

A God-Fashioned Life

Our culture has a tremendous impact on our lives – perhaps more than we realize. And, now with social media, that impact is infinitely greater. Daily, even hour by hour, images, philosophies, ideas, morals, and even fashion are presented to us in such an appealing way that we can easily be drawn to them. We are led to believe that the world’s view of life is the norm and if that is not our view, we are out of step.

Of course customs and fashions change – that is the normal continuous movement of life. Some of those customs and fashion are good or at least not harmful. However, it behooves us as followers of Christ who desire to live “God-fashioned lives”¹ to consider carefully what we truly believe and how we desire to live. Will we fashion our lives according to God’s wisdom as revealed to us in His Word and in nature, or will we fashion our lives according to the ungodly wisdom of the world?

God’s Word makes a clear distinction between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. Paul states, “*Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe...For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*”²

Corinth

“Thanks to Paul, we know more about life in Corinth than we do about life in any other first-century city in Greece.”³ “As much as for any other document in the NT – and more than for most – the various sociological, economic, and religious factors that made up the environment of the city of Corinth have a profound influence on one’s understanding of Paul’s letters to the church there.”⁴

Corinth was a key city in ancient Greece as it was strategically located on a narrow isthmus between the Aegean Sea and the Adriatic Sea. David Prior states, “In this important position it inevitably became a prosperous centre of trade and commerce: by land everyone came through Corinth; by sea sailors usually chose to use Lechaenum and Cenchreae, the two seaports flanking Corinth at either end of the isthmus, rather than circumnavigating the dangerous waters of Cape Malea at the southern tip of Greece.”⁵

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city similar to New York or San Francisco. “Like most seaports, Corinth became both prosperous and licentious – so much so that the Greeks had a word for leading a life of debauchery: “*Korinthiazēin*, i.e. to live like a Corinthian.”⁶

Corinth hosted impressive sports events similar to our Olympic Games that drew great and enthusiastic crowds. There were also multiple temples to gods such as the large temple to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and a temple to Apollo, the god of music, and poetry and of male beauty. Many nude statues of men in various poses that encouraged homosexuality were scattered around the city. There were over 1000 temple

prostitutes. All in all, Corinth was a rough, tough city that glorified sex with little to no restraints and was commonly spoken of as a city with no morals.

Paul brought the gospel to Corinth and soon there were converts and a church was established. However, although these church members had come to faith in Christ, the culture had left its mark on them and many maintained their previous lifestyle.

Paul pleaded with the church at Corinth to “become what you really are”⁷ – redeemed in Christ! After all, Scripture says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17)*. And, indeed, when we accept Christ as Savior, we are a new creation, just as a new born baby is a new creation.

There are definitely changes in a person when she comes to Christ. There is a new joy and thankfulness of being forgiven - of new spiritual birth. But also like a newborn, the Christian life is a work in progress. Like a newborn, it takes time, instruction, guidance and willingness to submit our lives to Christ and His way before that maturity will take place.

But we have to have the “want-to” to grow and also the understanding of how the ungodly world is impacting our world-view. Some Christians never “grow up” in Christ because they cling to their old way of life and don’t really want to change.

Obedience to Christ as revealed in His Word, is the normal Christian life. Christ did not die for your sins only that you might go to heaven. He died and was resurrected that you might *“take on an entirely new way of life – a God fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.”*⁸

The importance of this letter for today’s church – for God’s people, cannot be exaggerated. As I studied verse after verse, I felt like, to a large degree, it had been written to the church in America.

Gordon Fee writes, “The cosmopolitan character of the city and church, the strident individualism that emerges in so many of their behavioral aberrations, the arrogance that attends their understanding of being people of the Spirit, the accommodation of the gospel to the surrounding culture in all too many ways – these and some other features of the Corinthian church are but mirrors held up before the church today... These at least, as perhaps some others, are every bit as relevant to us as to those for whom they were first written.”⁹

Paul addressed the following issues in this letter to the Corinthians:

Called: In Paul’s introduction to this letter he reminded the Corinthians of their position (status) in Christ. They were saints – sanctified (made holy) through their relationship in

Jesus Christ. However, practically, they were not living up to their calling. There was a clear difference between their position and their practice.

Wisdom: There are two kinds of wisdom in the world – godly wisdom and worldly wisdom and two basic groups of people – the believer and the non-believer. There is a Christian worldview and a non-Christian worldview.

Grow Up! As part of the body of Christ, you are accountable to God for the way you live. But there is also a healthy accountability to fellow Christians within the faith family. Christ’s desire for you is to grow spiritually. If you do not grow spiritually, that will have a great impact, not only on you and yours, but on the local church body you attend.

Winking at Sin: There is no doubt that we live in a society that is obsessed with every imaginable aberration of sex and that life-style has spilled over into our churches. But what makes this lack of sexual purity even worse and what perpetrates it is the fact that most churches don’t want to touch this issue with a ten-foot-pole! They would rather sweep it under-the-rug. They/we wink at sin.

Glorify God in Your Body: From the beginning, God established a moral view of sex that makes sense in so many ways. All of God’s moral laws are for the good of humankind because He loves His creation. God has a spiritual and moral order and when we transgress that order there will always be a heavy cost.

Marriage and Singleness: If ever there was a time when there was great confusion and ambivalence about the marriage relationship, and sex in general, it is now. If we take our cues from our society regarding these issues, we will be deeply disappointed. Scripture is the one place where we can get God’s point of view on marriage and singleness. That is the view that matters because God is our Creator, He loves us and therefore He alone knows how He has designed us for maximum joy.

Christian Freedom in Balance: *We have freedom* to do certain things when there “are no inherently anti-Christian implications involved,”¹⁰ but should have *voluntary abstention* when other people might be damaged by our freedom¹¹ or we might be drawn into sin. These gray areas are what Paul addresses in these chapters.

Public Worship: There are certain things that should be common to all people who desire to sincerely worship God. Our worship should be honoring to God and respectful to others; sincerely from the heart; and the Word of God should be rightly divided. Paul urged the church in Corinth to “cultivate loving, responsible relationships in the body of Christ; and their times of public worship must be for mutual edification, not for heightened individualistic spirituality.”¹²

The More Excellent Way: The love that God speaks of in His Word is a far cry from what passes for love in our world. Most frequently worldly love is selfish – what is best for me! However, godly love always considers the other person – offering kindness and patience – not envying or boasting – not being arrogant or rude – not insisting on my own

way even though that might require a sacrifice on my part. God calls us to that more excellent way.

Death Is Swallowed Up In Victory: One of the analogies that Paul used to describe the resurrection of the body of a person who has placed her trust in Christ is that of a seed. Our human bodies are like the seeds – they will decompose or die – they are corruptible. But, in the same way the seed blossoms into a beautiful flower, so our bodies will blossom into a beautiful, *incorruptible* body that our omnipotent Creator has designed!

Tim Keller calls the issues Paul was dealing with in the church at Corinth *hot potatoes*. *Hot potatoes* are like many issues we have in our society that have spilled over into our churches and often pastors don't want to touch them. The issues had to do particularly with sexual immorality – much like our culture today. "It is my body and I can do with it what I want!" People in the church embraced worldly wisdom over and above the wisdom of God. But Paul didn't shrink from his responsibility in dealing with these "hot potatoes"!

Paul

Paul, the author of 1 Corinthians, (also known as Saul),¹³ was born and raised in Tarsus, a city of strategic importance in the southeast of Turkey. Being a Greco-Roman culture, it was a city of philosophy and industry, of culture and politics.¹⁴

Paul's family belonged to the strictest of the Jewish schools. They were Pharisees. So Paul and his family were Jews trying to live a strict Jewish life in obedience to their ancestral traditions in a primarily Gentile culture.

Paul was most likely apprenticed to his father as a tentmaker. Tent-making was hard physical labor, but it proved to be an ideal occupational skill for Paul as he constantly traveled proclaiming the gospel and establishing churches. (I imagine it allowed him to work out a lot of his frustrations!) Today we usually equate tents with camping or leisure use, but many people in Paul's world had to travel from place to place for seasonal work and therefore tents were in great demand.

Reading some of Paul's letters in the New Testament, we realize he was gifted even at a young age. He read biblical Hebrew fluently and spoke Aramaic, Latin, and Greek.¹⁵ He also read Plato and Aristotle and was able to discuss the philosophers of his day. As you will come to understand while studying 1 Corinthians, Paul had an unusual ability to reason very effectively. He also studied under Gamaliel who was the most prominent rabbi of his day.

Paul was zealous for his religion and was convinced he ought to oppose Jesus Christ. He had authority from the chief priests to jail many believers and even to put others to death. Paul himself said, "In raging fury against them, I persecuted them."

Then came the day when Paul journeyed to Damascus. He was going there with letters from the high priest to the synagogues in Damascus, in order to find any who were

following “The Way” (Jesus) so that he might bring them back to Jerusalem to be imprisoned or killed.

About mid-day on his journey, suddenly a light, brighter than the sun, shone from heaven and Paul and all with him fell to the ground! ¹⁶ Then Paul heard a voice saying, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*” And Paul said, “Who are you Lord?” And the Lord answered, “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*”

(At Damascus Paul met Jesus face to face. That encounter was life-transforming. So dramatic was this encounter that, still today, anything that happens in a life-changing manner we call a “Damascus Experience.”)

Paul was God’s chosen instrument to take the gospel to the Gentile world. And praise God that we Gentiles are also the recipients of this life-changing gospel! From that point on, Paul took the gospel to numerous towns and provinces in Syria, Turkey, Greece, Israel, Lebanon, Italy, Crete, Malta, and Sicily.

On Paul’s second missionary journey, at the age of 51, he went to the city of Corinth in Greece to preach the gospel. He had only recently suffered a severe beating in Philippi that almost killed him, and then had to leave three other cities in a hurry because of riots and threats against his life. No wonder he wrote the Corinthian church that he came to them “in fear and much trembling.”¹⁷

When Paul arrived in Corinth he met two believers, Aquila and Priscilla (husband and wife), who were tentmakers. They were mature believers and had the same desire to share the Good News with others as did Paul. Since Paul was of the same trade, and same goal in life, they became close friends and Paul lived with them while he was in Corinth. Aquila and Priscilla not only helped Paul to establish the church at Corinth, but traveled with him in his missionary endeavors.

Paul first went to the local synagogue to testify to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. But, they opposed Paul teaching and blasphemed, so Paul said to them, “*Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go the Gentiles.*”¹⁸ And from that time on, Paul’s ministry was with the Gentiles just as Jesus had told him it would be (although Paul never gave up on the Jews).

So what was Paul to do? It just so happened that Titius Justus, a recent convert to Christ, lived next door to the synagogue and he offered his home as a place where Paul could preach the gospel. As a result, many Corinthians believed, were baptized, and a church was established.

Paul taught the word of God among the Corinthians for one and a half years, but God had not called him to spend his life as pastor of just one church. Paul's principle ministry was to be to the Gentiles – traveling from country to country, and from culture to culture, winning converts and establishing churches.

After a year and a half, Paul left Corinth. It was not easy for him to leave the church at Corinth. He had the precious experience of seeing those people step out of darkness into the light of a new relationship with Jesus Christ. He had nurtured them along and encouraged them in difficult and trying times. (I can identify with Paul. My husband and I had the privilege of starting a church among the Highland Quichua Indians in Ecuador, S.A. We too saw many come to Christ and taught them from God's Word what it means to be a follower of Christ. We had a deep attachment to these brothers and sisters in Christ and when we had to leave Ecuador, it was heart-wrenching.)

Paul, along with Aquila and Priscilla, left Corinth and traveled to Ephesus. Paul settled in Ephesus for three years and while there he wrote this letter to his beloved fellow Christians at Corinth. Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 5:9, that he had written a previous letter to the Corinthian church, but that letter has never been discovered.

Paul had a brilliant mind and a passionate spirit. His use of analogies¹ to make his teaching applicable to everyday life is astounding. (You will be challenged to interpret his analogies, but amazed when you do!) It is abundantly clear that the Holy Spirit of God inspired him in writing these letters. Jesus was always at the center of Paul's teaching. Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins, and was resurrected that we too might experience resurrection - Jesus who paid the penalty for our sins that we might have an abundant life as well as eternal life in the immediate presence of God. However, in Paul's teaching to the Corinthians, he is deeply concerned about how they are living now - in their culture - in order to be a witness to a world that desperately needs Jesus.

Paul was an optimist, but also a realist. He was very "practical" in his teaching. "What you believe and embrace, will impact your entire life and your life after death." He was brave in sharing the gospel to the point of being beaten nearly to death. He was blunt and not afraid of confrontation, but all that he said and did was because of his fierce love for God and people. He no longer was motivated by anger and rage, but by God's love.

Paul's teaching is not legalism. He is not suggesting that we simply follow a lot of rules and "behave" ourselves. Paul had tried, on his own, to keep the Torah and that led to frustration and a zealotness that bordered on terrorism. No, Paul had experienced – there is no other way to describe it than, "being born again!" He was overwhelmed with the love of Jesus and it was God's love that motivated him to give his life telling others about Jesus.

Paul understood clearly the conflict, indeed the battle, between a life that is fashioned by an ungodly world and a God-fashioned life. And, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, challenges us to take seriously these issues.

¹ **Analogy:** Resemblance in some particulars between things otherwise unlike.

Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. These “books” were actually letters Paul wrote to the churches:

Romans
1 and 2nd Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 and 2nd Thessalonians
1 and 2nd Timothy
Titus
Philemon

It was Dwight L. Moody who said, “The world has yet to see what God can do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him. I will try my utmost to be that man.” Certainly God used Dwight L. Moody in a powerful way, but, with all due respect, I believe he was wrong in his statement. The world *has seen* what God can do through a person wholly consecrated to Him and that man was Paul, the Apostle. Paul was a world changer.

Questions for the Introduction:

1. Our culture has a tremendous impact on our lives – perhaps more than we realize. And, now with social media, that impact is infinitely greater.

What medium or source, whether it be family, friends, school, work, politics, social media, (i.e., TV, Face book, etc.), church or Bible has the greatest influence on forming your world view? Explain.

2. What do you think was the all encompassing problem with the church at Corinth? (See pages 4-5)

3. Tim Keller talked about the issues Paul was dealing with in the church at Corinth, and particularly sexual issues, as “hot-potato” issues (p. 7). What are some “hot-potato” issues that many pastors today are hesitant to address? Why do you think they are hesitant?

4. Paul met a husband and wife at Corinth who ended up being life-long friends. Who were they? What did they have in common with Paul? How did they encourage him? (p.8)

5. Do you have Christian friends or family who encourage you in your walk of faith? How do they do that?

6. What did God call Paul to do?

7. What method of teaching did Paul use frequently? Explain what that method is. (p. 9)

Footnotes:

- ¹ Ephesians 4:23-24, *The Message*.
- ² 1 Corinthians 1: 20b-21, 25.
- ³ N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography*, (HarperCollins, New York, 2018), 209.
- ⁴ Gordon D. Fee, 1.
- ⁵ David Prior, *The Message of First Corinthians*, (Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Il., 1985), 11.
- ⁶ *Ibid*.
- ⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Revised Edition*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2014), 18.
- ⁸ Ephesians 4: 23-24, *The Message*.
- ⁹ Gordon D. Fee, 20.
- ¹⁰ Craig Blomberg, 160.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*.
- ¹² Craig Blomberg, 67.
- ¹³ Acts 13:9.
- ¹⁴ N.T. Wright, 10-11.
- ¹⁵ N.T. Wright, 15-16.
- ¹⁶ Acts 9:1-9; 26: 12-18.
- ¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:3.
- ¹⁸ Acts 18: 6.
- ¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:2a.
- ²⁰ 1 Corinthians 12.
- ²¹ Gordon D. Fee, 54.
- ²² 1 Corinthians 12:12.
- ²³ *ESV Study Bible*, (Crossway: Wheaton, 2008), reference to Romans 6:3.
- ²⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, 1 Corinthians 1:17.
- ²⁵ Tim Keller with Kathy Keller, *God's Wisdom for Navigating Life*, (Viking: New York, 2017), 55.
- ²⁶ Gordon D. Fee, 94.
- ²⁷ Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 Corinthians*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1994), 56.
- ²⁸ Tim Keller with Kathy Keller, *God's Wisdom for Navigating Life*, (Viking: New York, 2017), 53.
- ²⁹ [Time.com/5199149/stephen-hawking-death-god-atheist](https://www.time.com/5199149/stephen-hawking-death-god-atheist).
- ³⁰ Gordon D. Fee, 73.
- ³¹ N.T. Wright, 16.s
- ³² Gordon D. Fee, 117-118.
- ³³ Gordon D. Fee, 128.
- ³⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, 1 Corinthians 3:18.
- ³⁵ Craig Blomberg, 77.
- ³⁶ Gordon D. Fee, 139.
- ³⁷ *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, (G. & C. Merriam Co : Springfield, Mass., 1967)
- ³⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, 1 Corinthians 3:18.
- ³⁹ *The Eerdmans's Bible Commentary*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1970), 1057.
- ⁴⁰ Gordon D. Fee, 173.
- ⁴¹ Luke 12:41-48.
- ⁴² 1 Corinthians 4:5b.
- ⁴³ *ESV Study Bible*, Introduction to First Corinthians.
- ⁴⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/14/us/catholic-church-sex-abuse>.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid*.
- ⁴⁶ *World Magazine*, March 16, 2019, *Authority in Question*, by Jamie Dean, p.41.
- ⁴⁷ David Prior, 71.
- ⁴⁸ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the first Epistles to the Corinthians*, (Geneva Series, Banner of Truth, 1958), 81.
- ⁴⁹ Gordon D. Fee, 229.
- ⁵⁰ Gordon D. Fee, 230.

-
- ⁵¹ Gordon D. Fee, 233.
- ⁵² David Prior, 76.
- ⁵³ *World Magazine*, March 30, 2019, *Finding Justice in the Me-Too Era*, by Lynn Vincent, p.34-39.
- ⁵⁴ *World Magazine*, March 30, 2019, *Finding Justice in the Me-Too Era*, by Lynn Vincent, P. 36.
- ⁵⁵ Craig Blomberg, 129.
- ⁵⁶ Gordon D. Fee, 276.
- ⁵⁷ L. Morris, *1 Corinthians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Inter-Varsity Press, 1958), 99.
- ⁵⁸ Gordon D. Fee, 280-281.
- ⁵⁹ Craig Blomberg, 126-27.
- ⁶⁰ *ESV Study Bible*, Genesis 2:23-24 reference.
- ⁶¹ Craig Blomberg, 133.
- ⁶² *The Sanhedrin* was a political, religious, and judicial council headed by the high priest.
- ⁶³ Gordon D. Fee, 319.
- ⁶⁴ *ESV Study Bible*, footnote for Matthew 19:3.
- ⁶⁵ Gordon D. Fee, 356.
- ⁶⁶ Missionary who was later martyred by the Waodani Indians in Ecuador.
- ⁶⁷ Gordon D. Fee, 397.
- ⁶⁸ Craig Blomberg, 160.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ David Prior, 140.
- ⁷¹ David Prior, 167.
- ⁷² *The Eerdmans Commentary*, 1064.
- ⁷³ David Prior, 166.
- ⁷⁴ David Prior, 172.
- ⁷⁵ Craig Blomberg, 67.
- ⁷⁶ Craig Blomberg, 208.
- ⁷⁷ *ESV Study Bible*; Reference to 1 Corinthians 11:3.
- ⁷⁸ Gordon D. Fee, 557.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁰ Gordon D. Fee, 563-4.
- ⁸¹ Gordon D. Fee, 556.
- ⁸² Gordon D. Fee, 645.
- ⁸³ Gordon D. Fee, 656-663.
- ⁸⁴ David Prior, 233.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁶ Romans 5: 5b).
- ⁸⁷ *ESV Study Bible*, Reference to 1 Corinthians 12:10.
- ⁸⁸ Craig Blomberg, 270-1.
- ⁸⁹ D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1987), 122, 124.
- ⁹⁰ Gordon Fee, 765.
- ⁹¹ Craig Blomberg, 280, 281, 286.
- ⁹² Craig Blomberg, 295.
- ⁹³ David Prior, 257.
- ⁹⁴ Craig Blomberg, 308.
- ⁹⁵ Luke 24:27.
- ⁹⁶ Isaiah 53:4-6.
- ⁹⁷ Gordon D. Fee, 827.
- ⁹⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Victor: Wheaton, 1989), 618.
- ⁹⁹ Craig Blomberg, 299.
- ¹⁰⁰ Gordon D. Fee, 877.
- ¹⁰¹ Craig Blomberg, 317.