

Growing in the Spirit

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Date: 16 June 2024

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- [0 : 00] As a sinner saved by grace. I don't need to tell you what the thorn in my flesh is, which part of living I find difficult.
- I'm just saying I'm a sinner saved by grace. And the last verse of 2 Corinthians says, May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.
- Be with us all. Christ crucified. You know the Corinthian church was a really difficult church to pastor. I mean, we've got Saint Paul, but he's not beyond using sarcasm, aggression, confrontation.
- The apostle who wrote 1 Corinthians 13 all about love, also basically said, well, in modern language, get stuffed to some people.
- Excuse me being blunt, but he used very, very graphic language. Because he felt that the church wasn't doing what the church should do.
- [1 : 25] Corinth was in the world. It was in its face. The temple of Aphrodite dominated Corinth. If you've ever watched Mamma Mia 1, fair enough.
- If you've watched Mamma Mia 2, you've wasted your life watching that movie. But at the end of Mamma Mia 1, there's something called the fountain of Aphrodite. And it breaks forth, and everybody's falling in love again, and it's all beautiful.
- Hey, let's not waste a good wedding, Donna. Or whatever the guy says. And that's the temple of Aphrodite. I tell you what, there was such darkness in Corinth.
- Such darkness. We might think we're two or three clicks away on our phone or on our computer from bad stuff. Well, it was in your face.
- I was in a church in Hackney two or three weeks ago. What a vibrant church that is. And so, of course, a witchcraft shop is going to be set up just opposite.
- [2 : 29] Of course it is. It's in your face. So you're saying, thank you, vicar, for a nice service. And then, witchcraft. Yay! You know, this is Corinth, a tough church.
- To be a Christian in Corinth was difficult. So the church was in the world, but the problem is the world was in the church. And so Paul speaks tough truth.
- A well-known Argentinian pastor, Juan Carlos Ortiz, went to a church. And this is the story I've heard. He stood up after about six months or so being a pastor and he said, love one another.
- And then he sat down. That's a bit awkward. And the deacons were looking at one another. And about ten minutes later, he stood up again.
- He said, love one another. And he sat down again. At this point, people are asking, should we get some of our money back this month?
- [3 : 38] Because, you know, he's obviously not prepared anything. And he stands up again. And he says, love one another. Sits down.
- Awkward. Then one person in the congregation says in a very clear voice, well, I think the pastor wants us to love one another.

And he turned to the person next to them and said, how can I serve you this week? The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, not just words, but the actions of one who emptied himself and became a slave.

Servant sounds rather nice, doesn't it? Like you're going to be in a movie. You rang, sir. But the word means slave. The lowest of the low. And Jesus emptied himself of his glory and became a slave.

And he died the most disgusting death. The most disgusting death on a cross. So disgusting, the Romans themselves got sick of what they were doing.

[5 : 00] An execution fit only for the lowest of the low. And for my sake and for your sake, Jesus experienced hell so we could be forgiven.

We've just celebrated D-Day and those brave people who went on those beaches. But when that beachhead was established, victory was secure.

Once the Americans, the Canadians, and the Free French, and the British had landed, that was the end of the war, really, except there was more fighting to do.

D-Day was the decisive day. But victory in Europe and victory in the Far East was still to come.

And as we look at the cross, that is our day of victory. Jesus has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

[6 : 10] But victory is still to be seen in fullness. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is experienced now with his forgiveness and his grace and his presence.

But the fullness, when he comes in glory, when every eye will see, every tongue will bow, every tongue will acknowledge and every knee will bow that Jesus Christ is Lord, that is still to come.

So at the moment, we've got a practicing Hindu in 10 Downing Street. I just pray that he's effective as a prime minister. When I have surgery, I don't ask whether, you know, the surgeon is a good Muslim or a good evangelical.

Can you do the stuff? You know? But if we have Mr. Starmer as prime minister, he's a committed atheist. But can he be effective?

Is he truthful? But until Jesus comes, every political system is imperfect.

[7 : 33] But we pray for our leaders and we pray that God's will would be done through imperfect men and women. But the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is for us now.

The cross of Christ for us now. But the fullness is still to come. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God.

As I said, it's not eros love. It's agape love. And on this Father's Day, I've just checked my phone. None of my kids have said anything. It's great, isn't it?

I want my money back. They've got a few more hours. It's not good. But the love of God, and although it's Father's Day, when we think of the love of God, we think of the prodigal son, but there's a picture of the prodigal daughter there as well.

So love is about feelings. Agape love is about God's settled decision. That he loves you because he loves you because he loves you.

[8 : 49] I just thought this morning, because this is a special room for me where years ago, I encountered the love of God.

and I've left my old diary at home, but I carry with me a card.

And on one side of the card is an invitation from Hearn Hill Baptist Church to an outreach event. We used to have little postcards, and we would do that. And I remember one outreach event was down the Railton Road over a pub.

So I had got this card, but one Sunday morning, God's Spirit was so tangible here that I was just down there on the floor.

Now, can I just go back a few minutes? I'm a sinner saved by grace. I need God's grace every day. But I was on the floor there, and God whispered to me words which I wrote down, and I carry with me.

[9 : 58] And if God had something to say to me, I wonder what He'd say. Well, I wrote these words down. Peter, I love you.

I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you. The love of God.

How hard is it when we mess up to say, does He really love me now? Now, Billy Graham, what a great preacher he was.

And one of his daughters, Ruth, same name as Billy Graham's wife, she messed up big time. And at Billy Graham's funeral, each of his children spoke.

And I watched the funeral. And I've written the words down, but I'm going to do them just from memory, okay? I've got the words absolutely nailed, but I'll just make it brief.

[11 : 06] Basically, her marriage finished after 20-odd years. And it was advised that she move churches, which she did, to make a new start.

And the pastor there thought it would be a good idea to introduce her to a very handsome widower. And in her words, we dated fast and furiously.

And my children said, careful. Billy Graham, my dad, and Ruth Graham, my mom, they said, honey, because they were from the deep south, honey, slow down.

Can we get to know this man? But I thought, what do my kids know? She said, what do my kids know? They've never been married. What do my parents know?

They've never been divorced. And so I went ahead and we married. 24 hours later, I knew I'd made a big mistake.

[12 : 11] Five weeks later, I literally fled for my life. And I knew I had to go home. But it's not just home to mom and dad.

She said, it's home to Billy Graham. You don't want to let your mom and dad down. You don't want to let Billy Graham down. And she drove two hours, two days to North Carolina.

And she was at the bottom of the drive, a windy drive. What's my dad going to say? What's he going to say? So she drove and there was Billy Graham waiting for her.

And she got out of the car and he came to her and gave her a big hug and said, welcome home. And she said this, my dad wasn't perfect.

But in that moment, he showed me what God's love was like. No lecture. This is what she thought. You've embarrassed us. Why didn't you listen to us?

[13 : 11] We told you so. We said slow down. We didn't get a chance to. No. No lecture. Just welcome home.

And God's love for you and you and you and you and me is the same. Welcome, welcome home. The love of God.

The prodigal son, above all, deserved a lecture. He should have been stoned by the villagers because he'd dishonored his parents. Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may live a long life.

He dishonored the family name. And yet, a party was thrown. That's the love of God for you and for me.

There's nothing you and I can do to make God love us more and there's nothing we can do to make God love us less. The love of God.

[14 : 13] And finally, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We're called to live in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Christ in us, the hope of glory.

We're quite okay with God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. That's how it works. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God. But Christ in us, the hope of glory.

The Holy Spirit making his home in us. And Paul, in another letter, urges us to be, being, being, being, filled with the Holy Spirit.

And the American evangelist D.L. Moody was once asked, why do you keep saying be filled with the Spirit? And he said, because I leak? Repent then and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, who may ascend the hill of the Lord, who may stand in his holy place.

he or she who has a clean hand, clean hands and a pure heart. Last time, but one, when I was here, I told you about a little college in America, Kentucky, called Asbury.

[15 : 48] And I said that there was a service of compulsory chapel. Now trust me, I've been a chaplain at two schools. It was my task to lead chapel at quarter to nine in the morning.

The boys and girls had no option but to be there. They would get a detention if they didn't turn up. Is that fertile ground for revival?

One little boy at a school, I could see quite clearly I'd chosen the hymn to be a pilgrim. He was singing to be a penguin. I could see it quite clearly.

Now, is that going to bring revival? The answer is no. But in this college where it's compulsory to go to chapel, generations, Z, who've been through COVID, who've been lied to, who were in the complex politics of America where if you don't support Donald Trump, you're not a Christian.

I'm serious. I'm serious. pastors have been thrown out. Okay, at least I can say I'm going to vote and you're not going to drum me out.

[17 : 08] But no, these kids have been abused in church by political pastors and they're in compulsory chapel in February 2023.

And 18 of them wait behind after the service. The preacher oddly named Zach Meerkrebs. Now, I've spoken with Zach.

He's real. I would have changed my name. But Zach Meerkrebs is a real person.

He's not ordained. He's a sports minister. and he preached that morning in this compulsory dead Methodist chapel service.

And he said by text to his wife, I've preached in his words a real stinker. He meant I preach really badly this morning. I'll be home soon.

[18 : 11] But these 18 young people hung around. and they worshipped and they welcomed the Holy Spirit. And then more people came and joined them.

16 days later, the college felt they had to just say, can we stop now? At least this phase. 52,000 visitors later.

No famous names. Hundreds of people trained for prayer ministry. I spoke to the guy who trained people for prayer ministry. I said, how did you train you?

I think it was 250 people. He said, very simple. Bad stuff out, good stuff in. You can only share what you've received.

Okay. And the ripples of that, you can look it up. Asbury Awakening. Asbury Awakening.

[19 : 12] Check it out. It's sound. The student counseling service, and I stand before you as somebody who's benefited from counseling, and I've been prescribed medication to help me go through difficult times.

I wish I could just say to you, I'm 100% fine. Do you remember what I said at the beginning? I'm a sinner saved by grace. So I'm not disparaging medication.

I'm not disparaging counseling. But the student counseling service had almost nothing to do. For weeks and weeks at Asbury, there were piles of vapes at the front because addiction was broken in Jesus' name.

Pornography was cleaned out of people's lives. Relationships were restored. Mission, cross-cultural, cross-continental mission has begun.

You say to me, Peter, has Asbury College been transformed? It's being transformed. Has Wilmore, the town, been transformed?

[20 : 35] Have people thrown their guns away? I don't know yet. Is there poverty in Wilmore?

Yes. Is there healing between the communities? Yes. Is there racial harmony in that college?

What I saw was yes, because leaders were from all races. holiness. And the key about leadership was holiness.

Holiness. Now, I'm standing on a platform, but you know what? I should be down here, because if you're on a platform, it kind of says you're a bit special.

I'm a sinner saved by grace. And before any of those young people got on the platform, they set something up called the consecration room. Before they led worship, before they spoke, before they gave testimony, they would go privately in the consecration room.

[21 : 49] And however long it took to get right with God and to get right with one another, they did that before they got behind a microphone. because it's the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit. I'm not going to be perfect until I'm in heaven, but I can't settle for unresolved sin.

I've got to put that right every day. and it starts with me.

It starts with me. There was a member of Herne Hill Baptist Church who came near to being famous, I suppose, Professor Lord McCall, who was in the house.

He said to me once, he said, Peter, I quoted you in the house of Lords. I said, really, Professor Lord McCall? Ian, did you?

[22 : 56] He said, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I did. I quoted you in the house of Lords. I said, what did you say? He said, well, that bit where you went, when one finger points at you, three come back.

I said, well, thank you. It's true, isn't it? I can't say to you, be filled with the Spirit, if I'm not filled with the Spirit. So, somebody said, draw a circle around yourself, and then say, Lord, within that circle, will revive everything.

And in that auditorium in Asbury College in Wilmore, Kentucky, there's one verse over the front of the auditorium, holiness unto the Lord.

Holiness unto the Lord. Perhaps it's true that I've only got one sermon now. On my ordination day, 40 odd years ago, my principal preached, apart from me, you can do nothing.

And I thought, well, Barry, hang on a minute, mate. I'm trained now. I've got two degrees. I'm quite a nice person. I get on with people.

[24 : 14] I've got lots of good ideas for church. But he was right because God's word's right. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing.

Apart from being filled with the Holy Spirit, we can do church, but we can't do church in the power of the Spirit. I close with this, that John Wesley, the founder, he didn't want to found Methodism, but he did.

He went to America as a missionary, came back saying, I went to save other people, who's going to save me? And it depends on your theology, whether you think he was a Christian already, or whether this is the first time, or whether this is a second experience.

All I know is that on May the 24th, 1738, John Wesley wrote these words. In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society, that's a Christian meeting in Aldersgate Street, where someone was reading Luther's, Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans, not even scripture, an introduction, right?

about a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed.

[25 : 54] I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen.