

1,22,26 2 Cor. 6:14-18, The Family of God (Part 2)

Last week was part one of our study on ‘The Family of God’; tonight is part two. We’ll start by re-reading our passage;

(2 Cor. 6:14-18), Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore, “Come out from among them and be separate”, says the Lord. “Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters”, says the Lord Almighty.”

There is a deep and warm fellowship among believers who are open and teachable that does not exist between those who are not. In the passage we just looked at, Paul sets up clear and obvious contrasts to drive his point home. As we saw in 1st. Corinthians, this church was tolerating things that would have even shocked unbelievers, and the compromises they were making were like leaven infecting the whole church.

We all know the importance of unity and love because it’s the only way the world can know we are genuinely disciples of Christ; (John 13:35) “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another . . .”

But as we saw in 1 Cor. 13:6, love only rejoices in the Truth. When unholiness or deception creeps in, two of the first causalities are love and unity within the body. There can be no “fellowship between righteousness and lawlessness or between light and darkness”. So, instead of the calmness and warmth of unity, suspicion and division occur.

People distance themselves from each other and begin taking sides; (1 Cor. 1:12-13) One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”;

another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?

And often this division is caused by members of the church identifying themselves with some person who is, as Paul put it in Acts 20, pulling away disciples to build his own following.

(Acts 20:30-31) From your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

(3 Jn. vs's 9-10) I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words.

I have experienced, first hand, what it's like to have a fellow pastor in a church that I was the senior pastor, work behind the scenes to build a following, divide the church, and eventually split it and plant his own church with those he “drew away”.

There are a multitude of ways churches have split over the last 2000 years, what Paul and John describe are only two of them, but their point, their warning, is that unless the division in the church is caused by a legitimate concern (as when Luther broke from Catholicism to bring about the Reformation over the issue of salvation by faith alone), unity should be maintained.

Satan knows that to divide is to conquer, because as we know from Matt. 12:25, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.”

And the stronger the commitment of any fellowship of believers to defend the truth and hold the ground of Christ alone, the stronger will be the enemy's attempts to destroy them, (Jude 3), “I found it necessary to write to

you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

Contending for the truth in an age of deception is the primary battleground this generation of Christians face. As Warren Wiersby put it, "Truth without love is brutality, and love without truth is hypocrisy".

This is why Paul moved from his impassioned appeal for love, forgiveness and unity in the Corinthian church to what we read in 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

Genuine love never compromises in holiness or in truth. Holiness, separation from evil and from the things of this world, is what gives love its strength, conviction and courage. When we speak, we are to speak the truth in love; these must never be separated.

The main idea Paul is communicating in this part of 2 Cor. is the issue of separation from evil; of holiness. As we'll see when we get to 2 Cor. 11:2-3, this was one of the things that drove Paul in all he was willing to do and sacrifice for the Church.

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I promised you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. I am afraid, however, that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may be led astray from your simple and pure devotion to Christ.

I want to make sure that when we look seriously at our call to purity and holiness, we don't lose the overriding reality that it will be Grace, not Law, that sanctifies us; that sets us apart. Because as with many of the truths we're taught in scripture about this Life, the word "grace" has gone through so many transitions over time that it rarely means now what it meant to the writers of the New Testament. So, I want to look at that for a few minutes, because there are very few concepts in the Bible that are as important for us to have a clear understanding of as what Paul meant when he wrote about God's grace.

The one word which best describes that which is to govern the Christian life is “Grace”. In the gospel of John, the Son of God was presented to this world as One Who was “full of grace and truth”.

(John 1:14) The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

The blending of Grace and Truth, more than any other expression of God’s relationship with us, defines the Church Age. J.F. Strombeck has this introduction to a section on grace in one of his books;

It is not only important to know the meaning of grace; it is equally necessary to realize the extent to which grace enters into the believer’s life. Many think of grace merely as the means whereby God forgives sin, and they fail to recognize that grace is God’s way of dealing with those who are in Christ, not only during the earthly existence, but also throughout eternity. Great harm has come from this limited conception of grace and the lack of teaching the fullness thereof. The present low level of Christian conduct is largely due to an incomplete teaching of grace. And truth is inseparable from grace. Only as grace enters into every phase of the believer’s life can there be truth in that life. It is grace upon grace that removes fear and gives assurance, stability and direction to the earthly life.

The Bible tells us that the same grace that saved us can now sustain us. Whatever we become as Christians, through our growth and obedience, will only be by grace. Those who know themselves, have no doubt about this.

(1 Cor. 15:10) By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Whether we realize it or not; whether we are living in reality or the unreality of pride and self-sufficiency, if anything truly good has come through us, it

has been by grace. Apart from grace, nothing of eternal value can be done for God.

This is just as true in the area of holiness as it is in Christian service. Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians to "be separate" from immorality and darkness is not just an issue of obedience or testimony, it's also an appeal to be who we are. Our freedom to be what we have become in Christ can only be experienced by dying to what we were outside of Christ.

And we can start this by remembering exactly how we got here. Watchman Nee's comments on this are good to keep in mind;

How regrettable that we often forget what God remembers and remember what God forgets. Some people are always musing: Does God really forgive after I have committed so many grievous sins? Will He indeed remember them no more? Yet others may think that even though God has blotted out sins, the scars which no doubt remain will forever remind God of what a sinner they are. If anyone is still bothered by his past sins and has no rest in his conscience, let him sing the following hymn till he can respond with an amen in his heart: "Why should I worry, doubt and fear? Has God not caused His Son to bear My sins upon the tree? The debt that Christ paid for me, would God claim again from me"?

We have to let our past be past. If we can establish, in our hearts, the reality that God will never bring *against* us what Christ has taken *for* us, we will at least have a solid foundation to build our lives on.

Freedom from guilt doesn't come by learning the doctrine of forgiveness; freedom from guilt only comes from *believing* that doctrine. At great cost to Himself, God has provided a way for us to live guilt free, but we have to decide what we're going to do with His provision.

Let's suppose we agree that we are accepted in spite of all we know of ourselves, and that we believe this. When the enemy accuses us (which he

will do, constantly), we remind him that our sins are removed by the blood of Christ, and we move on.

We aren't avoiding the things Paul lists in 2 Cor. 6 because we're worried about being condemned for giving in to them, we are avoiding them because they are lies, they are a trap leading to slavery, and they are not who we are in Christ; and we don't want to live a lie.

There is a huge difference in our motive and approach to holiness. One approach is an attempt to avoid things we secretly want to do in order to escape judgment; the other approach is to see through the deception these things represent and follow our desire to walk in light and truth and not be enslaved to darkness. One is based on fear, law and condemnation; the other is based on grace, a desire to be who we are and gratitude for showing us the way to true freedom and spiritual life as "sons and daughters of God".

Why would we want to act against our own nature?

Now, if we can get that settled in our minds, then the issue becomes, on the positive side, where does the Lord want to take us as His children? We know there is no value in the flesh, in darkness, in deception; but how do we know what *does* have value in God's eyes? This new life is "new"; we've never lived it before. Since Isa. 55 tells us that God's ways are not our ways, we can be sure that unless we learn about this new life we entered into, we'll never experience it. That is what Paul meant in Rom. 12 by having our minds "renewed". We can't see life as God sees it, let alone live it, unless we're willing to reject the old and by God's grace, discover the new.

We can read the contrasts Paul made in our passage in 2 Cor., but do we know how these can be applied in daily life? To have a renewed mind that will enable us to enter fully into what Paul is asking of us, we have to first know what God's (not man's) standards are in the way we live.

As Paul said in our passage, we have to be separate from anything that is false or that is opposed to God's will for His people. And we can't do that if

we aren't clear on the differences between the Lord's view of life and Man's view.

It would obviously take several studies to even scratch the surface of attempting to address everything that is different about life in Christ and life in the world. That's actually what most of what the Bible is trying to show us. The fallen Adamic race and those who through new birth are in the new humanity in Christ: Two different humanities with two different ways of viewing literally everything.

So, for our study tonight, I'm just going to focus on the difference between the Lord's standards when it comes to that which has true value in His eyes, as over against the world's view of these things. This is all part of what Paul's appeal in Rom. 12:2 is about – "Do not be conformed to *this* world, but be transformed by *the renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Let's start with Lk. 9:48,

He said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you is the one who is great."

Now, Matt. 20:16; the last will be first, and the first last.

The least will be the greatest, and the last shall be the first and the first, last.

The first thing we have to have settled is that God's ways are not only *not* Man's ways; in most cases, they are the exact opposite.

Here's another example;

(Lk. 21:1-4) He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So, He said, "Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

Compare that with what David said in 2 Sam. 24:24, “I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that costs me nothing.”

I've seen churches announce the names of people and even put up plaques honoring those in the church who “gave out of their abundance”. But God measures things completely different than we do. He sees everything and what most impresses Him is the heart, not the alleged generosity, of those who give as long as it “costs them nothing”.

In other words, the Lord determines true generosity, not by what is given, but by what is left over. Our tendency, of course, is to reverse that.

These examples deal with financial sacrifice, but as I mentioned earlier, this applies to everything in life. Even if no one notices what we do, God takes note of everything that happens. And regardless of how small our sacrifices may seem in the eyes of Man, this passage in Hebrews remains eternally true;

(Heb. 6:10) God is not unjust to forget your labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints . . .

This opens the door to another principle that is actually the true, spiritual foundation of *all* the actions of the Lord's people that are going to be recognized as having *great* value to the Lord. We are living in one of the most ambitious, self-serving and man-pleasing generations in history. We seem to do what we can to promote Christian celebrityship; whether it's musicians or pastors, we're copying the world's standards of 'success' and applying them to the Body of Christ.

It's big; if it's (quote) “mega”, it's worthy of our admiration; if it's powerful, inspirational, professional, attractive, magnetic and influential, we flock to it like groupies to a concert by our favorite band.

But like we saw earlier, the first will be last; the least will be the greatest. When Christ returns all of this is going to be balanced out and it will be a

major shock to those who have been as impressed with themselves as their followers were.

A 'renewed' mind looks for the same thing God looks for, which is *only* that which has true value to the Lord.

On the one hand, it's incredibly simple and is brought up consistently in the teachings and parables of Christ as well as in the writings of the apostles.

Let's look at a few passages on this;

(Matt. 25:20-23) "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

Here's some brief comments on this passage by Watchman Nee;

The extra five talents earned does not represent success, it instead represents the goodness and faithfulness of the servant. By outward appearance, Stephen (Acts 6) might have seemed to have been a failure, yet in spiritual reality he had done a good and faithful work. So, if a cup of cold water is given for the sake of Christ (this is faithfulness), it shall be rewarded. To be faithful means to do it for the Lord. For whom do we really work? Oftentimes we seek for success, not realizing that if success is not for the Lord it is but wood, hay, and stubble. The Lord looks for our faithfulness.

Now, (1 Cor. 4:1-2) "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that one be found faithful."

God does not expect perfection or showmanship or anything that would impress an unrenewed mind; He's asks only that we continue to walk with Him as long as we are here.

To be honest, I have a sense that everything is narrowing down. Some believers are going back to the world like Demas did, others are going with whatever is popular, like the majority in nearly every generation has done.

But from God's viewpoint, faithfulness is the one primary characteristic of a disciple. It's a man or woman who, because of their desire to know the Lord, to know the truth, has been allowed to understand God's purpose for us. And once that becomes clear to them, they hold onto a commitment to that and will not let anything move them away from it.

This is what happened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were confused, crushed and desperate for answers, so here's what the Lord did;

(Lk. 24:13-32) Two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not recognize Him. And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" So, they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that

they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see."

Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

In vs. 27, the Amplified Translation is, "Then beginning with Moses and [throughout] all the Prophets, He went on explaining and interpreting to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning and referring to Himself."

The difference between a defeated and dejected disciple and one whose heart burns with life is what happens when the Lord supernaturally opens the meaning of the scriptures to us and we see, with the mind of Christ, what this is really all about.

When that happens, turning back or turning away is the last thing we would want to do – our course is set and we have no intention of being anything but "faithful" in our allegiance of, and our pursuit of, what we now know is God's purpose for all of us.

I have noticed that in the lives of the majority of those God presents to us in the Bible as men and women He was pleased with – the heroes of the faith,

whether Old or New Testament, there was a great deal of failure. Some more than others. But the one thing they all had in common, was that at the end of their lives, they were standing in the center of God's will for them. They hadn't abandoned the faith and gone back to the world; and they hadn't exchanged God's purpose for His people for an imitation or alternate purpose created by Man.

This appears to be the one thing that is the most essential to the Lord. He will not "bring to remembrance" our sins and we are also instructed to forget anything in our past that may seem impressive to us or others. The past is past, and we're allowed to leave it there. What counts is the present and especially the final stand we take at the end of this Age. Are we standing with the Lord against all that is contrary to His purpose for His people? Is His purpose also our purpose?

Now, to close this part of our discussion, I want to share some thoughts I had on what can help us avoid the pull of the world or of religion so we can remain on track.

We saw in the beginning that there are two "minds" battling for control of us and that Paul said we are to remain faithful to one and separate from the other.

... what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? ... As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate", says the Lord.

I'm sure we've all experienced the power and the appeal of alternatives to God's purpose. But God has provided a way for us to counter that appeal. In a passage we've looked at many times, in Col. 3:2, Paul tells us to set our mind on things above, not on things on the earth. The "things of the earth", whether we are talking about politics, immorality or so-called Christian

movements, have a way of chipping away at us and weakening our determination to remain faithful to our heavenly calling.

So, for the next few minutes, I want us to get a taste of what it's like to think on things above, not on things on the Earth, to fellowship with light in order to experience what it's like to have no fellowship with darkness.

In 1 Cor. 2:16 Paul says that "we have the mind of Christ". Another way of saying that would be that the written word through the revelation of the Holy Spirit (as we saw in the Emmaus conversation) brings the thoughts of the Living Word to us.

If we want to take advantage of it, we have been offered a way to see all of life, all of creation (past, present and future) and even the deep thoughts of God Himself through the eyes of the second Person of the Trinity. Because of the immense love the Father has for his children, He has opened Himself up to us.

God didn't do all He did because of His infinite intellect. Our creation, and of course the cross, wasn't just an act of what's called "intelligent design" - it was God's heart that moved Him to do what He's done. This is what He's revealed of Himself to us. The "what" of the works of God's hands is observable, but to know the "why" required that the Lord give us a revelation of the innermost thoughts and desires of His Person.

God knew where He wanted to go before the first celestial being was created. The last chapters of Revelation show us His predetermined goal.

(Rev. 21:3) And I heard a great voice out of Heaven, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God."

The goal was a family; the motive was love, and the means of bringing this to reality is what we see in the history of angels and humans from Genesis to Revelation. Both the knowledge of, and the offer of entering into God's eternal purpose has been given to us and that purpose will be known and

experienced by those who eventually realize what an incredible God we have and what an incredible thing He has done. The Book of Revelation starts with the offer of “blessing” to those who hunger for the Truth. There is no greater blessing that God could give us than Himself; so that is exactly what He has done in Christ.

Now, if we were to “think on *those* things”, then I think the things of earth would lose a lot of their grip and even their appeal – faithfulness would be seen as more of a privilege than an obligation.

I’ll close with something I shared a few months ago on the “motive of God” in creation. Like I said, the “what” of creation is observable, but the “why” seems to have been either overlooked or downplayed in contemporary Christianity. It’s the “why” of creation that takes us past everything else into the heart of God to see what it was that motivated Him to do what He’s done, even to the point of the sacrifice of His Son, to ensure that the outcome would be perfect. We are genuinely the pearl of great price that God was willing to sell all He had to possess.

We say that John 3:16 is the heart of the gospel: but it is much more than that, it is the heart of the universe. There is back of all things in this created universe a heart; not just a mind or a will, a design, a reason, a power, a fiat, but a heart. We are familiar with the attempts to prove there is a design in creation, that there is a mind behind the universe, and that a will brought it into being. That is all quite good and right; but we are not so often asked to consider that behind it all there is a heart – and in reality more heart than anything else. The reason, the will, the design, come from the heart. Everything takes its rise in the heart of God.

We have said much about the thoughts of God, the counsels of God. The nearer we get to the very center of things, the more we shall become affected by this fact, that right there in the center is a heart. It is a heart that we shall come to eventually; not an explanation to satisfy our reason, not a demonstration of power, but a heart – but a

mighty heart: and when we use that word rightly, we simply mean love. We speak of people being heartless. That means that they are without all that love means. Love is not the governing thing in their thoughts, actions, and motives; they are strangers to love. Heart then, for us, means love, and when we say that back of all things and at the center of all things there is a heart, we mean there is love.

So, it was the revelation of this ultimate reality that captured Paul and formed in him a very solid foundation and commitment to be faithful to His Lord. He didn't need a "thou shalt be faithful" stamped into stone to motivate him – he had something greater than anything any law could offer – he had the revelation of Christ and once he saw Who Christ really was, he was never the same again.

When we studied John we saw that Jesus told us that when we saw Him, we saw the Father. What that means is that Jesus didn't come to *tell* us what God was like; He came to *show* us. There is a massive difference between a sermon or message or theological description of the glory of God, and a personal, flesh and blood, demonstration by life - a *manifestation* of the glory of God.

When you looked at Christ, when you listened to Him, when you watched Him doing what He was doing, that is what God is like. As this author explained it;

Whether it be with the little children and his hands of blessing upon them, drawing them to himself. Or take any of the many things that he did in healing, in comforting, in restoring, and any of the wonderful things that he said in the parables, what is called a prodigal son, or a lost sheep, or whatever it may be. What is the conclusion? That is a pretty story? That is very interesting? That conveys some wonderful truth and teaching? No! What he meant was, that is what God is like.

And when that realization hit Paul, *that's* when he was never the same again.