

How is your study of *Holy Conversation* going? Are you having some holy conversations? It's time to begin talking with someone – or each other about faith. How do we explain the Christian faith in understandable terms? That's the task. But sometimes it might seem confusing. Last week Tom Wylie preached on 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13, the love chapter – but the corresponding Holy Conversation chapter is entitled “Sin.” Love and sin. How do those connect? Perhaps that confuses you, too. So let's have a holy conversation.

Last week you learned that Corinthian society was primarily comprised of pagans<sup>1</sup> and that promiscuity was common and accepted. Corinth was the center of the worship of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. In his sermon, Tom called it a “gold-rush boom town, a drunken party town.” Paul defines the culture like this: involved with casual sexual encounters, male prostitution, homosexuality, adultery, and worship of idols. It was a city of greedy people, drunkards, abusers, thieves, and cheats. It was a sinful place, and some of the Corinthian believers had been like that. But through faith they had been cleansed and made holy; given a fresh start.

But sometimes it takes awhile for life to become congruent with what we believe. How do you change your lifestyle from one of sin to one of chaste behavior? Paul said, through love; specifically, the love of God. And that's the connection. The power of God's love changes us. “It was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us” (Romans 5:6). That Scripture changed my life. I saw I was a sinner. And I realized God loved me anyway.

Someone shares a testimony about that. Someone like you reaches out and helps others think about God. Then God opens their eyes through you because God resides in you and works through you. God begins to deal with sin and God awakens us spiritually. God's love in the face of our own darkness illumines the issues in our lives; the need for God's love.

Sin involves two things.

1. It's taking something from another person that belongs to them. King David took Uriah's exclusive relationship with his wife away from him. King David stole Bathsheba's self-respect by lust and an abuse of power.
2. Sin is also missing the mark. There's a target with a bull's eye and you miss it. You are unable to live the kind of wholesome life you want to live. It's the failure to understand and follow what the Bible is saying to you.

Sin is what needs to change in order to grow. For sin to change the Bible says we must decide to repent.

Richard Peace says if you go around saying the word “repentance,” people probably see the word repent in a negative light and are not likely to embrace you with joy. Besides, what does the word mean?

Richard Peace gave an example in chapter seven of a woman who drinks too much. “She knew it. Her family knew it. Everybody knew it. But that knowledge didn't stop her from drinking.” A

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<sup>1</sup>As opposed to Jews, who lived moral lives according to the law of Moses (Old Testament).

man, Peace writes, “attended more seminars than he cared to remember on how to find and fulfill your inner longings. He really knew a lot about the inner life. But this didn’t make much of a difference in his life. He still felt out of touch with “the way things are.” Peace adds, “What they both need to do is repent. Repentance is making the decision to stop walking along the destructive or unfulfilling path and instead to turn around and start walking on a new path toward wholeness and commitment” (p. 71).

Are there destructive things in your life that you need to give up so that you can move onto a new path of wholeness offered by Christ?

The Corinthians had some sinful habits. They were assimilating into the culture around them and justifying that it was okay. “All things are permissible,” they said, so some of them were indulging in sexual immorality. Paul pointed out that they needed to repent, or turn away from that lifestyle to a new path of wholeness. He didn’t use the word “repent.” Let’s listen to what he said. READ 1 Corinthians 6:12-20.

We have the incredible “luck” (we don’t believe in luck, of course!) or blessing that God communicates with us so that we can identify what needs to change in order to experience healing of mind and body.

He says “everything is permissible.” That is, Christians live by grace, not the law. “But, not everything is beneficial.” For example, there are no laws that say I have to work out, or eat a healthy diet, or get enough sleep.

But not doing those things will have ramifications for me.

I remember the first day I lost control of my children’s lives. After graduation from high school we took my middle son and his younger brother to Europe. He had just turned 18. The plane lifted off from DFW late in the afternoon, and as usual the flight attendants offered alcoholic beverages to the passengers. I watched in horror as my son ordered a beer. I urgently spoke to my husband, “He can’t do that!” But he pointed out to me that we were now subject to international law and he was 18. I said, “Everything is NOT permissible” to which he replied, “It may not be beneficial, but it is permissible!”

Christianity is not a list of ethical values by which we are bound, but salvation is about a holistic view of body and spirit. And when we become Christians, things change for both body and spirit. There is no dualism in Christianity. Hear me carefully. The Christian faith is not all about “saving souls” only, as if the body or material needs are unimportant. Nor is it about feeding the hungry only and ignoring the spirit. Christianity concerns wholeness of both the body and soul. God redeems and resurrects both body and soul. That’s what the Apostles’ Creed we recited earlier states. That’s what Christians believe.

Your body is so precious to God that God will resurrect it. Therefore you have a new way to treat it sexually. You have a new way of thinking about the way you live your life, both body and soul. You cannot separate your body and how you treat your body from your soul. As believers, we do not indulge sexual appetites illicitly. Now let’s explore why.

Paul warns that self-indulgence sets the stage for domination or addiction. It's like that saying, *First you eat to live; but then you live to eat.* Or, if my son's indulging in a beer becomes a constant and growing habit, it takes a toll.

Let's take the story of King David.<sup>2</sup> It begins with the first line of the narrative in 2 Samuel 11. *It was spring, the time when kings go out to battle, but David indulged himself and remained in Jerusalem.* He was the warrior's warrior, David and his mighty men. But in his success and power his life lost priority. He was king; he didn't have to do that anymore. He stayed home; took a nap; indulged himself and started looking down the wrong road. He lost focus and it would cost him dearly.

My granddaughter who is 2, wanted to pull her own little suitcase when we flew awhile back. She kept looking back at it as she walked. She was so focused on it she ran into people and doors and chairs. What are you so focused on? King David was dominated by desire, power, and eventually, the fear of being found out. "Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive" (Sir Walter Scott, *Marmion*, 1808).

Times change, and yet how much they remain the same. Can you relate to his story? In our culture it's hard to be clear on the true meaning of sex. Many people abuse what God intends to be a beautiful, honorable gift. How much better if he had let body and soul be dominated by the Lord!

When we join up with God, we change our minds. We give up a self-focused, immoral lifestyle for a lifestyle focused on God. Is your lifestyle focused on God? Or are you indulging in things that hurt your body, which is the residence of the Holy Spirit? We must understand that God cares about the welfare of your body as well as your soul.

But how do we do it? How is repentance different from a New Year's resolution to do better? Richard Peace explains, "The answer is the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit operates in a person's heart and mind.

It's transformation on the inside because you are loved by God and your body is precious to Him. God has paid a high price for you through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. God purchased you for a higher purpose. God's concern is not to make you a prude or someone who lives by the law. God's intent is to live in you, bringing you the love you need and filling up the loneliness you feel with His presence.

Something really happens when God enters your life. Salvation is not just about something that happens when we die, that is strictly about our souls. Knowing God is an intimate experience of communion where the Holy Spirit comes in and resides.

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<sup>2</sup>Stop and READ 2 Samuel 11:1-11 for the full impact of the sermon. Soon we hope to video our storytellers so that you can see dramatic presentations of these stories online at our web site.

Are you practicing things that join Christ, who is in you, with destructive habits? Repent. Turn to a new way that allows the Holy Spirit to flourish within you. That's what God communicates to us about our bodies. Praise God that both body and soul are loved.

AMEN