

The Glory of God in the Details of Life

1 Corinthians 10:31

Last week we noticed in 2 Corinthians 3 that in the new covenant God transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ, restoring the glory of God that was lost through sin. The Holy Spirit does this as we seek Jesus and walk with Him. Paul stressed the depth of this transformation by writing that we are transformed from one degree of glory of another. This commitment on the part of God should keep us from having small spiritual ambitions. For example, instead of wanting to be just a wee little bit more kind, we can pursue a type of kindness that expresses the glory of God - a type of kindness that expresses the beauty and weightiness of God Himself. The result is that when people experience us, they experience the glory of God.

This morning we are going to discuss how this transformation shows up in the details of our lives. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 Paul tells us that “whatever we do” should be done “to the glory of God.” I realize that we can hear this command in a variety of different ways, depending on our state of mind and our circumstances:

- A weary person may be overwhelmed at this idea. “You mean to tell me that I need to pay attention to every single detail of my life?!?! I’m just trying to survive right now.”
- A perfectionist might feel lots of pressure to do everything **perfectly** to the glory of God.
- A discouraged/downcast person might feel defeated by the idea of doing all to the glory of God.

I have felt all of these things at various times. But I’d like to suggest that this command is really an invitation to participate with God in the transformation process we discussed last week. God is already at work restoring His glory to our lives; He is transforming us from one degree of glory to another. When we engage our wills and seek to glorify Him in the details of our lives, we are participating in this transformation process in specific, tangible ways.

What we’re talking about today can be viewed as an onramp to a more glorious way of living. We begin by **consciously deciding** to express the glory of God in the way we speak or through facial expressions or through touch or in our work. Eventually, by the transformation of the Holy Spirit, these ways of thinking and acting become second nature; we become people who instinctively give glory to God in the details of our lives.

Let’s consider the foundational command in 1 Corinthians 10. Then we’ll look at a couple of specific applications found in the New Testament.

“ . . . whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

In 1 Corinthians 10:23-33 Paul is teaching the Corinthians how to think about food, specifically food that had been sacrificed to idols. This topic might seem rather obscure to us, but it wasn’t for the Corinthians. Many of the Corinthian believers had grown up worshipping idols - physical, literal idols - before coming to faith in Christ.

One aspect of idol worship was to kill an animal and offer the meat to the idol. Paul describes this as “meat sacrificed to idols.” Typically, this meat wasn’t a burnt offering (as in ancient Israel); rather, this meat would be eaten by the family making the sacrifice or would be sold at the market. Consequently, much of the meat available to Christians in Corinth had been sacrificed to idols. Was it permissible for Christians to eat this meat or not? Paul’s answer is fascinating and challenging.

Paul writes that something might be permissible but might not be the most profitable for the kingdom of God. The overarching concern that governs this issue (and every issue) is given in verse 24:

24 Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is the second great command which flows from the first commandment to “love God” with everything we’ve got. When it comes to eating, we don’t merely do what we want; we seek the good of our neighbors.

In an absolute sense, Paul writes that there is nothing wrong eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. In verses 25 and 26 he writes:

25 Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake; 26 for the earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains.

In other words, there is nothing inherently wrong with meat that had been sacrificed to idols. You couldn’t unknowingly participate in idolatry by eating something that had been used in idol worship. Earlier in the chapter Paul warned against participating in pagan worship; you couldn’t eat at “the Lord’s table” and at “the table of demons” (verse 21). But when you go to the market, you don’t need to try and find out whether or not the meat had been sacrificed to idols. It’s not as if the meat had been demonized. (See also 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Whereas some advocated abstaining from certain foods, Paul wrote that “everything created by God is good,” therefore no foods should be rejected “if it is received with gratitude.”)

If, however, you enter someone’s home and they tell you, “This meat was sacrificed to idols,” you have a different set of issues to consider. In that case, Paul instructs the Corinthian believers, “do not eat” such meat. Paul wanted to avoid sending the message that you approve of their idolatry. Therefore you should restrict your freedom for the sake of the person hosting you in his/her home.

This would create a very awkward (and potentially offensive) moment, right? “I’m sorry, but I can’t eat the food you’re putting before me if it would suggest that I approve of worshiping your gods. My loyalty is to Jesus alone.” In Paul’s mind, it was worth risking offending a person because of the larger issue of his/her salvation (as we’ll see in verse 33).

In the new covenant, there isn't a list of acceptable foods and a list of prohibited foods. Rather, the guiding principle is whether or not eating a certain food "gives glory to God." Paul writes this in verse 31:

31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Paul advocates evaluating eating and drinking in light of the glory of God. You shouldn't merely ask the question, "Am I permitted to eat this?" If you lived in a vacuum, the answer would be, "Yes, you are permitted to eat that." But since you don't live in a vacuum, you also need to ask the question, "What will bring glory to God? What will demonstrate the character of God in the most radiant way? What will reflect that He is a God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth? What will reflect that He took on flesh and blood and died for our sins?"

The following two verses suggest that Paul was thinking especially about the salvation of those who would be affected by our behavior:

32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved.

"Doing all to the glory of God" involves not hindering believers or unbelievers from experiencing the salvation that is offered in Jesus. We live in a way that demonstrates the heart of God. As we've been discussing, this means that we behave differently in different situations.

In some cultures in some parts of the world, meat sacrificed to idols is an issue as relevant as it was in Paul's day. Here in MHK I'm not aware that this is much of an issue. We have other issues to consider concerning food and drink; we still need to eat and drink to the glory of God. I have a friend who's a vegetarian (basically as a way to identify with the poor around the world who don't have meat); his wife doesn't share his conviction. In their own ways they seek to glorify God through what they eat. When it comes to alcohol, you may have the freedom to drink alcohol in moderation, but you need to restrict your freedom in situations where your freedom would cause others to stumble.

Nevertheless, the command stands: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or **whatever you do**, do all to the glory of God." The details of our lives should demonstrate how glorious God is.

Let's consider a couple of applications of this principle found in the New Testament. The first involves expressing the glory of God through our bodies.

Glory to God through our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:18–20) In this passage Paul is discussing the issue of sexual immorality, specifically prostitution. This is the conclusion of his argument:

18 Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

The first sentence is pretty clear, isn't it? Don't stay and try to resist the temptation; flee immorality as if your hair were on fire. This principle is easy to understand but sometimes hard to do, given the habits of the flesh.

The second sentence is rather complex; scholars have different explanations of Paul's exact meaning. But most agree that Paul is saying that immorality is uniquely self-destructive to your own body, especially given the believer's union with Christ.

For the sixth time in this chapter, 1 Corinthians 6, Paul asks, "Do you not know?" implying that he's telling them something that should be obvious.

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Just as God dwelt within the temple in Jerusalem in the old covenant, God the Holy Spirit dwells within the believer in the new covenant. Just as the temple in Jerusalem belonged exclusively to God, so too our bodies belong exclusively to God. Just as the temple was not their own to use for any purpose, our bodies are not our own and cannot be used for any purpose. Look at verse 20 again:

20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Being "bought with a price" is the language of redemption; since God bought/redeemed us, we belong to Him. The price, of course, was the death of Jesus on the cross. Paul is reminding us that God redeemed us at great personal cost, therefore we should take seriously that we don't exist for our own purposes. "Therefore," Paul writes, "glorify God in your body." He is saying that we should use our bodies in such a way that reflects the beauty and impressiveness of God. Dallas Willard's paraphrase of this verse is, "A price has been paid for you. So ***make your body a showplace of God's greatness.***"

This of course is what Christmas is all about: Jesus becoming one of us so that He could glorify God in His body. When we read the gospels we see how Jesus used specific members of His body to show the greatness of God.

- He showed the compassion and care of God when He touched the man with leprosy (Mark 1:41).
- He showed the truth of God when He spoke to His disciples (Matthew 7:28-29).
- He showed the holiness of God when He made a whip and drove the moneychangers out of the temple (John 2:13-16).
- He showed the heart of God when He stood outside Lazarus' tomb and wept (John 11:35).

- He showed that God notices people who are suffering silently when He noticed the woman who had touched the hem of His robe. He stopped (His body), turned to her, looked at her, and spoke (Mark 5:25-34).
- Of course Jesus' suffering was a way that He showed the greatness of God in His body.

In these ways we can and should imitate Christ.

In the long term this means that patterns of godliness become habituated in our very bodies. This means that our words, our facial expressions, our body language, our touch, our actions, etc. express love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control.

In the short term this means consciously employing (and training) the members of our bodies in habits that glorify God. In Romans 6 Paul wrote that we shouldn't present the members of our bodies to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; rather, we should present the members of our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. Notice how you use the members of your body; become a student of yourself. When necessary do differently.

Think about the possibilities that the members of our bodies offer if we want to display the greatness of God:

- Tongue. James wrote that the tongue is a very small part of the body that can be used for great evil. But the tongue in the body of a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit can be the source of great blessing. This week before going to work or before a conversation, pray and present your tongue to God as an instrument of holiness; purpose to speak words that meet the need of the moment (Ephesians 4:29).
- Hands. Instead of mindlessly doing the dishes, offer your hands to God as instruments of servanthood.
- Eyes. Of course we should avoid looking at the wrong things. But we can also purposefully look and notice the right things: the needs of the people in your own home (kids, this will amaze your parents if you "notice" that the floor needs vacuuming or that the laundry needs folding), the needs of the people in your neighborhood, in your workplace, in the grocery store.
- Kneeling, standing, lifting hands in prayer. Use your body to give glory to God in prayer.
- Exercise, rest, and sleep are ways we can be good stewards of the bodies we've been given. In this we glorify God.

I hope you see all of this as burdensome; this is a way to participate with God and move from one degree of glory to another.

Glory to God through thanksgiving (Luke 17:11-19) Luke 17 records that Jesus healed ten men with leprosy. As I read this account, notice the connection between giving thanks and giving glory to God.

11 While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. 12 As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met

Him; 13 and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” 14 When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. 15 Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, 16 and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 Then Jesus answered and said, “Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine—where are they? 18 “Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?” 19 And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”

The one man “gave glory to God” by falling on his face at Jesus’ feet and “giving thanks to Him” (v. 15). Luke emphasizes that “he was a Samaritan” - an outsider, a foreigner, an unlikely disciple. The implication was that the other nine men healed were Jewish, insiders, locals. The tragic irony throughout the gospel of Luke is that those with all the spiritual advantages missed the grace of God and failed to appreciate it when it showed up. That’s the case with the nine: they experienced blessing and healing from Jesus, but they failed to “give glory to God” by giving thanks to Jesus.

We can repent for how often we’ve been like the nine. But we should also be inspired and motivated by the one. If we simply slow down and take time to notice the blessings and gifts of God, we can give glory to God by giving thanks.

A couple of weeks ago I found Ann Voskamp’s “A Thousand Reasons” on my shelf (long story how it got there). I know that many of you have read that book. I’m only a few chapters in, but it’s a very moving account of how thanksgiving can change a person’s life. A few months after Ann Voskamp started making a list of a thousand things for which she was thankful, she was in the kitchen of a friend. Out of the blue her friend said, “You’ve changed.” Caught off guard, Ann replied, “I have?” “Yes. . . you’ve changed. . . It’s that list you’ve been writing, isn’t it?” “Yes. . . It’s the list.” Although she’d experienced her share of grief and loss, slowing down and noticing the small gifts of God in everyday life had changed her. For the first time she had hope in her eyes.

Christmas can be a difficult time for people; the losses and disappointments of the year come flooding into our minds. Sometimes suffering and pain can crowd out thanksgiving. Sometimes we just don’t think to give thanks when we’re experiencing pain or grief; sometime we might even think we’d be hypocritical to give thanks when we don’t **feel** thankful.

But both Scripture and experience teach us that even when we’re suffering God doesn’t stop being good or giving good gifts. I would invite you to give glory to God this week by noticing the beauty all around you and giving thanks. . . by noticing the people around you (as imperfect and flawed as they are) and giving thanks. . . by noticing the food you have to eat and giving thanks. . . by noticing the character of God throughout Scripture and giving thanks. . . by fixing your eyes on Jesus the Good Shepherd and giving thanks.