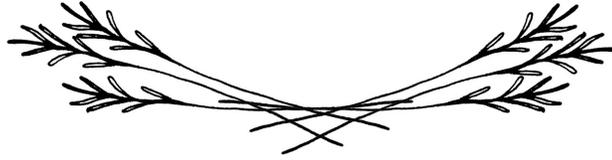


WEEK 11

SUCH WERE SOME OF YOU



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My high school recently had our twentieth year reunion. I didn't go, but I did enjoy everyone posting "then" and "now" pictures of themselves on Facebook. It is fun to look back and see our hairstyles and the clothes we wore.

Every generation experiences this change of fashion. You may have worn plaid jackets, hot pants, polyester suits, acid-washed jeans, or some other fad. You may have worn a mullet, high top fade, slicked your hair back with Brylcreem, had a bouffant, a beehive, or used a full can of hairspray while you teased your hair to get it bigger and bigger.

When we see those old pictures, we cringe at how ridiculous we looked. We laugh and think, "How did we ever think that was cool?" But we did, and we were proud of it! When we wore a red leather jacket with one glove, we thought we looked amazing. But now, not so much.

What would you think if one day, some of your friends began to dress the way they did in high school? Maybe they would start it as a joke for one night, but then they would continue dressing that way every day. As part of their daily routine, perhaps they would wear a polyester suit, platform shoes, or a red Members Only jacket. Or one day you notice they are growing a mullet that would make Billy Ray Cyrus proud. You would probably be a little embarrassed for them, and maybe have a talk to ask them what is

going on that is making them revert back to the fashion of their youth. We would be a little worried, and maybe even suggest they see a counselor. “Retro” may be in, but shoulder pads and disco are not.

In 1 Corinthians we meet a church that isn’t guilty of returning to the fashion of their youth, but to the sins they committed before they came to faith in Jesus. Before we go further, I want you to think about what it would be like for you to go to a foreign country where there is no church or concept of Christianity. You are able to convert 40 people. Some of them worshiped idols, cheated on their wives, were dishonest businessmen, were morally bankrupt. Now they are Christians, but they don’t really know how to worship God. Can you imagine what that church could look like? Maybe Bob only knows how to worship Apollos, so he brings a little of that into the church. Mary worshiped Aphrodite and she wants to bring those customs to the assembly. Johnny only worshiped money, and Suzy was part of a cult religion. This may give us some insight as to what the church of Corinth could have struggled with.

When we read 1 Corinthians, we see a church characterized by abandonment of spouses, conflict among different social classes, adultery—in one case—with a step-mother, jealousy over spiritual gifts, crazed and competitive worship services, and more. In chapters five and six, Paul addresses members who are returning to their former sins, members who are making bad business deals and are suing one another, and even a man who is involved in an incestuous relationship. Paul tells them that surely they can find wise and honest people in their church who could act as arbiters and avoid making a public scene. Then he calls them to remember their history:

⁹Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites,

¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And this is what some of you used to be.

Paul may be speaking in general or he could be remembering specific members and the sins they were involved in before they knew Jesus. This is no whitewashed version, but a raw version of who they used to be. When we read this, we can't help but see the power of Jesus. These people are no "choirboys"—these are the people your mother warned you not to hang out with. However, that is not who they *are*, but who they *used to be*.

Their transformation should remind us never to count someone out by thinking that they could never become a Christian. We need to remember that there is power in the good news of Jesus; it has the power to save people! Sometimes we trust too much in ourselves. We think, "I could never convert him," "I could never change her," or "I could never talk to or teach him." Often, we make evangelism too much about us. But the power is in Jesus, not me. I am not capable of changing anyone, but God can. I am not their Savior, Jesus is. We have to decide to quit making conversion about *my* knowledge, *my* ability, or *me*. It is about Jesus. The people at Corinth had changed. They used to be sinners, but that was before they met Jesus.

As my classmates and I were posting memories online prior to our class reunion, I received a call from a former classmate. He and I had a class together in high school and became friends. He wasn't the "poster child" for Jesus, to say the least. Our conversations in high school were usually about his antics and the trouble that had ensued. He drank too much and got into a fight; he was with a girl who thought she may be pregnant; he stole something and almost got caught. You get the idea. When he called, my heart skipped a beat, as I didn't know what to expect. I really didn't want to take the phone call. I thought about ignoring it because I didn't want to stroll down Memory Lane and

remember the past. He asked me what I was doing these days and I told him I was a youth minister. He got a good laugh and told me that he “could see that.” Then he told me something that took me aback: he was a deacon at his church. “Your church? You go to church?” I wanted to ask if I was talking to the right person. He had been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

If I were to be honest, I would never have believed he would give his life to Jesus. I never talked to him about Jesus. He was a sinner. Not *just* a sinner—he was one of the chief sinners (sound familiar?). If our class had given the “Most Likely To Go To Jail” superlative, he would have won it, hands down. But an example like this is what makes the gospel amazing. It contains the power to penetrate the calloused heart. It has the power to wash away every sin. Sometimes we forget how powerful the gospel is.

Paul continues in 1 Cor 6:11 by reminding them of the moment that they put away their old ways of sin, and put on Jesus: “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” He wants them to remember their baptism: they were washed; they were justified. Paul constantly takes his readers back to their baptism to remind them of the covenant they made with God and the new life that results from it. In Romans 6, he says,

³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin.

When we were baptized, we put to death our selfish desires, we renounced our sins, we changed the way we think, and we decided to take on the ways of Jesus. As a result, our sins were washed away, and God declared us justified (innocent) in his eyes. To Paul, baptism is when we embody the life of Jesus and participate in his death, burial, and resurrection. We sacrifice our life and give it to God. We die to our sinful desires, and come up out of the water as a new creation who now lives a new life. Paul reminds us that we were washed, we were justified or pronounced innocent, and we were sanctified or set apart from the world. We are to be holy as God is holy, and no longer live and think like the world (1 Peter 1:15-16). We cannot conform to the world, but be transformed by renewing our minds every day (Romans 12:2). We cannot revert back to our past, but must keep growing closer to Jesus every day.

In Colossians, Paul follows his thoughts on how baptism changes us to say we have put to death fornication, impurity, evil desires, and greed. He also says that we have stripped off our old self, and now we dress in new attire that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of our Creator. Paul is basically telling us that it is time to take get rid of the shoulder pad blouses, cut off the mullet, and put the platform shoes in the yard sale. Those things may have made us who we used to be, but now we are to put on our whitewashed robes and live for Jesus.

Questions For Discussion

1. What are some things that you used to wear but now find embarrassing or at least amusing? What has changed over the last several years to make you decide that those are no longer fashionable?
2. As we mature in our faith, we should begin to see sin as God does instead of from a human perspective. When we see sin from God's point of view, how does it look different?
3. What is it about our past sins that can draw us back to them and pulls us to our old lives?
4. How do we help people understand the significance that Paul gives baptism in Romans 6?