The Changed Heart

"The grace that does not change my life will not save my soul." - Charles Spurgeon

As Christians, we have heard and believed in the Gospel message as presented in God's Word. One of the key characteristics of salvation is that faith and repentance are followed by a transformed life. Unfortunately, the popularity of the prosperity gospel and other half-truths of scripture have led many to believe they can simply add Christ to their former lifestyle without sacrificial change. In other words, they think they can secure salvation and continue living a life of sin.

This is wrong. The following passage from Ephesians 2 describes the truth of the Gospel and its impact on our lives. We will use this passage as the foundation for this lesson.

> **Ephesians 2:1-10** – *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- [3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- [6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*

We Were Once Dead and Condemned (Ephesians 2:1-3)

It is clear, all mankind was dead in their trespasses and sins. As stated in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" [1] and the penalty for that sin is death.[2] From this, we can conclude that we are all condemned to suffer the wrath of a just and holy God.

Scripture uses the word "walk" to describe the lifestyle we live. That lifestyle before Christ reflected our sinful state and looked just like the popular culture around us. This is the lifestyle of the dead. As JB Philips said, "You drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living." And just like a stick in a stream, the dead float right along with the current, going wherever it takes them next. It takes life and desire to fight the current of the world and we had neither.

This passage adds another layer by pointing out that the "course of the world" is being directed by Satan and driven by "the passions of our flesh" and "the desires of the body and the mind." These passions and desires are not from the Father, but are sinful desires of this world[3] and reflect a lifestyle of spiritual death. These life choices lead not only to spiritual death, but often to hardship as well. The financial fruit of the dead is typically characterized by discontentment,[4] theft,[5] quarreling,[6] dishonesty,[7] bribery,[8] idolatry,[9] selfishness, and jealousy.[10]

Sure, even non-Christians can prosper and live joyful lives characterized by generosity and compassion, but let us not be so short-sighted to forget that the dead are still subject to the wrath of God that is to come. No matter how good their acts of charity may appear to the world, in God's eyes their deeds will never be anything more than filthy rags because "without faith it is impossible to please God". [11] The best acts of man will be rejected just like Cain's offering when they are not driven by a love for the Lord. [12]

"The heart is the altar that sanctifies the offering." – Thomas Watson

We Were Saved by His Grace (Ephesians 2:4-6)

Just like that stick in the stream, the dead can't change their condition, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, … made us alive together with Christ." Is there any greater truth? When we were utterly helpless, "hostile in mind, doing evil deeds", [13] God stepped in and saved us. Like the prodigal son, our Heavenly Father poured out mercy and grace to cover our rebellious actions against Him and accepted us by saying "my son was dead, and is alive again." [14]

We are a new creation. "The old has passed away; behold, the new has come". [15] The Christ-follower has had their eyes opened to a new reality. They can now see that this world is not their permanent home and they are nothing more than "strangers and exiles on the earth" [16] simply passing through. Their hope is no longer in the things of this world, but instead in an eternity with Christ. The truth of the Gospel is in direct conflict with the carnal appetite of our former selves. This is why the lifestyle of the Christian won't look like the rest of the world.

The defining attribute of the Christian lifestyle should be that you no longer live your life for yourself, but for Christ who lives in you. [17] Through the process of sanctification, God continually conforms you into the image of Christ. Over time, you will increasingly desire things that are eternal more than you desire those that are temporary and fleeting. [18]

He Changed Our Heart, For His Glory (Ephesians 2:7-9)

What is the purpose behind God saving anyone? According to verse 7, it is "so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." God did all the work to redeem us through this sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ, so that He could be glorified.

The believer is made alive through the process of salvation and given a new heart. [19] This new heart is what finally allows us to please God in the works we perform. Where our best efforts were once nothing more than filthy rags, they are now sanctified by the condition of our new heart in Christ. Like a child that pleases their parent through acts of love, God values our actions and our efforts by the intent of the heart behind them.

"Men judge the heart by the actions, God judges the actions by the heart; if the heart be sincere, God will see the faith and bear with the failing." – Thomas Watson

Our Actions Should Reflect a Changed Heart (Ephesians 2:10)

God's work in re-creating us has been done so that we can now glorify him in the way that we live out our lives (by our "walk"). As Paul writes, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever."[20]

Part of our journey of faithfulness should be the pursuit of a pure heart that has no impurities, like refined gold. A pure heart does not have two masters[21] but focuses perfectly on the Lord. Let our prayer be like that of the psalmist:

Psalm 86:11-12 – *"Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever."*

Consider the contrasting responses of Zacchaeus[22] and the rich young ruler. [23] Both were very wealthy men that would have claimed a desire to follow Christ. When Jesus saw the heart of the rich young man, He told him to sell all he had, give it to the poor and follow Him. Sadly, the young man turned away because he loved his money more than Jesus. However, when Zacchaeus encountered Jesus, his heart was immediately moved to repentance and he voluntarily gave up his wealth to be right with the Lord because he had found something much more valuable. Zacchaeus realized he had found the pearl of great value or the hidden treasure.

A regenerate heart prefers God's glory over money, power, or the praise of man. It is characterized by contentment and thankfulness that acknowledges there is nothing we have that we haven't first received. [24] While it longs for the God-given desires of power, pleasure and possessions, it is satisfied to wait for these blessings in eternity where we will enjoy them fully without the stain of sin.

Since so much of what we do involves money, we should expect these good works to be evident in all areas of our lives. The Gospel will impact our generosity, hospitality, love for God, hatred for sin, humility (counting others as more important than ourselves), devotion to God's glory, and obedience to His commands. If these fruits are not seen in an audit of our financial history, we need to seek out godly counsel and pray that God would create in us a clean heart and restore in us the joy of our salvation. [25]

Christians will live their lives dedicated to God's glory as a demonstration of true saving faith. Whether we are spending our money, saving it, or giving it away, our faith should be the driving force behind every financial decision. As we'll discuss later, there is no categorically righteous use of our money as long as our heart's desire is to give God the glory.

"So…whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways would you expect to see a difference between the budget of a non-Christian and a Christian?
2. What have you found particularly challenging financially as you try to live as a Christian in a secular world?

Endnotes: Scripture References

1) Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

2) Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3) 1 John 2:16 - For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life--is not from the Father but is from the world.

4) Ecclesiastes 5:10 - He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.

5) Exodus 20:15 - "You shall not steal."

6) James 4:1-2 - What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

7) James 5:4-5 - Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

8) Exodus 23:8 - And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

9) Colossians 3:5 - Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

10) James 3:16 - For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

11) Hebrews 11:6 - And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

12) Genesis 4:5 - but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

13) Colossians 1:21 - And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

14) Luke 15:11-32 - And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

15) 2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

16) Hebrews 11:13 - These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

17) Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

18) Colossians 3:1-2 - If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

19) Ezekiel 36:26 - And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

20) Romans 11:36 - “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.”24) Matthew 6:24 - "No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.

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22) Luke 19:1-9 - He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.

23) Matthew 19:16-22 - And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" 17 And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." 18 He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, 19 Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 20 The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

24) 1 Corinthians 4:7 - For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

25) Psalm 51:9-12 - Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. 11 Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.