



Grace Under Pressure: Aiming for Perfection
The Sermon Study Guide
2 Corinthians 13:11
November 22, 2009

Opening Prayer

We thank God for his word:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16

Leader **The Lord be with you.**
People **And also with you.**
Leader **Let us pray**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Remembering the Message (Read 2 Corinthians 13. Read again 2 Cor. 13:11)

1. What words or phrases stood out to you as you read this passage?
2. Briefly summarize Paul's message to the church in Corinth in this passage.

Introduction

We were reminded by Father David that, while Paul did not write these letters to us, the Holy Spirit did have us in mind. The Bible was written by humans who were guided by the Holy Spirit: over 40 authors, spanning 1500 years, and a broad spectrum of ethnicities, cultures, and places. We are called to observe the text, interpret the text, and then apply the text.

Going Deeper

1. Biblical hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation of the written texts of scripture. Why is the issue of interpretation so important as we read the Bible? What might be some important factors in interpreting scripture?

The Hard Letters to the Corinthians

The letters that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth weren't "nice". Some of his letters to other churches were full of joy, thanksgiving, even praise. In contrast, much of the content of Paul's letters to the Corinthians was tough. Paul was hard on the Corinthians. He calls them out on several things and says he "will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others"; he's hammering a message home to them.

"Brother"....

Paul then binds them all together with a single word: "Brother". Yes, there was trouble in the Corinthian church – problems in worship, with idol feasts and the Lord's Supper, lawsuits among believers, sexual immorality, divisions in the church, rebellion, as well as ugly words and rumors against Paul himself. And yet Paul reminds them that they are always brothers and sisters in this new family they are a part of through Jesus' death on the cross.

"Brother." Paul is speaking to brothers and sisters in the church. This one word would have stopped his readers cold. When Paul says "Brother" he introduces an idea that would have been shocking and foreign to the people first hearing the letter. He speaks across cultural barriers, across socio-economic lines, across racial divides. Where did Paul get this radical idea? Jesus had already planted the seed for this new idea of family. Jesus blew the social structure of his day apart and re-defined family in a way that included tax collectors, sinners, harlots, and lepers, Samaritans, the despised and the outcast, - people from every walk of life.

Just like the church in Corinth, Christ Church is filled with people who've made wrong choices and who sin. And it's not "those other people", it's us. We all make wrong choices and we all sin. We are all affected by the sin of others. Sometimes the difficulties and sorrows we face are the consequence of living in a broken world. There are people who are struggling through a long season of unemployment. There is arguing and rebellion and pride and condemnation of others. Some are having a crisis of faith. Others are facing tremendous suffering and anguish because of some circumstance in their marriage or family. But we are all brothers and sisters under the Fatherhood of God. We are family.

Going Deeper

1. What are the struggles that churches today face, including Christ Church? How are we called to respond to trouble, divisions, and sin in the body? How can we build up the body in the face of these difficulties?

2. What are some things you are facing where you are tempted to try and "go it alone"? How is God calling you to respond in light of Fr. David's sermon?

3. Read Mark 3:31-35 and John 19:25-27. How did Jesus re-order the idea of family in his early ministry and from the cross? How have you experienced this new idea of "family" in your life? How is the Father calling you to expand this value – this radical idea of a new family – in your life?

4. How have you come to know your Father in heaven through brothers and sisters in the Bible? Through your brother, Jesus? Through your brothers and sisters of Christ Church or other church families to which you've belonged?

5. Is God calling you to extend peace (figuratively, a holy kiss) to a brother or sister in Christ with whom you are at odds? If so, what will you do this week to reach out to that "brother" or "sister" and share the grace of Christ?

6. How would you describe your Christ Church family? What kind of family are we?

Grace Under Pressure

We have journeyed together through the book of 2 Corinthians. Paul didn't write this letter with us as his intended audience. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit has used this letter written 2000 years ago to speak to the hearts and lives of many in our congregation over the last 11 weeks. We've heard and discussed how the Holy Spirit moves in a person's life, why suffering happens and how we can comfort others with the comfort we ourselves have received. We've read, heard, marked, learned, and inwardly digested words on the new creation we are in Christ Jesus, words on tearing down strongholds, and words about the thorns in the flesh that we all experience. This is life...the rough and tumble of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in a world of unbelief, a world of joy and pain and sometimes deep sorrow. Jesus has provided for us Grace. A loving way of living. A power made perfect in weakness. A place where you can be a brother or a sister. A confidence in knowing that His love will lead you through everything. Our Father in heaven sees us in our weakness and throws a lifeline of hope – the gift of grace for every moment of our lives.

Going Deeper

1. Reflect on the messages and lessons from the last 11 weeks. Is there one passage from 2 Corinthians that has been particularly meaningful? Explain.

2. How have you experienced God's grace under pressure in these weeks? How has your life been a witness to God's grace under pressure? How will you share this message of God's grace as an encouragement to others in the family of God?

Closing Prayer

Using some of the words from this letter to the Corinthians and including praise, thanks, and petition, write a brief (1 or 2 sentences max) prayer to God. If you are in a small group, close your time together by praying these prayers aloud. If you are doing this as a private devotion speak your prayer aloud to your holy and loving Father God.