

# “We Are What We Repeatedly Do”

## 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

In February, I mentioned that a couple of TV commercials got my attention, and not in a good way: The Super Bowl ad imploring you to “come back to the sea” (because that is where you evolved from) and the Dodge truck ad telling you to “take time for Sunday” (by staying home). Recently, another commercial caught my attention, but in a good way.

Under Armour, the makers of athletic gear, use a famous quote from the Greek philosopher Aristotle: “We are what we repeatedly do.” He goes on to speak of excellence as being a habit. So I saw this commercial a couple weeks ago and it made me think about how you can apply this to other aspects of life – not just exercising.

And I walk into the 7<sup>th</sup> grade classroom the next morning and notice a poster between the whiteboard and the smartboard with this quote from Aristotle: “We are what we repeatedly do.” I have been teaching there for six months and never noticed it before. Apparently being perceptive is not something that I repeatedly do.

So Monday morning, I sit down to look at the texts for this week, and Paul is talking about how Jews demand signs (we talked about that last week – they wanted Jesus to put on a show and Jesus wanted them to find Him in the Word of God. The same is true today.)

Paul also says, “Greeks seek wisdom” and “God has made foolish the wisdom of the world.” Paul is not speaking out against quotations like Aristotle’s. Wisdom is trumpeted throughout Scripture. Jesus tells His disciples to be wise. There is an entire genre of writings within the Bible called “Wisdom Literature” like the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is not the problem.

The so-called “wisdom of this world” is the problem. The wisdom of this world says there is no need for God, or if He is needed to get life rolling along He is an impersonal force off in the distance. Paul says, “The cross is folly (is foolishness) to those who are perishing.” Christ crucified and risen from the dead is foolishness to the world.

Paul is not speaking against the wisdom of Aristotle’s quote, “We are what we repeatedly do.” On the contrary, Paul would agree. Aristotle didn’t know how correct He really was. “We are what we repeatedly do.” Therefore, clearly, I am a poor, miserable sinner. Paul says, “The good I want to do this I do not do, but the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing. Wretched man that I am.” “We are what we repeatedly do.” I am a sinner.

But God does not leave us to be defined by our sin. It is true, “We are what we repeatedly do.” Except even this truth is made foolish in Christ in the waters of Baptism. We are baptized into Christ – once. That is who we are – period. Have confidence in your Baptism. God has washed you clean once and for all.

However, although you have received everything that you need for salvation in the new life, in the new birth of Baptism, that new life must be fed and nourished. Your spiritual birth is much like your physical birth. You are alive through no act of your own.

You can survive for a while with no help from the outside. However, it will not take long for that new life to wane away if proper food and care are not provided. Physical health and spiritual health each require proper food and exercise.

Someone asked me this past week what the most frustrating part of my ministry is. I said, “The most frustrating thing is not simple apathy, people just not caring – although the world is full of that. The most frustrating thing is being able to see obvious spiritual problems with someone and they are completely unable to see that what they are doing or what they are not doing is causing immense, possibly eternal spiritual harm. It is like there is this wall blocking them from seeing the truth.

What I didn’t get to say (as we were in the midst of a public venue and I didn’t have the microphone) is that this frustration is also a comfort and is what allows me to sleep at night. I don’t have the power to tear down that wall. Tearing down that wall is not going to happen because I came up with clever enough words. This is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. I can’t take the Holy Spirit and shove Him down your throat – feathers and all.

His work happens beyond our work. I cannot do anything to create faith in a crucified and risen Christ through which you or your loved ones receive God’s grace – unless you bring the person to be baptized. But then again, it’s not really me doing the work. However, I can feed and nurture that new life with the gifts God has given His church.

This is where Aristotle is useful. “We are what we repeatedly do.” Last week we focused on being immersed in God’s Word – that is where God permits Himself to be found. But His Word is not His only gift.

Why do we confess our sins every week? We are repentant sinners. “We are what we repeatedly do.” Thanks be to God that He has given the pastors of His church the authority to absolve those sins. “In the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all yours sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” You get to hear those words repeatedly, every week. You are forgiven. Speaking these words is one of the great joys of being a pastor.

Back to the frustrating part of being a pastor, I plead with people, I plead with parents who are raising their children outside of regularly coming to worship and there is this wall. They don’t understand how they are starving themselves and starving their family when they have not heard the words of absolution in such a long time. Not to mention, eating and drinking that which Jesus says, “Do this in remembrance of Me.”

Then they will come one Sunday and won’t be seen again for a few months. They came once. Nothing seemed to change. The wall is still there. The sanctified life in the church, which is the Holy Spirit’s work in you is like growing older. You looked in the mirror yesterday, you look in the mirror today, you don’t notice a change after one day. But after a year, five years, ten years, there is much change. “We are what we repeatedly do.”

The Word of God, the Gospel, changes you. The season of Lent forces you to look into the mirror. It requires you to see your sin, confess your sin, and find God’s forgiveness in the foolishness of Christ crucified. Only He can tear down that wall. Amen.