

INTRODUCTION:

As we step back to observe the “big picture”

- it’s not really about **justifying** a lifestyle
- or convincing other’s that we belong in God’s family
- or having **license** to follow our human impulses

When reading the Gospels, it’s apparent that Jesus didn’t get into a moral panic over the things we tend to chafe over. Christians gasp over immorality yet Jesus saved his rebuke, anger, and judgment for the “religious” sinners who felt spiritually superior because they were not immoral. His passionate indignation was expressed for the self-righteous, never once for the adulterer, the prostitute, or the dishonest tax collector.

Matthew 21:31b-32

"I assure you, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. ³²For John the Baptist came and showed you the way to life, and you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to turn from your sins and believe him.

It’s hard to turn from your sins when you don’t think you have any! Religion causes people to feel superior; a relationship with Jesus results in you knowing your sinfulness and your utter dependence on God’s grace and mercy.

It is about me and God:

- receiving His **Son**, his love, and grace
- living justified
- working out my salvation (Philippians 2:12)
- trusting God to complete the work He’s started
- crossing the **finish** line

1. The Big Picture

a. Peter’s **Vision**

The OT Law & Peter’s Vision Acts 10:⁹ ... Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹²It contained all kinds of fourfooted animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. ¹³Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

¹⁴“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

¹⁵The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”

¹⁶This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

¹⁷While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. ¹⁸They called out, asking if Simon who was known as Peter was staying there.

¹⁹While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. ²⁰So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.”

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa went along. ²⁴The following day he arrived in Caesarea.

Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

²⁷Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

- i. Before this time the only people converted into the Christian church were Jews, Samaritans, and those who had been circumcised and observed the ceremonial law; but now Gentiles were being invited to share in all the privileges of God's people, without first becoming Jews.

- Cornelius had true faith in God's word, as far as he understood it, though not yet clear faith in Christ.
- This was the work of the Spirit of God, through the mediation of Jesus, even before Cornelius knew him.
- God, through His Spirit, works in the same manner today.
- Cornelius' prayers and gifts were accepted, which otherwise would have been rejected.

The prejudices of Peter against the Gentiles would have prevented his going to Cornelius unless the Lord had prepared him through the vision. To tell a Jew that God had directed those animals to be made clean which were before deemed unclean, was in effect saying, that the law of Moses was no longer something to follow?

Imagine, some faith-defining belief of ours suddenly dismissed (and God is behind the dismissal).

Perhaps it would be something like heterosexual Christians hearing in a traditional church that God will invite the GLBT community into a relationship with Him on the basis of Jesus' blood.

Acceptance cannot be obtained on any other ground than that of the covenant of mercy, through the atonement of Christ; but wherever true religion is found, God will accept it without regarding labels. The fear of God and works of righteousness are the substance of true religion, the effects of special grace. Though these are not the cause of a person's acceptance, yet they show it; and whatever may be lacking in knowledge or faith, will in due time be given by God who has begun the work.

James 1:²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

- Attend to the needs of people who can't care and provide for themselves
- Avoid worldly pollution (discuss & define)

b. Romans 13:10, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8

i. The Law of Love –

Romans 13:¹⁰ You can't go wrong when you love others. When you add up everything in the law code, the sum total is love. (MSG)

Galatians 5:¹⁴ For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That's an act of true freedom. (MSG)

Christian freedom is the freedom to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13 *You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*). The slavery of love is contrasted to two other kinds of slavery.

- First, the immediate context puts this command to serve in love in direct contrast to indulging the sinful nature. Our sinful nature causes us to be slaves to our own selfish desires, but love expresses itself in service to the needs of others.
- Second, the command to serve in love is contrasted to slavery under the law. Christians are not to be under the law, enslaved to it, but they are commanded to be under others as slaves to them. Christian obligation is not subjection to the law (*Gal. 5:3 Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is*

obligated to obey the whole law.) but subjection to one another in love.

We have already learned two things about the meaning of love in this letter: first, love was expressed by Christ's giving of himself for us (*Gal. 2: ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*); second, love is the expression of true faith (*Gal. 5: ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*). Now we learn that love is expressed by servicing one another. When the object of our faith is Christ, who loved us, we are motivated and empowered to express his kind of love to others.

When such love is expressed, the whole law has been fulfilled. *The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself"*

James 2: ⁸If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. (NIV)

c. God's Gift of Grace & Justification

i. Ephesians 2:

⁸Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish!

Christians are like little children who fight over possessing the kingdom as though it's a scarce commodity and like it's theirs to dole out.

Remember the parable of the workers of the vineyard?

- Some worked all day
- Others 1 hr.
- All received the same pay
- The first workers were indignant
- God's response: The wage you received was what you agreed to work for. What is it to you if I decide I want to pay the same wage for those who only worked an hour? You criticize my generosity.

There is genuine inequity here! But the inequity is at God's expense.

"You don't deserve...!"

"You didn't earn...!"

Right you are!

We serve a generous God!

ii. Romans 5:9-11, 15-17

⁹Now that we are set right with God by means of this sacrificial death, the consummate blood sacrifice, there is no longer a question of being at odds with God in any way. ¹⁰If, when we were at our worst, we were put on friendly terms with God by the sacrificial death of his Son, now that we're at our best, just think of how our lives will expand and deepen by means of his resurrection life! ¹¹Now that we have actually received this amazing friendship with God, we are no longer content to simply say it in plodding prose. We sing and shout our praises to God through Jesus, the Messiah!

¹⁵Yet the rescuing gift is not exactly parallel to the death-dealing sin. If one man's sin put crowds of people at the dead-end abyss of separation from God, just think what God's gift poured through one man, Jesus Christ, will do! ¹⁶There's no comparison between that death-dealing sin and this generous, life-giving gift. The verdict on that one sin was the death sentence; the verdict on the many sins that followed was this wonderful life sentence. ¹⁷If death got the upper hand through one man's wrongdoing, can you imagine the breathtaking recovery life makes, sovereign life, in those who grasp with both hands this wildly extravagant life-gift, this grand setting-everything-right, that the one man Jesus Christ provides?(MSG)

The grace of God, through the righteousness of Christ, has more power to bring salvation, than Adam's sin had to bring misery,

Through one human offence, the entire human race is exposed to eternal condemnation. But the grace and mercy of God, and the free gift of righteousness and salvation, are through Jesus Christ. This free gift fixed them in a state of justification, as Adam and Eve would have been placed, had they never disobeyed God.

CONCLUSION:

The Big Picture

- God is not willing that any perish but that all people engage in a relationship of intimacy through repentance, Gentiles, Gays, and fundamentalists.
- The Law of Love is the life of the believer who has received salvation and justification through Jesus.
- Loving is much, much more than not hating.
- Grace is the unearned favor we've received from God through Jesus. Justification is living "just as if I had never sinned" (as Adam and Eve lived before disobedience).

Questions

Next week: Final week

How Then Shall We Live? 2 Peter 3:11

- d. Promiscuity
- e. Partnership
- f. Celibacy