
- d. His brothers were really asking him to please himself:
  - i. Either by gaining fame and power
  - ii. Or by easing the difficulties of family tension (pleasing family to make it easier on him)
    - 1. Family was HUGE in his culture: honor and shame were familial issues
      - a. If you are honored, your family is honored
      - b. If you are shamed, your family name is shamed
      - c. Mark 3:20-35
- e. Selfishness always pollutes love
  - i. Like a skunk in the basement (Paul Miller)
  - ii. No matter how much you fragrance the upstairs, the stench of selfishness floats up and stinks up the house
- f. Because Jesus is controlled by a complete trust in His Father, He is not pressured by family nor needing the praise and affirmation of men
  - i. He desired to please His Father above all else
    - 1. John 8:29
  - ii. He lived and breathed His dependence upon the Father
    - 1. "my time has not yet fully come"
    - 2. "I can do nothing by myself"
  - iii. His hour came when He went to die for the sake of men
    - 1. John 12:22-23 – spoken after Palm Sunday, the week of Jesus' death
    - 2. Mark 14:41 – spoken the night of His betrayal
    - 3. The preeminent love for the world

How do we love purely?

See love as a person:

Love is personified in 4-7. Although the English translations come across as full of adjectives, they are actually verbs. What does this mean? Paul is personifying Love. Love is a person, an active and powerful presence that must act upon us, not us acting upon it. It has to come into us, empower us, change us. It must come from an outside source of infinite capable love.

Paul is really thinking of someone in particular, isn't he? Paul deals in this book with the terrible character flaws of the Corinthians. He says, you're forgetting the Cross. How can you be so proud if you remember the Cross? How can you become so emotionally needy if you remember the Cross? You're never going to become a loving person by trying to live up to certain behaviors. Look at the Cross! Look to Jesus, fix your eyes upon Him!

If you find yourself being impatient, arrogant, rude, critical, look at the Cross because you've forgotten on the one hand that the Cross humbles me. How can I be proud, when it took the death of the Son of God to save me? Secondly, how can I be so emotionally needy with feelings of envy and worthlessness and self-pity when God loves me enough to free me at such a high cost to Himself?

Where do you see the ultimate example of suffering under provocation? Jesus stayed on that Cross when all it would have taken was a word to get Him down. Where do you see the ultimate example of not keeping a record of wrongs? "Father, forgive them" Where do you see the ultimate example of love never falling away? "Father, let this cup pass from me, but not my will, but Yours be done."

Jonathan Edwards says that love is "putting your happiness in the happiness of another." Their joy IS your joy. Their delight IS your delight.

What do you get a man who has everything? Jesus owns the entire universe and when God came down and said I am going to die for you, how do we respond? "Lord, let me repay you?" How stupid is that?! Look at Isaiah 62.

"Lo, your salvation comes; Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him." And they will call them, "The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD" (Is 62:11b-12a)

Jesus Christ's reward is your joy. He put His joy into your joy in Him. When you see Him loving you like that, then you will be able to turn around and do that for others. You can only pass on what has been shown and infused into you by Jesus Christ. Look at the Cross and see that His happiness is your happiness in Him. Heart character is only changed by looking at that person of Love and His expression of that love. When we truly grasp how deeply that God loves us in Christ, then we are empowered to turn and love others for their sake, and pour our lives out extravagantly so that they might find their joy in Christ.

If you are a Christian, look to the growth of the character of the heart:

Don't mistake gifts or virtues for grace. Are you growing in heart transformation? Is your trust in the gospel growing? Are you depending upon God more and seeing the sufficiency of Christ for your sins and your virtues as coming from God daily? Are you more loving? That is, are you becoming kinder, gentler, selfless? Do you find your joy in seeing others joy in Christ grow? Does your love ever give up? Look to Jesus today.

If you are not a Christian today, seek the Lord, ask Him to transform your heart, to renew your innermost being, and to show Himself to you as we look into His Word. Wrestle with the Great Lover and ask Him to reveal Himself to you.