

Generous Hearts: Godly Character

Sunday, February 21, 2010

Text: Galatians 5:16-26

Pew Bibles #1815

¹⁶So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. ¹⁷For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Short opening story – Generosity - Tess and Dr. Armstrong

These past six weeks we have been looking at some of the I AM statements of Jesus and we have been focusing on the character and work of Jesus as :

the Light of the World
the Gate
the Good Shepherd
the Resurrection and the Life
and the True Vine

Having taken a good look at the character of Jesus, we now take a look at ourselves in relationship with Jesus.

This morning, we begin a short six week series called Generous Hearts. As you know, if you have been at Asbury for even a short period of time, Pastor Tom challenges and stretches us in the area of generosity. Having worked with Tom for almost 17 years now, I have witnessed his generous heart in the many areas of his life. These is not only biblical principles that he teaches and exhorts us generosity is a daily practice in Tom's life. Generosity is part of Tom's character.

Generosity begins in the heart....in order for generosity to be lived out in one's daily life, generosity must take root in one's character.

It seems to me that one of the key reasons that we cannot live a generous life is because we are so consumed with our own lives. As much as we hear about the significant – even life and death – needs of other people,. . .

. . . we see it on TV

. . . we watch as we drive by on our city streets

. . . we see it in people at school or at work

So we know of the great needs of people around us, but we have great difficulty being diverted from **our own concerns**.

Money, family, kids, work . . . the list goes on and on doesn't it!?

I don't have the money to be generous

I don't have the time to be generous.

I don't have the energy, capacity or maybe even desire to share my life with others.

I'm trying to keep my own life under **control** here and you are asking me to help others!?

And **control** really is a big deal for us isn't it!?

Have you ever heard of Lieutenant Hirro Onada? He was the last Japanese soldier to surrender after World War II. . . . in 1974, almost thirty years after the war ended.

Onada was left on the island Lubang in the Philippines in 1944 --- along with three other soldiers. They were left with the command to "carry on the mission even if Japan surrenders." Eventually the others were killed or surrendered. But Onada continued his war alone.

Through the years, he ignored messages from loudspeakers announcing Japan's surrender. Leaflets were dropped in the jungle begging him to surrender so he could return to Japan. During his 29-year private war, he killed at least 30 Philippine nationals. More than half a million dollars were spent trying to locate him and convince him to surrender.

Finally, on March 10, 1974 Onada surrendered his rusty sword after receiving a personal command from his former superior officer. His lonely war was finally over.

Determined to keep control of that island, Onada battled a war that ended 29 years earlier.

Sermon Central Key word: Surrender

And so it is that many of us are still trying to CONTROL the lives that we say we surrendered to Jesus months, years, maybe even decades earlier.

On May 17 when I was 13 years old, I said to Jesus, take my life . . . I give it to you. And yet it seems, even decades later, I find myself doing tug-o-war with Jesus over my life.

In fact, Paul lays out this tension in Galatians 5, the text we read a few minutes ago.

In Galatians and in Romans and elsewhere, Paul describes that we actually have **two** natures battling it out in our lives.

We got the lingering presence and influence of the person we **use** to be before we came to Christ . . . that person that still determines to be in control of my self-centered life based on my own desires and self-determined goals.

Paul calls this person the old self --- or the sinful nature --- or the flesh.

The other nature is the person that I have become since entering into this life transforming relationship with Jesus. This person is very different from the 'old person' I use to be. This person has said to have been given new life, new purpose and new focus in life. This person doesn't live with myself at the center of life - rather this new person lives according to the pattern given to me by Jesus.

This new person has died to the old way of doing life and is determined to grow in nature and character that reflects the nature and character of Jesus.

You see that – don't you in our text? See vs. 17 - 19 - 22

In fact, in relation to that person we use to be before Christ ---- here's what Paul wrote in 2:20 - *I 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.*

And listen to this, what Paul wrote to the Corinthians Christians (chapter 6):

*⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Jesus Himself also spoke to us with this: *No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

I'm not sure the NIV translators chose the right word for these competing gods. The older translations say, *you cannot serve both God and mammon* . . . mammon is more than money. Mammon is the accumulation of our STUFF.

Mammon is the stuff that distracts us from being focused on what God created us for. Mammon is the accumulation of your physical stuff, as well as the stuff of your own dreams, your own desires, your own drives and your own determinations.

And all of that mammon, even when put together and totaled up is **sheer rubbish** . . . it is valueless compared to that which God has in store for you as you walk His ways in life.

And I know **we say we agree** with Jesus that we can't serve both Him and mammon --- so that leads to the question: Then why are we determined to prove Jesus wrong? Why do we suppose that we are the exception ---- that I WILL BE THE FIRST ONE to successfully serve both God and my own stuff, my own dreams and determinations.

Jesus says YOU CAN'T DO IT --- it's not possible. So, I can imagine God saying, "Hey how about you give me that pile of rubbish that you treasure so much . . . let me take that from you - --- well, go ahead and let go . . .

go ahead . . .

yep, let go . . . There you go, let me take that **trash** of yours and now watch and see how I'll turn your trash into my treasures!

Watch how God takes your stuff - **AFTER** you let go of it – and turn it into treasure

See how God takes your dreams – **AFTER** you release them to Him - and turn them into HIS dreams.

When we as Christians, continue to hold on to our pursuit of the OLD NATURE, including trying to follow Jesus in **THIS** area of my life and the ways of the world in **THIS** area of my life . . .then we settle in a so-called "Christian life" that has mere moments of experiences with God or tiny glimpses of God's goodness . . . AND yet we still lack a fulfilling ongoing relationship with God.

Rather than trying to keep **CONTROL** of my life, and we see that God's desire is that I **SURRENDER** my life to God and to let **GOD** take CONTROL of my life!

Are you living **two** lives?

One has to die.

In fact, if ONE doesn't die, there's a good chance they BOTH will die.

Jesus already told us the two can't survive together. No one can serve two masters.

There is a word I would hope you will walk away with today, a word that I hope will stick with you. You've heard the word before . . .and it's a word that's very relevant to our discussion.

INTEGRITY

INTEGRITY - living one life

Integrity means being unimpaired - being a complete and undivided person - being ONE PERSON

Wise Solomon wrote in his Proverbs (10:9)

The man of integrity walks upright, but he who perverts his ways will be exposed.

The person of integrity doesn't have to be concerned about being found out, because who he is is already clear, because he is ONE PERSON --- and that one person is who he intends to be.

Many of us are NOT walking upright – in integrity -- because we are attempting BOTH the ways of Jesus while still trying to squeeze in our own ways and plans and values --- our mammon.

Paul is urging followers of Jesus to be people of integrity --- to be ONE PERSON who has died to that old self --

- that old self was crucified with Christ –

and lives as ONE PERSON devoted to walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

Jesus said, you cannot serve two masters.

You cannot live two lives

One has to die --- or they both will likely die.

Who are you?

Are you still the old self you use to be

Or ARE YOU REALLY that person who has surrendered that old self to Jesus and now living for him?

It is so incredibly difficult . . . almost impossible . . . to develop a GENEROUS HEART while you are living TWO lives. That **OLD PERSON** you use to be -- that old person that is still trying to have control of your life . . . is so concerned about that control, that he doesn't want to share his stuff . . .

. . . she does want to give up her time

. . . they really don't want the inconvenience involved in the needs of others because they're too consumed with their own needs.

But that person that Jesus is transforming in you --- that **NEW YOU** . . . that's the one who has SURRENDERED control . . .

That's the one with the generous heart.

That's the one that Jesus will use!

So much more to talk about in the Sundays ahead.