

1 Cor 4: 1- 13 (Luke 6:37-42) Both Churches July 2012

Introduction

Spent the last few weeks looking at the opening chapters of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and to remind you,-- Paul has been trying to get the Corinthians to work together and not divided into groups and factions around various leaders. (One being himself)

In chapter 4, which we read today, Paul ends his advice and teaching on this subject, and next week we move onto another of the problems in the Corinthian church.

But today, staying in chapter 4, we see that Paul concludes this section by looking at two attitudes towards other people which the Corinthian church needed to deal with.

The first is Judgementalism -- been rather too quick to judge other people.

The second is pride and arrogance. The two tend to go together.

Judgementalism

Verse 5 "therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts."

We have a problem with church in this country (and elsewhere) it is that Christians are seen to be judgemental people -- that we sit in judgment and condemn others for their behaviour and lifestyles.

To some extent this is unavoidable. If you seek to live a righteous, pure life following the way of Christ -- then that in itself -- without us saying anything -- will tend to offend some people. We cannot help that... self-condemnation arising from their own guilty consciences. (Though we may gain the admiration of others). We are innocent in this respect.

But we can help to make sure we're not deliberately offending others by what we say and by our attitudes -- by being judgemental towards people who don't choose to live according to our Christian standards.

Their behaviour may not be of the kind that pleases God -- but unless we are accepting towards them how will we ever get near to them with the message of Jesus.

(I have put something like this in my summer newsletter on the website)

Unless we can rid ourselves of this judgemental image we will never really be able to talk to many people about the good news of Jesus. And it is far more important that we speak to them of the salvation and new life they can have in Jesus, than that we comment about their behaviour. Once they know God their behaviour will start to change -- it's that way round.

Otherwise steel shutters just come down and they don't listen to us.

And besides, as Paul says here, judging is very difficult because only God really knows what's in a person -- let's leave that to him.

Now just one rider on this. Well we are not to judge others and particularly non-Christians that doesn't mean that we don't have a responsibility to maintain a level of care for each other within the Christian community. If one brother or sister is going astray we may need to confront them -- as Jesus taught. And there may be a case for church discipline -- in fact Paul's next chapter is headed in the NIV "expel the immoral brother". But that is within the church -- not in general.

Pride

The second issue Paul has to take up with the Corinthians is that of pride.

v8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!

10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong!

Paul is being deliberately sarcastic -- in order to bring home to them their attitude of pride.

According to Christian teaching, pride is the greatest sin. In his book "Mere Christianity", C. S. Lewis writes that "lust, anger, greed, and drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison to pride. Pride is the utmost evil, the essential vice. Pride leads to every other vice -- it is the complete anti God state of mind.

And we all practice this vice. The problem is that it is so widespread we hardly notice it.

So what is it? How do we spot it in ourselves? What is its chief characteristic?

Pride is essentially competitive. It is competitive by its very nature.

It is seen in the way we compete, or compare other people against ourselves. (Or vice versa). The keywords that give it away are all comparatives.

You show pride when you think to yourself that you are - a richer, cleverer (more clever), more beautiful, fitter, healthier, more polite, more thoughtful, better spoken, -- or in general terms just better than the other person - -- superior in some way or another. Or we think in reverse terms that the other person -- that they are poorer, or not as clever, or don't work as hard (or don't work at all), or are a bit rougher, or their clothes aren't as nice as mine, or their sermons are not as good.

There is nothing wrong in rejoicing in our accomplishments -- the gifts God has given us, the things we have achieved and succeeded in.

There is nothing wrong in taking pleasure in being praised for doing something well -- for here the pleasure lies not in what you are but in the fact that you have pleased someone who you wanted (and rightly wanted) to please.

The trouble begins when we pass from thinking I have pleased him, all is well, to thinking, what a fine person I must be to have done it

It is the comparisons... and it is just so easy...

The guy (woman) in that car hasn't a clue about reverse parking..., is driving too slow, too fast. (Better driver)

My grandson can say 50 words and he's only two months old (expand)... (reflected pride -- fine line between rejoicing in other people's achievement and using them to puff yourself up in front of others -- we can do it with our children's accomplishments -- reflected glory)

And of course the most terrible thing is that this vice can smuggle itself into the very centre of our religious life -- that I am "a better Christian" than he is. I attend church more often, I read my Bible more frequently, I give more to charity,

All good things except for those comparatives -- "more".

Conclusion

C. S. Lewis advises, (and I would recommend reading the chapter on pride)

"If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed."

Prayer.