

*You might remember the hoopla that came a while back when the Episcopal church elected its first ever openly gay bishop, Gene Robinson.* The election threatened to cause a split amongst the 2.4 million member denomination. When asked by a CNN reporter whether his election would cause a split in the church, Gene Robinson replied, “I hope they don’t decide to leave my church. If they do that will be their choice.” He then went on to address the impact his election would have on other churches. He said, “I suspect that before too long, other denominations will also follow and welcome openly gay and lesbian people into leadership positions.” And then he said, “Just as Jesus reached out to people on the fringes and brought them in, that’s what the Episcopal Church is doing with this vote”

*Bishop Elect Gene Robinson (who by the way has a great last name but terrible theology) was right in one aspect when he said that Jesus reached out to those on the fringes.* Jesus spoke with, spent time with, even welcomed and ate with all kinds of sinners...but the one thing the Bishop left out was that Jesus welcomed the sinners, but then called on them to repent of their sins and change their lives.

**Friends, God loves you just the way you are right now.** And there is nothing you can do to make Him love you any less or any more, but God loves you so much that He will not let you stay just the way you are. He wants you to be transformed by His grace, to be made new in the image of His Son Jesus Christ. And as the body of Christ, we are called to do the same, to welcome and love any and every kind of person, but to call them to be transformed by God’s grace.

*In the text that was read to you a few moments ago, the apostle Paul gave us a before and after snapshot.* It’s a snapshot of a person before and after becoming a Christian and the change that takes place. As we continue in our series of *the demands of the cross*, I want us to see that the cross demands that our lives be transformed, where lost sinners are turned into saved saints. And perhaps this morning, by responding to God’s grace, you can leave here saying like the blind man who met Jesus, “I once was blind but now I see!”

*Now, one of the greatest testimonies to God’s love and power is a changed life. And our church needs to be a place where lives are changed.* This means first of all that the church needs to be distinct from the world around it. Look at vs. 17. It says, “**So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.**”

*The word church literally means the called out ones.* And as the church, we are called to stand out. To be distinct, not by a fish on our car or

a bible on our shelf, but by the way we live our lives. Jesus said, “**You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.**” We are called to shine, to give light to this world darkened by sin, but if we are no different from the world our light just simply tends to just blend in. Paul tells us as the church, you must not live like those who don’t know Christ.

***How does a person who does not know Christ live? Paul here tells us.*** Now there are degrees of extremity, but all follow a similar pattern in life. In his book, *God’s New Society*, John Stott describes the downward spiral of a heart that does not know Christ. It starts first with the *Hardening of the Heart*. Look at the last part of **vs. 18**. “**They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.**” Now all these other symptoms are the result of the hard heart. Now the word there literally means a heart of stone. It’s a heart that is unwilling to allow the truth of God to penetrate and thus respond to that truth.

***Now it’s not impossible.*** I’m a firm believer that the Grace of God can soften even the hardest of hearts, (that’s why I believe no one is ever so far away from God that they are without hope. There are people who have become Christians that I would have never guessed in a million years. Recently I read about the conversion of Anne Rice, the author of the horror books such as *Interview with a Vampire*, and now she is a believer in Christ and has begun writing Christian novels). It is not impossible, but God will not force Himself upon anybody. That’s why I said that a hard heart is an unwillingness, not an inability, to respond to God’s truth. God gives us the choice to decide. A hard heart is the result of a conscience decision to reject God’s truth. Now let me ask you, how will you respond? Have you chosen to harden your heart to God’s truth, if so why not allow that truth to penetrate and totally transform you? But it’s your choice, and it’s a choice you have to make.

***Now the next step in this downward spiral is a darkened heart.*** Vs. 18 says that **They are darkened in their understanding**. If a person is unwilling to hear the truth of God, then they are then unable to understand the things of God. Their hearts are darkened. That’s why it’s so hard to explain spiritual issues to someone who is not a Christian. Ever try to explain to someone why it is that you are seeking to live a holy life, or why you can have joy even in the worst of circumstances. And it’s difficult for those with a darkened heart to comprehend who God is. A God who is Holy, righteous, and just; a God who holds us accountable; and a God who

loves us to the extent that He places His Son on a cross to die for the sins of the world are concepts that the unbeliever can't understand. They may be able to regurgitate them back to you, but they can't comprehend the truth.

*The next step downward is that of a deadened heart.* Vs. 18 says that they are **separated from the life of God**. Paul used the expression elsewhere to explain life apart from Christ as being dead in sin. And when a person is apart from God, there is no shame felt for committing a sin and no reason for controlling one's behavior.

I remember to this day something I saw on television when I was only in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. My brother and I had a television set in our room, and one weekend our cable system gave an HBO free preview weekend. And for those with cable and satellite in your kids rooms, please be careful what they watch and what channels they have access to. Because Without my parents knowledge, I watched a documentary on HBO on sexual perversion, and even though we didn't grow up in a Christian home, we grew up in a moral home, and I remember watching a group of adults dressed in raunchy clothing doing things that were unthinkable to anyone and everyone in the room thinking how in the world can those people do such things. Don't they feel awful or ashamed? They didn't because they were dead in their sins.

*And when a person is dead in their sins, with no feeling of guilt or shame, then what follows is recklessness.* Look at vs. 19. **"Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more."** It's an anything goes mentality. There is no limits to the perversion that is possible, and I think you can simply turn on your television to witness this taking place. They are seeking satisfaction and fulfillment in their sins, but they can never be satisfied. It says that there is a continual lust for more. Dr. J.V. McGee in his commentary said that, "This vicious cycle leads to a desire to go even deeper into sin. If you paint the town red tonight, you have to have a bigger bucket and a bigger brush for tomorrow night. The meaning here is to covet the very depths of immorality. Men in sin are never satisfied with sin." **Isaiah 56:11** says, **"They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. "Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better."**

*Now the point he makes with describing this lifestyle is this... You shouldn't live like this.* You're not like that. You've been saved, you've been sanctified, so you shouldn't behave like those who are not. Look at **vs. 20-24**. **"You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you**

heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” In other words, stop living the way you were living and live a holy life.

**Now that is not as easy as it sounds.** We have temptations all around us and we still struggle with sin. But as a Christian, sin is no longer your master. And God gives the grace necessary to change. If you are a believer in Christ, then you no longer live like you used to live. Listen to how the apostle Paul said it in **Eph 2:1-3**, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” Notice, the way you used to live. You don’t live like that now. You used to live...not now.

*Paul says here in our text that we are to put off the old self, and this is what we call repentance.* Now the word repentance comes from two Greek words Meta Noia meaning to change one’s mind. It’s a change of attitude. My mind was once proud and arrogant, now it humble and permissive. It’s a redirection of your will. It’s a purposeful decision to forsake all that is evil and pursue all that is good.

*Now there are three words involved with Genuine repentance. We’ve mentioned them many times and we will mention them many times again. The first is conviction.* You admit that you’re wrong. There is no evasion, no denial, no blaming others. No saying everyone is doing it. You say, even if everyone else says its right, God says it is wrong. **Proverbs 28:13** says, “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”

*Next, you must have contrition, or remorse.* It’s not enough to know that what you have done is wrong, but there needs to be sorrow behind it. While I was stationed in the Navy, we had a first class Petty officer who whenever we hit the ports, he would go out to the nearest bar and find him what he called a wife for the night. The problem with this was that he already had a beautiful wife at home with three kids all under the age of 10 who used to send him pictures they drew him. When confronted with his behavior, his response was, “yeah its wrong, but what happens at sea stays at sea, and if his wife didn’t know, no harm done!”

*I compare that with another shipmate of mine who went out one night and had too much to drink.* With his defenses weakened by the alcohol, he gave into temptation and cheated on his newly wedded bride.

And the next day he came to me and he was in tears. He said, “Barry, how could I do this,” and you could just sense the immense remorse from him. **Psalm 34:18** says, “**The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.**”

***But true repentance doesn't end there.*** There must be a change. It's not enough to know its wrong; it's not enough to feel bad about it....there needs to be a transformation. When Paul preached to the Ephesians, listen to what happened. **Acts 19:18-20**, “**Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.**<sup>19</sup> **A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.**<sup>20</sup> **In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.**”

***You see, when they believed there was a change.*** You can't say you believe in Christ and then live your life no differently then before. Let me illustrate this. Yesterday, I decided I was going to go outside and do some yard work, and when I was done with that I decided I was going to do some exercises. After I was done, it was getting close to dinner and my wife said, “Barry, you smell!” My girls agreed, “Daddy you stink!!!” Now, I can take a hint. So I thought it was wise if I showered before I ate. Now what do you think my wife and kids would have said if I took a shower, but showed up at the table with the same old stinky clothes on. I would say, “I've been cleansed!” and they would say, “Yes, you've been cleansed, Now you gotta change!” And the same is true in our Christian faith. We are washed in the blood in the blood that cleanses us from all sin, but we are also told to let go of those old way of doing things and put on the new.

***And the good news is that you can change!*** You can let go of those old ways. No matter what it may be, whether it be something about your personality, or a habit you may have, or whatever, you can change. I heard about a picture of a 300 lbs man on a beach wearing a shirt that said, “I conquered Anorexia” and what a testimony it is when people see the way people who come to Christ change their old ways. One of my favorite verses that I think is very powerful comes from **1 Cor 6:9-11**. Listen to this, “**Do 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**<sup>10</sup> **nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.**<sup>11</sup> **And 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.**” As a Christian, you have been redeemed from the empty way of life, you have died to sin, and God wants you...No He

demands that you change and live a holy life. It's not easy, and there is a maturing process as a Christian grows in Christ.

***But if you are in Christ, then you are a changed person, and we need to live out the reality of that change.*** The bible says that if anyone is in Christ He is a new creation, the old is gone and the new has come. All things are new. You've changed. Look at [vs. 23](#). It says, "**be made new in the attitude of your minds.**" You've got a new attitude; a new mindset. You are a new person. You may look the same on the outside, but everything about you has changed.

***Now how about you? Have you changed?*** It starts by first accepting the grace and love in Jesus Christ, and then allowing Jesus to change you. You know, concerning Bishop elect Gene Robinson, a defender of his said that he was elected because of his superior credentials as a minister. A man who left his wife and two daughters to live in a homosexual affair with another man is good credentials? I don't think so. You know what would be? If he said, "God, I messed up. I sinned against my family and you. I pledge that I will leave this sinful lifestyle and return to you. Please forgive me and help me to change my life and follow You." That would be the best credentials possible. The credentials of a changed life. And God can change your life this morning. The cross still stands this morning as a place where you can come and find forgiveness, where you can find transformation and renewal, and a place where you find a new life in Christ. The old has gone, the new has come.

[Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I am found. I was blind, but now I see. There's been a change in me.](#)