

Passing the peace

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Let Jesus' heart shape you.

The default narrative of our day could probably best be summed up with the phrase "follow your heart." It sounds liberating. No one can challenge you when you are following your heart. The best for you is what you think you ache for in your "heart."

We haven't arrived here by accident. Our society is built in large part on this ideal. The most libertarian of perspectives. "You do you." Go after what pings your interest and desire in a given moment and don't listen to the haters who get in the way.

Of course, we know this as a mantra and worldview can be terribly dangerous. Who decides whose "heart" is right when two paths intersect? Our proximity to one another is too close to allow for the end of our rugged individualism. We sense it. In fact, anyone whose "heart" has told them to take a different route is evil, to be refused and rejected. We can't logically go on like this. There must be a better way.

We ache for direction, for true north. But it is not found inside of us. We are meant to follow another heart - the heart that beats at the center of everything. And that's what we want to determine to do today. To let the heart of Jesus shape us. Be our true north, our path, and our goal.

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

Let Jesus' heart shape you.

We have reached a major shift in the letter to the Corinthians church. Here we transition from exhortation to the repentant members of the church to correction of the unrepentant minority. Paul is going to war against rebellion.

Going after those stirring up division in the church by questioning his leadership, his calling, his position before the Lord.

False apostles, who have made a name for themselves with large crowds, fanciful speaking, and loads of money, have accused Paul of being a coward in the way he leads. He is humble face-to-face but bold from afar when he speaks with paper and ink. It is not dissimilar to saying that Paul is strong when he is posting commands on Facebook but too much of a chicken to say it to your face.

There is some truth to that... after all these letters are occasioned by the need for correction, a veering from the gospel he proclaimed in person, and in strong language, he is known to call them back.

But his accusers have also lamented how Paul is not a great speaker, too simple to be wise and appointed by God. His teaching tends to humble people rather than puff them up, which can't be a good sign to anyone with modern, Roman sensibilities.

Here Paul starts his defense, “entreating” pleading with the unrepentant, that they would come to obedience, to repentance.

He begins by saying that following Jesus hits different. This is what makes us salt and light in the church. This is what makes us peculiar people, set apart, a model or image of the Kingdom of God.

From the way, the heart of Christ, we learn to walk and go to war.

1) The Way

“I entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...”

All of his argument, the correction of the dividers is rooted here. This is his grounding for the defense and foundation the ministry is built upon. Jesus' heart. Jesus' meekness and gentleness.

A reference to Christ's slowness to anger and patience in order to allow time for repentance before he returns to judge... but also the personality and character that Paul as a believer, and they as the church, are to take on.

No appealing by earthly authority, or by his record of church planting, his training and education, but pleading by the heart of Jesus for his people.

This is a letter to the church so they have received the gospel. This is for Christians. Those that have recognized the lure and failure of following your heart, the depths of sin, and rejection of God. And have turned instead to Christ as Savior and Lord. As the One who gives over his perfection to become a sacrifice for us. To forgive us of the patterns and structures of sin that corrupt our hearts and the behaviors that result.

For the unbeliever, the heart of Christ toward you is meant to draw you into faith in him. For the believer, the heart of Christ toward you is to solidify your faith and draw you into more and more being like him.

Matthew 11:27–30 “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. [28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (ESV)

The mention of “heart” in Scripture is not about emotions alone but to reveal a central animating significant to life.

So it is vital that when Jesus says what his heart is like we pay attention. Because this is the center of his life and ministry and it is meant to shape his followers. And it has shaped Paul, from the divine meeting on the road to Damascus to the moment he pens this letter to the Corinthians church, his life is in response to the heart of Christ.

That the One calling us to come to him extends his gentle and lowly heart to us. That in the midst of our sin he has the greatest sense of love for us and dies for

us. That while struggling to live in humble submission to his way he still calls us his own and never leaves or forsakes those so prone to do the same to him.

“He will abundantly pardon. He does not merely accept us. He sweeps us up in his arms again.” -Dane Ortlund

His ways are higher than ours... designed to reveal his heart toward us. And we could go on... endlessly mining the depths of his grace and love for us. And this is the truth that Paul appeals to the Corinthians from. “By the meekness and gentleness of Christ.”

Listening to his heart is the essential work of the believer. To hear Jesus louder than the noise of everything else. To hear and see his heart for us.

We talk of transformation, becoming like Christ and here it is. We are in desperate need of the meekness and gentleness of Christ. It keeps us, humbles us, and gives us a place to rest... as we walk.

2) The Walk

Paul is walking out his life and ministry in light of Christ’s heart and this is what he desires for the church to embrace.

In 2004, at the Republican convention, it was the final night and President George W. Bush was accepting the party’s nomination. As he closed his speech, not completely unlike Paul, he spoke to some of the criticisms he received. He said that “some folks have a problem with the way I move, suggesting I have too much swagger... where I am from, we just call it walking.”

Now, we could call the Christian life, our walk, a swagger, it might be more appropriate to say it’s a stagger! It looks different - so in Paul’s defense, of course, his focus and ministry are going to feel different. It is not based on worldly standard of success or strategies of progress. It is based on the good news of Jesus, not “fleshly” striving.

It is a life of humble, gentle, boldness. The false apostles are on the wrong side. **Matthew 23:12** “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (ESV)

We are flesh (human) but we don't live according to it; we live supernaturalized by the heart of Christ for us. The Spirit of God applying, pouring the love of God into our hearts. Equipping us to reflect Christ, in humility, gentleness, obedience. The minority in Corinth was missing it.

“In short, the Corinthians were quick to seize every emphasis in Christianity that spoke (or seemed to speak) of spiritual power, of exaltation with Christ, of freedom, of triumph, of victorious Christian living, of leadership, of religious success; but they neglected or suppressed those accents in Christianity that stressed meekness, servanthood, obedience, humility, and the need to follow Christ in his suffering if one is to follow him in his crown. They glimpse what Christ had done, yet failed to contemplate what remains to be done; they understood that D-day had arrived, but mistook it for V-day. They loved Christian triumphalism, but they did not know how to live under the sign of the cross.” -D.A. Carson

They, like us, are more eager to go after power than humility. And everything Paul has taught, everything he has written is calling them to live under the cross, shaped by the heart of Christ. He is hoping the heart of Jesus will have its way so that there is no need for a rumble!

Like James would write to believers, Jesus yearns for us, jealous for us to live in light of him and his love, not the world's. **James 4:6** “But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (ESV)

Paul asks the church to disassociate themselves from his opponents and their fleshly version of Christianity. He hopes that the disassociation will bring some of them to repentance and protect the faithful majority of the Corinthians from their error.

But if there isn't change, Paul is ready, he is equipped, and so are we.

3) The War

2 Corinthians 10:4–5 “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. [5] We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,” (ESV)

Things have ratcheted up. Correction takes on the tone of war. And there are arguments of the dividers that need to be taken down. But it won't be fist-to-cuffs. Those shaped by the heart of Jesus don't do battle as we might expect.

His weapons destroy the way people think, their assumptions, sinful patterns, and mental structure by which they live in rebellion against God... even when they “think” they are protecting God.

So those stirring up division, calling Paul a weak pastor with a failed ministry, are actually working against the knowledge of God. Against the growth of the church, against the promised Christlikeness of believers there.

And the weapons Paul uses against the systems of thinking and behaving have divine power to wreak havoc!

This reminds us of the spiritual nature of our lives. **Ephesians 6:10–12** “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (ESV)

Elsewhere (e.g. Romans 13.12, Ephesians 6.10–20, and 1 Thessalonians 5.8) Paul describes the weapons he uses for the fight; here he says what they're used for. They are what you need for the battle against all ideas, arguments, philosophies, and world-views that set themselves up against the knowledge of the true God.

This being inside the church, it's the gospel tearing down walls and systems built against it. All of it is taken to obey Christ.

“He was determined to confront the human-made systems of thought which, though usually containing some glimmers of truth, actually led people away from knowledge of the true God rather than towards him... There is no insight, no vision of truth, so noble and lofty that it cannot be perverted and made an instrument of human pride. Likewise, there is no small glimmer of light, no faint echo of reality, so small or corrupt that it cannot be taken into the service of the world's creator and rightful Lord.” Wright

For Paul it's how he will undertake church discipline, for us it's how we stand apart, it's where we learn to walk with Jesus.

“We do well to follow Paul in his realistic estimate of the entrenched power of unbelief and pride in the human mind. Only the right weapons will subdue and capture this proud fortified rebel who places himself over God; those right weapons are the words of the gospel... Like Paul, we are so to proclaim Jesus Christ as Son of God, as crucified to save sinners, as Lord and as judge, that every thought of the hearer is captured to obey Christ... Only the gospel can make that which sets itself up against the knowledge of God, namely rebellious unbelief, obedient to Christ. Paul's very humility, which they despise, what he calls the meekness and gentleness of Christ indicates that he is himself a man whose every thought is captive to obey Christ. He is the living embodiment of what he proclaims.” -Paul Barnett

We can live this war too... Timely, there are so many divergent views, and people willing to say the way of humility and gentleness is bogus (aligning themselves with the minority in Corinth). There are plenty of perspectives that rather you pay attention to them instead of the goodness of Christ and how he calls us to live.

“The message is to embrace the gospel preached and modeled by Christ and his apostles - to fully enjoy the present blessings of salvation: eternal life, the indwelling of the Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, the fellowship of Christ's body, and the blessed hope of Jesus' return - to embrace “the meekness and gentleness

of Christ” - to abandon conventional warfare that wages war “according to the flesh” - and to embrace our weakness as the ground and occasion for his power.”
-Hughes

For Paul and the church, everything filters through the gospel, the truth of Christ - no other “worldview” will suffice. Not “follow your heart” but submit your heart and every idea that comes from it and to it, to Jesus. That everything we are and proclaim is colored by the heart of Jesus.

Let Jesus’ heart shape you. Then live from his heart, for His glory, in everything.

Know the heart of Jesus - Be people of the word, hungry to hear of Christ’s heart for you. Ask the Spirit to teach you. Gather friends to savor the goodness of our Savior.

“Meek. Humble. Gentle. Jesus is not trigger-happy. Not harsh, reactionary, easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms.” -Ortlund

Let it humble you. Let it renew you. Let Jesus shape you.

Go to war - Take captives to obey Christ. As always, the battle for the mind remains a central part of the church’s task. And it is not just fought by Christians against systems and mindsets outside the church. It is fought inside as well, like in Corinth.

We submit everything we think — all our ideas, all our worldview, all our viewpoints — to God, and we say, “Let your word dismantle me if necessary.”

May we be known for the way we interact, the way we proclaim, the way we live as it reflects the meekness and gentleness of Christ, that many would come to him.

Paul can live this, he can give his life to it because he has been changed by the heart of Jesus. But he has also been served by those willing to take every thought captive to obey Christ. Such as Ananias walking down straight street to meet the blinded Saul/Paul. Told by Jesus to go to this man known for his treatment of followers of the way... He must have fought doubt and fear and all sorts of stuff. But ultimately had to take that all captive to Christ and knock on that door.

Matt Pilgrim - The Long Walk

No man has ever walked slower
Than Ananias did that day
Undoubtedly expecting that
There'd be a heavy price to pay.

For there at his destination
Was the famous killer of men
With the power to fill up graves
Whether with stones or by the pen.

He hoped to encounter a friend-
Anything to delay this plan.
Such strange thoughts are put forth by fear:
"I'd rather die than help this man."

"I'll grab a few things for dinner!"
A conveniently useful thought.
But the shops were all closed up tight
All of that scheming came to naught.

Old Straight Street felt too short that day
"I could have sworn it was longer."
Wondering if in a real fight
God's will would prove to be stronger.

But then there was Judas' door
"I'd forgotten how tall it stood."

His fist hung for what felt like hours
Before it would rap on that wood.

A silent pause, then rustling.
“Lord, may you please make this death quick.”
What faith from a young disciple
Who would visit some lunatic.

And as he heard the door’s hinges
Start to make their ominous creak
He glanced back over his shoulder
Having never felt quite so weak.

And as he looked his vision swirled
Then the air around him grew chilled
And suddenly Straight Street was not,
And he stood where Christ had been killed.

The path to Paul now sloping down,
Jagged slopes outside city gates.
Each step of that walk soaked with blood
And the faith that links souls and fates.

And there on his own Golgotha
Ananias heard Jesus speak:
“You bore your cross well today friend.
You loved me enough to be weak.

You’ve started something beautiful,
A work that will set millions free
Because you trusted me enough
To pursue one called “enemy.”

Your last “well done good and faithful”
Will be there for you in glory.
Now go and finish this great task

Of helping Paul start his story.”

The creak of hinges, a door slams.

The surprised face of Judas the Jew.

“Ananias, please, come in,

There’s someone here waiting for you.”