

“GROW UP: LIFE LESSONS FROM FIRST CORINTHIANS
(#2 – RELATIONSHIPS IN GOD’S KINGDOM)”

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 9-18-11]

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1. [Traditional Service ONLY] Read Text: 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Pray.

2. [STORY OF MAN WHO HAD YELLOW JAUNDICE]

There once was a man who loved the color yellow -- so much so that nearly everything he had and owned was yellow. He had a yellow house, a bright yellow car, yellow suits and pants, and a yellow-painted bedroom with yellow carpeting on the floor. Why, he even had yellow sheets and bedspreads!

Well, it just so happened that one day the man contracted a severe case of yellow jaundice, and his family was so concerned that they called for a doctor to come to the house and check on him.

So, the doctor arrived and was told by family members what was wrong. The doctor went into the bedroom where the man was, and in a short while came back out with an exasperated look on his face.

“What’s wrong?” said one of the family members. “Is he going to die? Did you get to treat him?” “Treat him!?” said the doctor. “I couldn’t even find him!”

A--Well, unfortunately, this accurately describes a lot of Christians in today’s world -- instead of standing out and making a *different* because of our faith and beliefs, all too often our actions and behaviors look much like the rest of the world that people may not even recognize us as followers of Christ.

B--Well, as we continue a new series, we learn about the apostle Paul’s experience with Christians who had a similar problem standing out from the rest of their culture.

3. If you were with us last week, you’ll remember we talked about the fact that this book of First Corinthians essentially is his advice “*Life Lessons*” to spiritually immature believers in the Greek city of Corinth, challenging them to “*Grow Up*” in the Lord through the way that they deal with specific issues/topics that he addresses.

A--And we learned that the first four chapters dealt with *divisions* in the church caused by their selfish inability to *value differences* among themselves.

B--Today, using the lens of today’s short scripture, I want us to look at Paul’s advice in Chapters 5-7, and how it not only challenged the Corinthians Christians to “*Grow Up*” in *their* faith, but also how it can challenge *us* to do the same in ours, as well.

(As in the past, sermon notes are available in bulletin, past sermons and study outline available in Narthex & on my blog, and that each week I’m asking you to read ahead the Homework Chapters in preparation for each week’s message -- this week read Chapters 8-11)

C--In Chapters 5-7, he addresses several seemingly unrelated subjects that (for him) are just another example of the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthian believers

--II--

4. First, in Chapter 5 he deals with the subject of **sexual immorality** within the church.

A--Now, let's remember what I said last week about the Corinthian church being made up of people who (before being converted to Christ) had very loose sexual morals:

1--Some of them had been ritual prostitutes in the pagan Temples, others had sold their bodies for money on the streets, and sexual faithfulness in relationships in general was laughed at in the Greek and Roman world.

2--So it shouldn't surprise us that these new Corinthians believers might struggle with falling back into some of their old habits in this area by visiting prostitutes, swapping spouses, having affairs, and so on.

3--In this case, though, not only were those things happening, but Paul had also gotten word about a kind of immorality Verse 1 says "*is not found even among the pagans*": a church member essentially sleeping with his mother-in-law.

4--And not only did these things seem to be condoned by the church leadership, but Paul's letter says there were some who actually "*boasted*" about it (Vs.6)!

B--So, Paul here is addressing not only what to do with the *offenders*, but with the misguided attitude of the *whole church* towards human sexuality, in general, by saying that a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity is no longer consistent with one who follows Christ.

5. Moving on to Chapter 6, he turns his attention to what we would today call "**litigation among believers**"-- Christians who were suing fellow Christians at the drop of a hat.

A--And Paul reminds them here that not only is this inappropriate, and not only does it reveal *our own* immaturity when we do it, but that in the end *we'll* be the ones who suffer *because* of it (Verse 7a) -- it's kind of like the old saying "*when you point one finger at others, there are four pointing back at you*" [Or in this case... "*When you sue somebody else too quickly, it says more negative things about you than about them!*"]

B--His point is that even though it's "what everybody else does" in the *culture*, there are other ways to solve differences within the body of Christ than the taking of fellow believers to court.

6. And then finally, in Chapter 7, Paul answers questions that he was asked in a previous letter about **marriage and divorce** among believers.

A--He talks about the nature of appropriate sexual relations between a legally married man and a wife, and how, and under what circumstances, a Christian can divorce.

B--And then he talks about the challenges that occur when believers marry non-believers, and the pros and cons of marriage versus remaining single.

C--And all of this advice was offered to guide the Corinthian believers to act *differently* from the pagan society all around them.

--III--

7. Now, when I first read these chapters, I kept asking myself what *you* may be thinking right now:...What do these three seemingly *diverse* subjects have to do with each other?

A--And then it hit me:...they all deal with how we handle “*Relationships in the Kingdom of God*”-with how you and I act & interact with each other as fellow children of God. ¹

B--That’s really the main point of today’s short scripture (6:19-20): ...That since our “*body is a temple of the Holy Spirit... [we should] therefore glorify God in [our] body*”...rather than do *whatever feels good* with it like the rest of the world does. ²

C--You see, Paul is saying (both to the Corinthian Christians and to us) that -- unlike the man with yellow jaundice --when you and I as followers of Christ “Grow Up”/mature in the Lord, **then the relationships we have in God’s Kingdom should look, feel, and BE different from what we find among non-believers.**

8. Now unfortunately, many of us as Christians today are more like the Corinthians than we are the ideal that Paul sets forth.

A--E.G., Many church relationships today are rarely much different from those in our secular world -- like our secular counterparts, we’re people of legalism and judgment, quick to condemn at first sign of challenge, without ever bothering to find out the true motives or intentions of others.

B--Many of us are more like **thermometers** (*reflecting* the rest of our world) and *not enough* like **thermostats** (*setting the tone* for what the world *should be*).

C--So, how do we fix that, then? If we’re really called to have “Kingdom Relationships” that look *different* from the rest of the world, then what will that look like?

--IV--

9. Well, using basic principles found throughout Chapters 5-7, let me suggest three sets of characteristics that should mark our relationships with one another:

A--First, **GRACE AND FORGIVENESS**.

1--Even though the surface tone of these three chapters at times seems rather harsh, throughout we nevertheless find an underlying foundation of grace who's purpose is to bring about peace and salvation, not judgment.³

2--It's been said that grace/forgiveness is the "oil" and lubricates the "gears" of our relationships, and keeps us from "burning out."⁴

3--So, "Kingdom" relationships always have room for grace and forgiveness.

B--Second, **RESPECT AND HONOR** (even when we disagree).

1--Throughout these three chapters, Paul makes it clear that he disagrees with many of the ways the Corinthians are conducting themselves, but he does so in a manner that honors and respects the people to whom he's writing.⁵

2--He's showing us that sometimes Christian love has to be "tough" -- that sometimes we have to speak truth that people don't want to hear; but that we should always do so in a way that doesn't demean or berate them.

C--Finally, "Kingdom Relationships" are also marked by **LOVING PERSEVERANCE** -- meaning that when we deal with problems/conflicts among us, we should be willing to exhaust all other avenues *before* we resort to "drawing lines in the sand."

1--Now, nowhere in today's reading does Paul suggest that we allow sin, evil or wrongdoing to continue unchecked -- in the end, it *has to be* dealt with.

2--But notice that whether he was dealing with sexual immorality, or litigation, or divorce, Paul's tough discipline is always the *last resort* recommended by him.

3--Too often today, though, when people hurt/injure us through something they say or do, we Christians jump *too easily* to judge and condemn, never taking time to consider if there was a good reason *why* they acted/spoke as they did.

4--So, Paul's words and advice here model for us the importance of *persevering in love* -- of thinking and praying *before* we act rashly.

--V--

10. Now, obviously we've covered a lot of ground today. But I hope we've seen that within Paul's heart was a desire that there be a true *difference* in the relationships among believers.

A--That our Christian relationships should be marked by *grace & forgiveness*, by *honor & respect*, and by *loving perseverance*.⁶

1--Now, don't hear me wrong: Paul is NOT saying that we should *only* share these things with *fellow Christians*; No. We can (and should) share them also with those who have not yet found Christ.

2--Instead, though, he's setting a *higher* standard for how we treat our fellow Christians because if we can't learn to treat *each other* well, then what right do we have to teach God's ways to *others*?

B--In the end, you see, he's saying that "*Relationships in God's Kingdom*" (e.g., among those of us who say we follow Jesus) are meant to be a model of peace, love, compassion and justice *for the whole world!*

14. [PRAY: "*O God, forgive us for times when we as your children act just like orphans, having no faith whatsoever, acting too much like the rest of the world, and not enough like the 'set apart' people you have called and equipped us to be. Forgive us when we are slow to forgive, quick to judge, and swift to condemn those who have hurt or wronged us, especially from within the body of Christ. Instead, grant us your Holy Spirit to learn how to be people of grace and forgiveness, of honor and respect (even when we disagree), and of loving perseverance that enables us to look for the good and loving intentions behind even the most hurtful of behaviors. Help us to act these ways towards one another, that the rest of the world may see how different we are and want to know more about your love and power that makes it all possible. Most of all, help us be guided by you in all we say and do so that you would glorified through us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, Amen.*"]

ENDNOTES:

¹ For example, in Chapter 5, Paul is saying that a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity (the kind that many of them originally came out of) is no longer consistent with the behavior of one who follows Christ. In Chapter 6, he's saying that in being hasty to take each other to court, these Christians were acting more like their unbelieving neighbors than true disciples. And in Chapter 7, he's saying that even their *marriage* relationships were too often mirroring the pagan society around them, *instead of* being different.

² Although he uses the *literal* term "body" here, it can be argued that Paul's use of that word is also meant *metaphorically* (i.e., to mean our "relationships," in general). If so, then it means that Paul is saying there that how we relate to one another in our *relationships* (not just sexually or physically but in terms of our very *being*) should be *different* from the way the rest of the world relates -- that we should "glorify God" through our relationships. So, if we want to "grow up" in the Lord, then we have to learn to "glorify God" through the use of our "bodies" (i.e., relationships of *being*) in relationship with each other.

³ For example, read Chapter 5:5 & 8; Chapter 6:7-8, 11 & 20; Chapter 7:5-6, 9, 14-16, 25-32 & 35.

⁴ I've noticed that when people first come to Christ and become part of a church, there's often a "honeymoon" period where they somehow think that people in church always get along and always like each other -- all lovey dovey!

Well, if you've been in the church for any length of time, I know you have no such illusions! Having and maintaining healthy relationships within the Church are just as difficult as if one is not in it. In fact, such relationships may be *more difficult* to be healthy simply *because* there is unrealistic assumption that church members and leaders have to be perfect and can never make *any* mistakes -- quite often people in the church offer *less grace* to their fellow church members and leaders than they do to people who are *not* in the church.

But relationships in God's kingdom can be just as difficult or challenging, for one, because the Church is made up of imperfect human beings like you and me. And any time you put two or more imperfect people together, there will inevitably be conflict and disagreement. What we have to learn, therefore, is not how to avoid differences or conflict, but how to allow God's grace and forgiveness to be a "lubricant" that can help smooth out the rough edges of our relationships.

⁵ We find this especially in Chapter 5, where the entire chapter seems rather "harsh." However, even there notice Chapter 5:5 which indicates that the *purpose* of this harsh discipline is "*so that his spirit may be saved....*" Notice this attitude of respect and honor also in the way Paul write in Chapter 6:7-8, 12-19, as well as in Chapter 7:1-2, 17 & 35.

⁶ What about *your* relationships with fellow believers? When you're dealing with people within our church, do you offer as much (or more) grace than you do to those who're not in it? Do you allow them to be human and make mistakes? Or do you do what the Corinthians did, by being quick to judge, quick to condemn when they make a mistake, quick to point out their faults, but slow to recognize your own?