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GOD, WE HAVE QUESTIONS

(July 6, 2014, sermon at Canyon View Vineyard Church)

First, a little review: Corinth was an important city in Greece; it was a Roman colony with many Roman soldiers and thousands of slaves; it was a port city with ships, sailors, and travelers of many nationalities constantly traveling through; there was entertainment, notice the theatre on the overhead; sports, we know about the marathon that originated in Greece; and it was notorious for immorality. *Corinthizomai* was a slang word meaning, *To fornicate*. How would you like for your city to be known by such a word?

You will notice on the overhead (an artist's sketch) that the *Acrocorinth* is located at the bottom. This was a mountain, the highest place in the area, and on top was a massive, beautiful temple, with Corinthian columns (what else?). This was the temple of Aphrodite, or Venus, the lady without arms. She was the goddess of beauty and sex, with 2,000 priestesses who were actually prostitutes. People were encouraged to visit this temple for a spiritual experience. Just think: Wherever you were in the city or area, that temple of perverted sex was looming above the landscape. It would always be up there in a high place capturing your attention and imagination.

The church in Corinth, not surprisingly, reflected its culture in many ways. How could it not? The Christians had problems with factions, lawsuits, marriage, divorce, the single life, spiritual gifts, women in the church, and immorality. The people had lived in Corinth, they had come out of Corinth, and the problem was to get Corinth out of them.

So the Christians in Corinth had questions: "How does God want us to live?" Let's look at part of the answer in selected verses in 1 Corinthians 7 from the NLT:

So I say to those who aren't married and to widows – it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust. (7:8-9) You are now a slave of Christ. God paid a high price for you, so don't be enslaved by the world. Each of you, dear brothers and sisters, should remain as you were when God first called you. Now regarding your question about the young women who are not yet married, I do not have a command from the Lord for them. But the Lord in his mercy has given me wisdom that can be trusted, and I will share it with you. Because of the present crisis, I think it is best to remain as you are. If you have a wife, do not seek to end the marriage. If you do not have a wife, do not seek to get married. But if you do get married, it is not a sin. And if a young woman gets married, it is not a sin. However, those who get married at this time will have troubles, and I am trying to spare you those problems. But let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: Thetime that remains is very short. So from now on, those with wives should not focus on their marriage. Those who weep should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions. Those who use the things of this world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away. I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. (7:22b-32)

God's answer to the Corinthians turned everything upside down. It was a radical, extreme perspective. Let's look back at Chapter 6, verses 19-20: *Don't you realize your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price.* And again, two verses in chapter 7, verses 22-23: *You are now a slave of Christ. God paid a high price for you, so don't be enslaved by the world.*

This letter to the Corinthians simply continues the radical expectation voiced by Jesus and all the writers of the New Testament: *Die to yourself, die to your rights, crucify your flesh, despise the world, take up your cross, make your body a living sacrifice, you have been bought by God, don't be a slave of sin/the world/the devil – be a slave of God.*

We are told again and again: Put God first, put Christ first, first, first – and everything else a distant second: Jesus ahead of your marriage, your spouse, your children, your money, your career, your sex life, your possessions.

So is God offering us a life of suffering and misery? No, no, no! Suffering is, without question, a part of the Christian life, but God is offering us a life of joy, peace, love, adventure, and freedom. It's a paradox, isn't it?

Are we, the United States, Corinth? There are certainly some obvious parallels. We are wealthy; multi-ethnic; we value entertainment and sports; we have many factions; and we have a lot of immorality. We have high places looming over our society: Hollywood and Wall Street. Their influence is pervasive, and they constantly capture people's attention and imagination. Hollywood proclaims: "Sex is the meaning of life!" Wall Street proclaims, "Money is the meaning of life!"

So, like the Corinthians, we American Christians have questions: "God, how are we to live?" Let's examine how God's answer to the Corinthians speaks to us:

(1) Our career, money, finances, savings, the American dream, materialism. Verse 30 is addressed to *Those who buy things*, and Verse 31 says, *Don't become attached to things.* --- Easier said than done in our society, right? I have here a stack of ads which was the insert in this morning's Daily Sentinel. These inducements to buy something are incessantly before us on TV, the internet, newspapers, magazines, billboards, etc. What is the message this "High Place" is communicating to us? "Money and stuff are the meaning of life! Stuff, more stuff, new stuff will give you happiness, peace, joy, and security." Look at some of these ads: "If you buy one of these new automobiles, men will admire you and women will lust after you!" Yes, that is what it promises. And if you buy one this month, you will "save" over \$7,000! Oh, but wait. Here are several brands of beer that say if you drink this beer you will be a part of the "in" crowd and women will lust after you. But wait, these brands of vodka and liquor make the same promise. (Women are apparently incredibly stupid.) Here is a hair care product that tells women that they will be sexy and irresistible if they spray this stuff on their hair. Here's a vitamin product that says we will live longer, be healthy and sexy (naturally), if we take these vitamins or this natural food supplement made from the eye balls of a tiny frog found in the rain forest. And, oh, look! They are coming out with a new, wrap-around TV, as big as a barn door, that you simply have to have! (Many years ago someone said that television was going to cause mankind to evolve so that they would have eyes as big as basketballs and brains the size of a pea.)

Our world tells us that more and more stuff will give us happiness, peace, joy, and contentment, but is it really true? I have read that our society produces more anxiety and depression than any other nation, and we certainly use more prescription drugs and pain killers than anyone.

Proverbs 18:10-11 reads: *The name of the Lord is a strong fortress; the godly run to him and are safe. The rich think of their wealth as a strong defense; they imagine it to be a high wall of safety.* That is a beautiful proverb, but do we really believe it? Do you trust God, or do you trust your savings, retirement, stocks and bonds? Three times during my life God put me to the test, and it's easier said than done. When I was 35 years old, I had a "secure" office job with the T&P Railroad in Dallas. (I put "secure" in quotes because "a secure job" is an illusion. Right?) I had a wife and four kids. To leave that job and trust God was a real test for Doris and me. Two other times we had a much more severe test. I can remember the time Doris and I spent a sleepless night, talking, praying, walking the floor. About the time the sun came up, we decided. "We are going to do what we believe God is telling us to do, sink or swim." Golly, that was scary. Do we really trust God when everything is on the line? If it is easy for you, you are a better man than I am.

Jesus said to put God first, and put loving others ahead of loving yourself, and that will lead to peace, joy, and fulfillment. Is that just religious talk?

(2) Marriage and Singleness. Paul said that God has the right to tell you whether to get married and even whom to marry! That is radical. Verse 26 says, *Because of the present crisis (or distress)...* The scholars say he is not referring to a time of unusual persecution, but to this present evil age. That is, he is saying that this whole age we are living in is stressful, distracting, and temporary, and that we would be better off to remain single and focus on the Lord. He said it is OK to get married if we must but that singleness is the better choice.

Some time back there was a "Happiness Survey" that asked several thousand people how happy they were. They found that, overall, people were at about the same level of happiness regardless of whether they were married or single. But they discovered that many singles believed they would be much happier if they were married, and that many marrieds believed they would be more happy if they were single again. For Christians the whole question is irrelevant. God does not seem

concerned about our being happy, he is concerned that we become Christlike. Becoming Christlike results in joy forevermore. Joy is a whole different category than happiness.

(TESTIMONY OF SARAH ALLEN. (At this point we had on overhead the testimony of Sarah Allen. I hope everyone will go to our church website, www.Canyonviewchurch.org, and watch this impressive presentation by a young single lady in our fellowship who understands what God is after in each of us, whether single or married.)

Many members of our fellowship, both marrieds and singles, including widows and widowers, are doing some great ministry – volunteering in our hospitals or other places (there are over a hundred volunteer opportunities in Grand Junction, and Christians are filling many of those roles); teaching classes; mentoring young people; caring for disabled loved ones; raising their grandchildren; visiting the sick; serving in the backpack program, etc.

I have strong feelings about the word “retirement.” Being able to retire from a job is a great blessing, but I don’t believe we are supposed to retire from serving the Lord. When we retire from a job, and if health/family/finances permit, we have great freedom to serve God. We have wisdom (we have made all the mistakes possible, so surely we have learned something) and time and open doors. We can even become a missionary, short or long term. Many of you have been on mission trips. It’s a blast, an adventure, to get to see God do some amazing things. It is our goal that everybody that is able to do so will take some short-term mission trips. Jesus said, *Go into all the world...* As we go, God gives his anointing and we may see some salvations or healings or miracles we have never seen before. Since I passed 80, seven years ago, I have made several mission trips to Mexico, three trips to the Amazon, and one trip to Haiti, in addition to my seminars, prison ministry, and counseling. I really do see my good health and long years as a God-given blessing and opportunity to serve Him.

Paul said that when we are single our interests are not divided, and we have more freedom to serve God. I will acknowledge that being single has freed me up just as the Bible says. I have decided that I am not going to remarry. I just wish the ladies would stop pestering me.

(3) SEXUALITY. Fred Feller, Lynne Cumming, and I have been ministry partners for over 20 years. Several years ago, when Lynne’s mother, Betty, was 80 years old, she lived in Phoenix and attended a big church. One afternoon Betty attended a woman’s meeting, and at the conclusion of the meeting the Senior’s Minister, a man in his 70’s, offered to take her home. When they pulled up into the driveway and stopped, the minister turned and placed his hand on Betty’s breast. She gasped, pushed his hand away, and stared at him in shock. He became defensive and angry. He said, loudly, “Well! I have a right to my sexuality!”

This is the question: Have we drawn a line in the sand – regarding sex, money, alcohol, recreational drugs, marriage, career, or whatever, and said, “Hey, I’m a Christian, but don’t anybody talk to me about this subject.” I have had guys say this to me: “Glenn, I simply have an unusually strong sex drive. This is just the way God created me. It’s the way I am. And God understands.” Oh, I see. God has to make an adjustment in your case. Makes sense to me.

I have several articles here that I have clipped from The Daily Sentinel. Articles like this appear nearly every week. This one is about a long time administrator in School District 51 who was soliciting sex with a 14-year old girl. This article is about a teacher who was exchanging sexual photos with young girls. This one is about a policeman who had hundreds of photos of child sex. Etcetera. Some of the articles involve Christians. Some in the past have been members of this church. Have you ever thought of the implications? These men have lost their jobs. They are now unemployable in their long-time career. Think of the pain and humiliation of their spouse, children, and family. And they have to go to court and maybe to prison!

Why do they do it? How could a Christian do such a crazy, destructive thing? It is because they have continually refused to surrender their will to God in a radical way. They continue, year after year, their hidden life of sexual fantasy, pornography, prostitutes, internet acting out of their sexual perversions. Their hearts gradually become hard, their conscience no longer functions, they no longer hear God, and they become a slave to the devil! (That is exactly what the Bible calls it.)

The same process goes along with excessive use of alcohol: It can end with multiple DUI’s, with a wreck, with a murder or a suicide. The same process with drugs, or with gambling. Not long ago a lady in our community embezzled over a hundred thousand dollars from the company that employed and trusted her. As I recall, it resulted in the bankruptcy of the company and her imprisonment. We are not talking about evil people, we are talking about normal, vulnerable people (like you and me) who do evil things.

The same process with love of money. It leads people to become greedy, cold, to lose their marriage and their children and their souls.

Maybe someone is thinking: "I don't like to hear preaching like that - - you're being intolerant and legalistic. I believe in a God of love. He doesn't condemn us no matter what we do!" Oh, come on. Read the New Testament. God does love us unconditionally, but his love frees us from sin, it doesn't give us freedom to continue in sin. Because God loves us, he sets parameters on our passions, lusts, and idols that drag us down to destruction. *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts.* (Ro. 6:12) *The Lord knows those who are his, and all who belong to the Lord must turn away from wickedness.* (2 Tim 2:19)

If we are disciples, and that is what believers/Christians are named in the New Testament, there is not an option - - we are commanded to a radical obedience, to die to self, the flesh, the lower nature, and to live for him. I'm so thankful that the Lord has saved me and is saving me from self-destructing, from alcohol and pornography and fear and anger.

(3) BREVITY OF LIFE - - Verse 32 - - *This world as we know it will soon pass away.*

History Channel has a series named Life Without People, and the premise is - if the human race suddenly disappeared, what would happen to the cities, buildings, roads, bridges, infrastructure? They show what would happen after 10 years, 50 years, 1,000 years, and it is amazing how quickly everything would revert to jungle or desert and melt back into the landscape. I guess the point for us is that if we are investing our life in stuff, in things, then we are fools because none of it is going to last. That is exactly what Jesus called the rich farmer who kept building bigger barns, a "fool."

Everything we can see with our eyes is turning back to dirt. That includes our bodies. We are turning back to dirt. My body is well on the way. My doctor is also my dermatologist, and he is a Christian and my friend. A couple of months ago I was complaining to him, "You're a terrible doctor. I've been coming to you for 20 years, and I'm falling apart. From head to foot: my hair is falling out, and my toes are like eagles' claws, like Nebuchadnezzar. I have skin like a lizard, with wrinkles and spots." He was not sympathetic. He sent me to an examination room and had me pull off my shirt, and when he came in and glanced at me he acted like it scared him. He missed the class on bedside manner. I said, Tell me the truth, is it possible I could die of extreme ugliness? He thought for a minute and said, "My mother-in-law hasn't died."

(4) WEEPING - - Verse 30 - - *Don't be absorbed by your weeping.*

Doris and I were married 53 years. (Overhead – two photos of her.) We had a heck of a time, but God healed our marriage and we became best friends. Let me tell you how she died. In 2002 Doris was still functioning well, but she had emphysema and was slowly declining. On a Saturday in November we went to the Healing Rooms at 9th & Ute for her to get prayer. God touched and refreshed her, and we were encouraged. We started driving home, but after only a few blocks she slumped over, and was gone. I cried out to God and rushed her to the hospital, but there was never a response. It was very difficult for our children and me because it was so unexpected, but we knew she was with the Lord.

Several weeks later I ran into a friend, Gordon Peterson, who owns an orchard, and he said he had something to share with me. He said, "On the day before Doris' funeral, I came in from the orchard and sat in my rocker, and although I am a man who never takes a nap during the day, on that day I immediately dozed off and had a vivid dream. I saw you and Doris driving home, and suddenly your car was filled with a flash of light. Then I saw a door open up above your car, and Doris leaped through the door." Wow! Wasn't God kind to give us that vision?

Over the course of my ministry I have conducted several hundred weddings and several hundred funerals. I remember many lovely weddings, but I have to admit that my favorite is funerals, Christian funerals. I held many funerals for unbelievers, and I truly hate them. I could tell you many depressing stories, and some creepy stories, about funerals for unbelievers. But funerals for Christians are wonderful and beautiful. They are comforting, inspiring and hopeful. They are not just about the person who died, they are about Jesus and his faithfulness to the man or woman who believed in him. The Bible says God is the potter and we are the clay, and when you look at the life of a Christian you can see Jesus' fingerprints all over their life, you can see Him.

God says that Christians *should not be absorbed by their weeping*. Grief is our human reaction to a loss, and it is healthy and necessary. But a lot of people hold on to their lost loved one and make their room or photographs into a shrine. A "spirit of grief," which is a demonic spirit, can attach itself to the emotion of grief and paralyze and ruin their life. God says to us, "Don't do that, and don't allow that to happen." That kind of attitude does not honor the Lord. It is very near to ancestor worship. Christ's resurrection demonstrated God's victory over death and the grave. Thank the Lord for their life

and release them to him. You can do it with His help. Then you can live your life as God intends.

Let me give you a little test: There are about seven billion people on earth, and 259,000 people die every - - week, month, or year? Day! Over a quarter of a million people die every day. Many are no doubt sick and in pain and are expecting death, but surely a great number are caught by surprise. They did not know when they awoke that it would be their last day on earth. Dr. Doom has a message for you: “Your funeral is on the way!” That is a given. The question is, are you going to have a Christian funeral?

As we close, I have a couple of questions: Are you sure you are a Christian? It’s time to make a decision, for time will soon be past.

For believers, have you drawn a line in the sand - - regarding sex, money, alcohol, drugs, gambling, a wrong relationship? Are you ready to make a radical surrender to God?

Final reflection:

In 1964 Doris and I were thinking of moving to Colorado when I finished seminary, so we drove from Dallas to Colorado for a visit. We took the back seat out of our VW bug to make room for our four kids, so there were six of us. (Nowadays, it would take a shoehorn to fit any two of us in a VW.) We decided to drive to the top of Pike’s Peak, which was insane because the highest mountain in our part of Texas was 12 feet.

As we were driving up the mountain, we stopped below timberline in a park in the forest to let the kids run around. We were gazing at the tremendous view, but after a while we suddenly realized that Matt, our four-year-old, was gone! Where was he? Doris and I started running around through the trees screaming, “Matt, Matt!” I can still remember the feeling of panic. I was literally breathless. Until we found him.

That’s the way God feels about his lost children. His love for us is radical. It’s extreme. It doesn’t even make sense. He sent his Son to die on a cross to rescue us.

He’s reaching out for you right now, with outstretched arms. **Run to Him! Run!**

God Bless
Glenn

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