

Intro to 1Cor- Perceiving God's Grace

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 23rd Oct 2010

Intro-

- The New Testament is full of letters to Churches just like ours. In these letters we find teaching relevant to our lives today.
- If the Apostle Paul was alive today on the earth and he was to write a letter to us as a Church what would it say? What areas would he address? How would we feel having such a spiritual person speak into our lives?
- We will look at such a letter today written to a Church which was really struggling. This Church was not necessarily struggling with numbers, but struggling with maturity. It was packed with pastoral problems. Paul had started it in Corinth on his second missionary journey (see Acts 18). He spent a year and a half with them until moving to the next place. He would return to Corinth later, but while he was away all sorts of horrendous problems plagued the Church.
- Today we will look, not at how Paul addressed the pastoral problems, but how he introduced the letter. In his wording we will find answers to how we are to view pastoral problems when they occur in those around us.

Read 1Cor 1:1-9

The gracious introduction to this letter of correction teaches us the following:

To always look for the good in people and situations

- There was plenty of bad in the Church in Corinth. Corinth=a city of iniquity (the temple of Aphrodite there had about 1,000 priestesses, religious prostitutes, to 'Corinthianise' was an ancient saying meaning to commit gross immorality) and this had slipped into the Church- a man was hitched up with his mother-in-law (1Cor 5:1). Also worldliness had got in- divisions were rife (1:10-4:21). People in the congregation were taking each other to court (1Cor 6:1-8). Pride had come in- gifts were being used for show and self rather than to build up the body. Selfishness- people had become inconsiderate- the rich were scoffing the food and getting drunk at the Lord's table and the poor were missing out. People in the Church had become physically sick and some had died through complete disrespect for the Lord's supper. Heresy had come in- some were saying that there is no resurrection (1Cor 15:12). They were a motley crew.
- However, despite the difficulties, Paul started his letter on a positive, encouraging note. We need to learn from this when we have to approach each other to bring godly correction. The 'sandwich' principle.
- Despite the pastoral problems present, Paul addresses them as 'saints' and 'sanctified' v2. Paul is emphasising the perfect work of Jesus on the cross for them- they are justified-declared righteous in God's sight. Paul in 2Cor 4:16-17 says that we are to no longer regard anyone according to the flesh- this means we need to learn to see everyone through God's lenses. God will also empower them to walk holy (sanctification- experiential righteousness).
- Not unreality, so that you ignore things which need addressing- this letter corrected what needed correcting.
- Develop the ability to see the good. Cup half empty or half-full
In some parts of Mexico hot springs and cold springs are found side by side -- and because of the convenience of this natural phenomenon the women often bring their laundry and boil their clothes in the hot springs and then rinse them in the cold ones. A tourist, who was watching this procedure commented to his Mexican friend

and guide: "I imagine that they think God is pretty generous to supply such ample, clean hot and cold water here side by side for their free use." The guide replied, "No señor, there is much grumbling because He supplies no soap. What about me?"

- Perceiving God's grace leads to a thankful attitude. Ungratefulness and complaining occurs when we refuse to see or acknowledge the grace of God either in situations, in ourselves or in others. Phil 4:4- rejoice in the Lord always! Col 3:15 'Be thankful'. When Matthew Henry was robbed, that very night he prayed: "I thank Thee, first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, and not I who robbed."

That God gives good gifts, even to messed up people

- There was a powerful initial response to the gospel in Corinth, even though when Paul spoke the gospel there he was nervous and not the best of speakers (1Cor 2:1-5). The Holy Spirit moved powerfully and many became Christians and were filled with the Holy Spirit and moved in spiritual gifts. However, despite their gifts there were horrendous problems in their lives.
- The difference between a gift and wages. A gift is simply that- a gift. It is something we have not earned or worked for. Salvation and spiritual gifts are not wages, but free gifts given to the hungry, given to those who believe. They are not rewards for service. In 2001 the Sun newspaper reported that a woman, Susan Anderson wanted £4,000 pounds to pay off debts. The Halifax bank, which uses the slogan, "Always giving you extra," did just that and sent her a check for nearly nine million pounds. "I know the slogan, but this was ridiculous," Anderson, 51, told *The Sun* newspaper. The mother of two didn't spot the error at first. "It's only when I looked at it later that I thought: 'That's not right,'" she said. "At first I thought it was for 8,000 pounds, twice what I wanted. Then I looked at it again and realized that there was this huge figure that seemed to go on for ever," said Anderson, who is now expecting a new check for the right amount. The single mother of two from Gloucestershire in western England alerted the bank to the mistake, but not before photocopying the check and showing it to her workmates. She also admitted dreaming about how to spend the money. "Since getting it I've been round the world 20 times in my head spending it. I could certainly do some serious damage to money of that kind, and I need it," she said. A spokesman for the bank told *The Sun* a computer error was behind the blunder. Grace is being able to keep the gift, even though we don't deserve to.
- Jesus said 'it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick- I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repent'. This was good news for Paul, who was the 'chief of sinners' because he actually persecuted the Church (so he became the prime example of the grace of God to us). It was also good news for the Corinthians- they weren't about to lose their gifts because of inappropriate use of gifts, rather they could by the grace of God get back on track.
- We need to know the message of grace for us- that God wants to give good gifts so that we have 'come short in no gift'- 1Cor 1:7. That tongues is not a badge for good behaviour. That prophecy is not for the super-mature. In scripture when people believed they received prayer for the Holy Spirit and were filled and exercised spiritual gifts straight away (Acts 10:44-46; Acts 19:6). Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit?
- We need to accept that sometimes God uses people we don't like very much. Also sometimes they might be more anointed than us! Just as God is gracious, so too should we be. The disciples tried to stop people who were casting out demons and were not part of their group- Jesus discouraged this action, saying that those who weren't against them were for them.
- Maybe we need to forgive ourselves for something we have done, and stir up the gifts that we know are in us- it is all of grace.

That God is faithful and will finish what He started in us

- Two psychiatrists were at a convention. As they visiting, one asked, "What was your most difficult case?" The other replied, "I had a patient who lived in a pure fantasy world. He believed that an uncle in South America was going to die and leave him a fortune. All day long he waited for a letter to arrive from an attorney. He never went out, he never did anything, he merely sat around and waited for this fantasy letter from this fantasy uncle. I worked with this man eight years." "What was the result?" "It was an eight-year struggle. Every day for eight years, but I finally cured him... then that stupid letter arrived!"

- Jesus will present us blameless before God the Father
- Therefore we can eagerly await the return of Christ (1Cor 1:7), not be dreading it!
- God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be blameless before Him- Eph 1:4. What part did we have to play in this decision? None- the world had not been created. Therefore it is all of God. We thought it was all of us when we chose to follow Christ, but it turns out to be all of Him. Therefore our salvation is secure. While we were 'without strength Christ died for the ungodly'-Rom 5:6. If whilst we were ungodly He died for us, how much more, now that we are godly will he accept us (Rom 5:9)?
- What does blameless mean? Blameless. It means what it says on the tin. Justification- being declared righteous. Greek word Tetelestai, which in our version of the Scripture is translated, "It is finished." Archaeologists have repeatedly found its Latin equivalent, consummatum est, scrawled across tax receipts used in those days, indicating it also meant "paid." With sin's account settled, our debt of guilt was indeed wiped out!
- Read Rom 8:28-30- Predestined, called, justified, glorified. He has predestined you, called you, justified you, of course He is going to glorify you on the day He returns!
- God is faithful (1Cor 1:9) by whom we were called. If the One who called us were not trustworthy, faithful always, perhaps we would be left in doubt. But His very name is Faithful (Rev 19:11). Although we might be unfaithful to Him, He cannot be anything but faithful to us, as He cannot deny who He is (2Tim 2:13).
- T-shirt saying 'Be patient with me- God hasn't finished with me yet'. 'Work-in-progress'. Be patient with yourself. Be patient with others. Nurture the good in all people. Bring all to their full potential in Christ.

The hymn-writer Fanny Crosby wrote more than 6,000 gospel songs. Although blinded by an illness at the age of six weeks, she never became bitter. One time a preacher sympathetically remarked, "I think it is great pity that the Master did not give you sight when He showered so many other gifts upon you." She replied quickly, "Do you know that if at birth I had been able to make one petition, it would have been that I should be born blind?" "Why?" asked the surprised clergyman. "Because when I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!" One of Miss Crosby's hymns was so personal that for years she kept it to herself. One day at a Bible conference in Northfield, Massachusetts, Miss Crosby was asked by D. L. Moody to give a personal testimony. At first she hesitated, then quietly rose and said, 'There is one hymn I have written which has never been published. I call it my soul's poem. Sometimes when I am troubled, I repeat it to myself, for it brings comfort to my heart.' She then recited while many wept, 'Someday the silver cord will break, and I no more as now shall sing; but oh, the joy when I shall wake within the palace of the King! And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story-saved by grace!' At the age of 95, Fanny Crosby passed into glory and saw the face of Jesus. That's the sure hope of every child of God!

Summary

From Paul's introduction to his letter of correction to the Church in Corinth we learn:

- To always look for the good in people and situations
- That God gives good gifts, even to messed up people
- That God is faithful and will finish what He started in us

Song: *I will praise You all my life*

Ministry

Prayer to receive Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts