

In our series on disabilities in the church, we come to the important idea of how we view people. We turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, where Paul is explaining that Christians have a home in heaven, and that we must continue to share the gospel with everyone in the world. This chapter informs the Christian view of all people, and therefore the Christian view of people with disabilities. There is mercy for all of us in Jesus Christ.

How we view people affects how we treat people.

1. We must not view people with disabilities the way that the world/flesh does. (v.14-16a)

Earlier in this chapter, Paul wrote about his desire to be clothed with his heavenly body in our eternal home with the Lord. Paul admitted in verse 4, that in this body we groan. But Paul also wrote in verse 9, that while we are at home in this body, we make it our goal to please the Lord. Our earthly body is not our final body. In fact, one reason for sufferings, disabilities, weaknesses and brokenness is to remind us that this body and this world are not our home. We have a better home in heaven, where we will all go, one fine day!

Our paragraph begins in verse 11 with Paul reminding Christians that we have fear of the Lord. To fear the Lord is to respect the Lord. It means that our goal is to do things the way the Lord wants us to do things. Why should we share the gospel with others? Because the Lord wants us to. So we come to our passage in verse 14.

The one thing that dominates our outlook on people, and therefore our outlook on people with disabilities, is the love of Christ. How does the love of Christ serve to re-orient our view of everything else? Just like verse 14 shows – that we have concluded something about the cross of Christ that causes us to look at the whole world through the cross. What is it that we have concluded? One died for all. Christ died for all. Okay, but what is the impact of that truth? Therefore all have died. Okay, keep going into verse 15. What is the consequence of all having died? Well, if we all died, and yet obviously we are still living, then we have a whole new purpose for living. We don't live for ourselves anymore. The selfish person inside me who lived for myself- that person died with Christ on the cross. My flesh has been put to death. Okay, well, help me out then. Since I am not living for myself anymore, then what is my purpose? Who do I live for? I live for Christ. Christ died for us, and we died with Christ, so that we have a whole new purpose...we live for Christ. We live for the one who died and rose again!

Since tomorrow is Valentine's day, give me one minute to talk to the married people here, to take this gospel logic and bless your marriage. Okay, in marriage you should not be selfish right? You should not live for yourself, right? Who should you live for? Wait, if you think you should live for the spouse, you are wrong. Did that spouse die on the cross for you? No. This is key to marriage. This is the gospel key to marriage. You don't live for yourself. You don't live for your spouse. You live for Christ, within your marriage.

That was my application to marriages. Now we can take the same truth and apply it to our topic today - people with disabilities. We are to care for people with disabilities, right? We are not to be selfish, right? Okay, who do we live for? Do we live for the person with disabilities? NO! Caregivers, hear this. Hear this. Your life is not defined by providing care for your loved one, your patient, your special person with a disability or a need. No. That is a horrible way to define yourself. Your life is defined by living for Christ! Christ is the one who died and rose again for you!

Verse 16 – THEREFORE.... Because of this gospel truth, we now see how to view people with disabilities in the church. How? NOT ACCORDING TO THE FLESH. The Greek word at the base is to know. To stand in relationship with. We do not know people according to the flesh. We do not stand in relationship to people according to their characteristics in the flesh. We are not acquainted with them according to their abilities or their disabilities.

If a woman is beautiful, we don't treat her any better, and if a man is wealthy and muscular, we don't treat him any better.

Same for a disability. We do not treat a person according to their body, their disability.

If an Olympic athlete were in our church, and came back, we would not treat them according to their celebrity status. We would treat them as a brother or sister in the Lord who had also accomplished something. We would give glory to God for the accomplishment.

Through Christ, we can correctly view people with disabilities. We do not see them first as handicapped, first as crippled, first as disabled, first as immobile, first as struggling with mental health, first as struggling with aging, first as overweight, first as bald, first as wrinkled, first as sick. That is not how we view them. Instead, we view them as sisters and brothers in the Lord.

You know that motivating sentence in our culture? – “he is not heavy, he is my brother.” That is a statement of how we view the person. He is not a burden. He is not heavy. He is not something I wish I could offload. No. the defining and controlling way that I view him is that he is my brother. After I view him as my brother, then I treat him as my brother. I would carry my brother for 100 miles.

I don't know him as a 179 pound burden. I know him as my brother!

a) Storybook view: the world is whole and the disability is broken.

The modern view, or the modernist view of the world is that there is nothing wrong with the world. The world is not fallen. The world is not broken. The world is whole and normal. Within this view, if we come across a boy who was born in such a way that he will always need a wheelchair, it surprises us as something outside of what is expected. What is wrong with the boy? What is his problem? What is that child's birth defect? These questions come from the belief that the routine of the world is the baseline. Most kids are normal. Most people are normal. So, a difference is something other. Something abnormal. Something broken. So, in this storybook view of everything being ideal and everything having positive connotations, here comes the boy in the wheelchair, and how does everyone view him? Abnormal. What if you are the boy in the wheelchair? How does that make you feel? You feel angry because you would be defined exclusively by your limitations.

This wrong view of the world is whole, and the disability is broken, has resulted in rejection of those with disabilities. Throughout history, people with mental and physical disabilities have been abandoned at birth, banished from society, used as court jesters or a circus act, they have been purposefully drowned or burned, they were gassed in Nazi Germany, and still today people with disabilities continue to be separated, put in institutions, raped, euthanized, and murdered. Why? Because how people are viewed affects how they are treated. This storybook view focuses on the negative characteristics of the diagnosis, and not on the shared reality of the personhood of the individual boy or girl, man or woman. So, people have reacted to that view with a different view, which is also an error.

People who take up the cause to defend people with disabilities and improve their lives, want to change the way people view it. All they do is change the language. They confuse things, so it is the confused view...

b) Confused view: the world is whole and the disability is whole.

Disability is presented as normal. The world is a storybook world, and the disability is a wonderful and normal part of the storybook world. That is confused. This is typical for postmodern views of things. Think about what it leads to. Having a disability is not seen as suffering, not seen as a deficiency. It is not seen as a tragedy. A person with a disability then does not deserve compassion, special care, or donations. Disability is now recognized and celebrated. There are no lower expectations for the person with a disability. The new language confuses everything, and solves nothing.

A boy in a wheelchair requires no greater acknowledgement than a boy with a different color of hair. No compassion.

So, when a baby boy is born with a disability and her other friends gather with the young mother, should they say “I am so glad to hear of your son’s disability! This is great. I just wish it were me having a baby like yours!” That would be absurd and cruel.

How would such a person view the world? The world is whole, and the disability is whole.

2. We must not view Christ the way the world/flesh does. (v.16b)

Paul knew that prior to Paul’s conversion, Paul had entirely misjudged Jesus. Paul as a Jewish rabbi was looking for the Messiah, the Christ, but concluded that Jesus was NOT the Christ. Paul was wrong. Paul and his fellow Jews got it all wrong with how they were looking at Jesus.

How could they get it so wrong?

Because they looked at Jesus purely in a human way, exclusively from an earthly perspective.

Our view of Christ is of course the foundation of our view of everything else. We regard no one from a worldly point of view. Not even Christ. So, it does not matter whether we are Jews or Gentiles, red, yellow, black or white, rich or poor.

3. The Biblical view of disabilities: the world is broken and the disability is broken, but Christ redeems. (v.17)

In verse 17, Paul wrote that our new birth – our being born again – is a work of a whole new order. A whole new creation. We become a part of a whole new creation. God is re-making the world. The old has passed away, the new has come. We are reconciled to Christ, therefore we view everything from a new vantage point.

Let’s go back to the example of the pregnant woman who just gave birth to a boy with a disability. The doctor just told her. Her friend comes in. What should happen? The friend should say, “I am so sorry to hear about the diagnosis. God created things good, and now things are broken in our world. Disability is part of that brokenness. This is something that we grieve together. This is going to be very difficult, very sad and very costly. However, Christ died to redeem us, and Christ uses even the brokenness of our world and the brokenness of disability to shape us and fashion us. The disability may never change, but there are other things about the boy that will change and deepen and grow. There are things about us as people around him that will deepen and be impacted in a good way.

There are a lot of things about your son that are not broken. There are things deeper than his body that are the same as my son. He has the ability to love. Your son and my son have the ability to create, to make decisions, to rule over the animals in our world. Your son and my son both have the ability to relate to others, and to design things. Both have the ability to think. Both reflect the image

of God. Both have been made by God, just as they are, in order to experience purposeful, blessed lives. Your son can have a good life in a broken body and in a broken world, because we have a good God who has conquered this world.

Everything is touched by mankind's fall into sin in Adam, but not everything is ruined by the fall. On every level, there is a mixture of the blessedness of God's design in creation, and the brokenness of the fall. By God's grace given to each of us every day, we can continue to participate in the damaged but not destroyed blessings of being created in God's image. We have purpose. God has a purpose for the life of the boy or girl with a disability.

All of us are impacted by the brokenness of the world and our own personal brokenness. For some people, the effects of the brokenness are more noticeable, and more dramatically experienced in some people's lives. For example, cancer threatens a person with death. But the truth is that all of us are slowly moving toward death. Being healthy is just the slowest form of dying. In the same way, we could say that being healthy is just the least noticeable form of disability!

But what if the person with cancer has more spiritual health than the person who is physically fit but is living an immoral or self-centered life?

Disability is simply more noticeable. No one is completely disabled. No one is completely healthy. This is the true condition of our world.

We each have a mixture of whole and broken in our spiritual walk, our physical bodies, our intellectual abilities, our emotional balance, our psychological make-up, and our social abilities of relating to other people.

Sometimes people have great weakness in one area, but great strength in another area.

I am not saying that if you have a disability you also have a superpower.

But I am saying that if you have a disability, you should be on the lookout for the hand of the Redeemer. The disability stinks, but Christ's mercy is nearby. God's purposes will be made known eventually.

CONCLUSION:

Let's take my example of a boy in a wheelchair, and fast-forward to him being an adult now. Let's say his name is Jon, and let's say his disability is spina bifida. Let's say he is a blessing in his church because of he has become determined to have a positive attitude and a warm sense of humor, and a deep faith in Christ, and a noticeable level of patience that shows more spiritual strength than others in his church. Let's say his church is celebrating the sanctity of human life, and Jon is asked to testify. Let's listen in as Jon shares how he considers life with a disability, "I just focus on living one day at a time, taking each day for what it brings. And God will just lead me through. Whatever I face, I'll face with Christ."

For Jon, his physical disability in the hands of the Redeemer, has caused tremendous spiritual maturity. Christ has taken something that is broken, in a

broken world, and He has redeemed it in the life of a brother in Christ, to the glory of God.

How we view people, impacts how we treat people.

When we view people right, we treat people right.

Yes, disabilities fit in the church.