

Yield 13 – Power over the Past

One of the greatest privileges I have in my role as pastor is to field QUESTIONS. I can't tell you how much joy I find in questions. There was a day in my own life where I was told that questions were SINFUL. So many things I wanted to ask but was told I could not. I felt powerless and frustrated, and all because of a lie. Jesus welcomed questions and usually answered them with a bigger response than people were expecting. So I LOVE it when I get questions.

After last week, I had a host of questions: one at lunch that day from students, others throughout the week in emails and conversations. But one that seemed to be repeated again and again was about the past. OUR past. One of the greatest lies that our hearts hear from the EVIL one is this: you ARE your past and you cannot escape it. You are what you are, and you must carry that past with you forever. That, my friends, is what we call SHAME. And shame is not the same thing as guilt.

GUILT/CONVICTION is our recognition that we have made a wrong choice or taken a wrong action. And guilt can usually be made right by our own actions to apologize and demonstrate real contrition and CHANGE in our behavior. IT's about what we DID, not who we ARE.

SHAME is different. Shame is the feeling that we are damaged goods. We are permanently scarred, marked by our mistakes and INCAPABLE of escaping to a new life. "I am what I am, I cannot change," some of us believe.

Last week I told you I was broken hearted over people who never embrace repentance and live in defiance of God. But equally heart-breaking is that some have HUNGERED for repentance but can't seem to experience the RELIEF that Jesus intended for you. Some are numb to conviction (last week) and refuse to yield their lives to Jesus. This whole letter was written to a Corinthian church that was PROUD of their sin, proud of their standing, so a great deal of Paul's letter is confronting in a way to EVOKE some appropriate conviction and repentance. That's exactly what we were talking about last week.

At the same time, others are numb to forgiveness and the regeneration that Jesus empowers. They're two sides to the same coin, the same deception. And some of the questions I received this week pointed to this kind of struggle: when you face shame, you feel you can never do enough, you can never *really* be forgiven. The past is too bad, too severe, too damaging, too addicting, too *SINFUL* for Christ to forgive and heal. You can't let it go, can't believe it's redeemed, can't see yourself as cleansed and free. Despair or capitulation follow.

So today, we return to **1 Corinthians 6**, and I want to focus on one verse here that many of you read and you frankly have a hard time believing it. It's verse 11:

"Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Now here's where a little language clarification helps. You don't hear me do this often, but this is one of those places it really makes a difference. Paul does something here that is starkly obvious in the original language—and David Garland translates it the way Paul wrote it, even though we don't say it that way.

BUT you were cleansed; BUT you were made holy; BUT you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." [David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Baker Academic, 2003, p. 194, 215]

That term, *alla*, that we translate "but" is a conjunction that divides and CONTRASTS—so it cares more of an import like this: You were BUT you now ARE! Something has happened that has changed your past and because your past has been redeemed your PRESENT is redeemed. YOU ARE because Jesus made it so.

Now why do people struggle with that? Because our natural expectation is that WE have to do something to redeem it ourselves. And try as we might, WE can't. **Jesus knew that.** IF there had been a way for YOU to fix YOU, YOU would have done it and Jesus never would have had to face the cross. If you could have rescued yourself, undone your past, there was no need for the Cross. It makes His loving sacrifice a waste.

So, I want you to hear how Paul described this to other believers during that same era. Paul wrote to **Titus** about this, and he says that JESUS brings that new life. In chapter 2: ¹¹ *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.* ¹² *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.* You don't muster this or define this. HE does. HE gives us a power we do not have on our own. HOW? Look at **chapter 3:**

³ *At one time we too WERE foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We LIVED in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

On some level, we ALL have been defiant to God, we all have made mistakes, built a past we wish we could undo, and we have felt the effects. **BUT SOMETHING HAPPENED!!!**

⁴ *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared,* ⁵ *he saved us, NOT because of righteous things WE had done, but because of HIS MERCY. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,* ⁶ *whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,* ⁷ *so that, having been justified by HIS GRACE, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

It wasn't that you woke up and fixed you. HE came to rescue you from that past. And once he deals with your PAST, that same Savior is at work in your present and future. **Phil 2:** *Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear.* ¹³ *For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*

Do you hear the pattern? The power for leaving the past is not up to YOU to somehow muster. It's made possible by Jesus and HIS grace. **It's not UP TO you; it's possible FOR YOU!**

Literally, the concept is what we call "regeneration." Christ "made us alive" again. Robert McGee in *Search for Significance* describes it this way:

"Regeneration is not a self-improvement plan, nor is it a clean-up campaign for our sinful natures. Regeneration is nothing less than the impartation of new life." [Robert McGee, *Search for Significance*, Rapha Publishing, 1985, 1990, p. 111]

Ephesians 2 says this: *Once we were DEAD in our sins, but have since been MADE ALIVE in Christ.* We have a new life!

We have been watching *the Chosen* on Wednesday nights and it's always touching to see this transformation and relief from the past portrayed. Mary Magdalen wore the shame of demonic possession and in that bondage did unspeakable things. But Luke's Gospel says that she was a person Jesus set free.

So, there's a scene where Mary comes face to face with another person who's possessed and is miserable. And the demon within that person recognizes Mary's past. He calls her by an old nickname. And Mary's response is the RIGHT answer: **"I don't answer to that name anymore. My name is MARY."** [*The Chosen*, season 1, Angel Productions]

- Jesus has set her free.
- Jesus has forgiven and cleansed her past.
- Jesus has given her a NEW life, a NEW future.
- Jesus has given her a new POWER for following Him.
- **What she must do is BELIEVE it!**

And so must you. What will you do?

Last week... I told you about my friend Bob. "I'm still learning to live in my sobriety." And I told you that the problem wasn't the drinking; the problem was that he still believed the LIE about himself. Something happened with Bob before he moved away. I saw it. We all saw it.

He finally BELIEVED Jesus' grace over Him, BELIEVED that he was a new creation—not because he sobered up, not because he accomplished something, not because he was coming to church. But in his words, "Jesus got down on his hands and knees in my vomit and said, 'if you will let me, I will help you to stand.'" And Bob finally believed that Jesus had led him away from the mess of his past. It set him free!

That's what Jesus offers us—and many of you believe in the cross and resurrection, you believe Jesus is God's son. But you have a hard time believing he WANTS to and is ABLE to free you from your past and impart NEW LIFE into you.

SETTLE THIS TODAY! PRAY this with me today. . .

- Jesus, I know I made a mess in my past.
- Jesus, I know you came to cleanse that past and me.
- Jesus, I know you paid for that past on the cross.
- Jesus, I want to know that relief, that new power for living for you.
- Jesus, I want to know that new life—so Jesus, today, I give you all my past; I give you my present and my future.
- Jesus, I want to walk away today and ask for you to pronounce all my sin forgiven ONLY because I'm trusting YOU to do that.
- Amen