

Growing Faith, Increasing Love, Ongoing Perseverance (part 2)

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Date: 20 March 2024

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[0:00] ...in communion up at the altar. Ife was on my right or my left, and then Jerry Shriver, I don't know if you know him, he was! He was on the other side. He's like six foot something too. And so I was like, it was a little small. It's like a hobbit Eucharist there between the two giants. So thank you, Ife, for inviting me and thank you for all for listening to me and having me here. I've been here before.

I love this church and I love you guys. So thank you very much. I have two sons. I'm wedged in between four daughters. I've never really been worried about my daughters, so they never were a cause of nightmares or worrisome fears or anything like that. But ever since the boys were born, I have dreaded teenagedom, the onset of adolescence, because that's when I just assumed that one morning they'd start, wake up and start smoking and then start drinking and then sneaking out of the house. And that's when we'd go out of town for a weekend or something and come back and there'd be all the smell of the ashtray and the stale beer and the red cups everywhere and comatose teenage bodies on the floor. That's what I assumed it would be like during the teenage years.

So when Aidan, my oldest son, and Rowan, my youngest son, when Aidan turned 13, he's now, how old is he yet? He's going to be 20. But when he turned 13 and then Rowan afterwards, I wondered when is it going to happen? When are they going to turn into horrible, awful human beings? And well, through absolutely no fault of my own, it never happened. They didn't become the teenagers I thought they would. I'm still, when I'm thinking about it, I'm still kind of pinching myself waiting for it to happen. They're sane, reasonable, even Christian young men. Of course, the reason I assumed that they would be horrible teenagers is because I was, I was a horrible teenager myself. So I thought that was a normal run of events. I caused my parents all kind of pain and heartbreak. Now, if the churches that Paul planted were children, Thessalonica, the church in Thessalonica, the church in Philippi, the church in Ephesus, the church in Colossae, you know, Paul would carry around their pictures in his wallet. If he had a car back then, he would stick on the bumper sticker, my child is an honors student for each one of those, each one of those churches. You can tell by the letters, if you read, if you read the letters that Paul writes to these, to these churches, they're all just very, you guys are doing great.

Here's some teaching about Jesus. Watch out for those false teachers out there, but you know, keep on keeping on. You're loving each other, right? You just need to keep growing deeper in Jesus. I love you. My friends here, they love you too. Just keep going. But then, then there's Corinth.

Now, I've been listening to I've preached wonderfully through, through, through first Corinthians. And I think you're in chapter 12 this coming Sunday or right? You got there. Okay. Well, you've heard all about the stuff going on in Corinth. You've heard about the celebrity preacher competition. I'm with Peter. I'm with Paul. I'm with Apollos. You've heard about the lawsuits. You've heard about the weird incest. You've heard about the pagan sacrifices and, and the drunk, maybe even comatose bodies littering the floor during communion. That was probably in chapter 11. So, so Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, basically to sum up is, what's wrong with you guys? Why, why, why are you the way you are? And you'd think after receiving the letter you're studying right now, first Corinthians, you'd think that the people in the Corinthian church would say, you know, we've, we've, we've really caused Paul a lot of heartbreak. We've made him very sad. Uh, we've caused him a lot of pain and you know, he's an apostle, uh, of, of Jesus

[4:19] Christ. You know, let's, let's get our act together. Let's shape up. But instead they got together and thought about it and came to the conclusion, the real problem, the thing that's really wrong here is Paul. He's, he's the one who's causing all the issues here. And, and you might wonder, given all the things going on in Corinth, how they, how they came to that conclusion. Well, uh, having been at this job for more than 20 years, uh, uh, it, I can tell you, if you've got a group of people, uh, in a church doing the things that the people in the Corinthian church are doing, they've already found a way to pretend that Jesus is just, is just fine with all of it, that he's, he's okay with it. So, so the problem is going to be no matter what, the apostle or the pastor or whoever who's telling them to knock it off. And that's the way it was, uh, in Corinth. Who is Paul anyway? Um, they seem to be, seem to have asked themselves. He's not one of the 12. He's, he's not, he wasn't one of the original 12 apostles and they replaced Judas with Matthias and he's not Matthias, he's Paul. Uh, he says Jesus showed up on some road somewhere and made him an apostle, but look at him, look at Paul, always getting beat, not beaten up, always being thrown in jail. You'd think that Jesus would take better care of an apostle. And then some preachers come passing through Corinth who say, you know what? You guys are right. The only person there is to commend Paul's apostleship is, is Paul. And all he does is talk about that bloody cross and, and depress everybody and criticize everybody. You don't need that kind of negativity in your life. You want visions? They would say, these teachers, the pastor, you want visions? We've got visions. You want tongues? We've got tongues. You want prophecies? We got prophecies too.

You don't want his long, boring sermons. Well, we've got the Ted talks and we'll bring them for you. Can you listen to those? And nobody, nobody's going to put us in chains or try to stone us to death because Jesus is on our side. That's probably the kind of things that the people in Corinth are listening to as these teachers would pass through in their church or to their church. Now, again, that's a situation in, in Corinth when Paul sits down and writes his, or maybe he was pacing and someone else is taking notes. I don't know, but he, when Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, if you have a Bible, you might turn there. Second Corinthians, we're going to be in chapter, chapter five. And we're kind of dropping into one of the more encouraging sections, or at least it seems like it at first. Paul is comforting his readers. He's saying in the beginning of chapter, chapter five, that you as Christians can face death with utter confidence. Because when the tent, if you're looking for first Corinthians, it's after second Corinthians. So you can find it that way. When the tent that, when the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. He's saying when you die, you have a home you're going to go to. And for that reason, he says further down in that first section, he says, this is verse six and seven, we're always of good courage. We know that while we're at home in the body, we're away from the Lord. Yes, we're of good courage. We'd rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. You hear what he's saying? It's better to be dead because then, then we get to be with, uh, with Jesus. And so you, he's saying, don't have to be afraid to die because, because you get to go be with the Lord. That's so encouraging. That's so comforting. But, but, but just when you're feeling happy about it, happy about all the things Paul's been saying about death and you're kind of thinking, Hey, yeah, maybe death isn't such a bad thing. I maybe, maybe I want to go and, and die and be, be with, be with Jesus. Then you come to verse 10.

And if you, if you look at verse 10, for we must all, so be, be courageous, be confident. You want to go and be with Jesus because for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what's due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Now, if you notice that word appear there, uh, that means something like be revealed. So, uh, what, what Paul is saying is we must all be revealed before Christ's judgment seat.

[9:15] Okay. And, and that means there'll be, there'll be nothing hidden, uh, no secrets, no hiding place, no thought, no word, no deed tucked away in the dark where no one can see it.

How do you feel about that? Does that make you say, does that make you, are you saying I want to be away from the body and at home with, with the Lord now? I, I, I, I'd rather be at home in the body and as far away from the Lord as I could possibly get.

If, if, if I'm reading this right, maybe I'm not. Remember what, what Paul writes in Romans chapter six, that the wages of sin, that's the reward you get for sin is death.

And that's both the death of the body. And it's also the kind of death that never ends that we call hell. Now, I don't know any of you here. Why not some of you here? But I know all of you here.

And so maybe some of you are thinking something like, well, you know what, I'll, I'll probably be okay. Because, because we're getting what to do for the, what we've done in the body, good or evil. And, you know, I think I, my, I've done some bad things, but my good stuff outweighs my bad stuff. [10:30] So I think I'll be all right when I, when I, when I get there, but that's not how it works. It's not even how it works in our own court system. If you get hauled up before a judge for, for drunk driving, hope you never do.

And you say to the judge, but, okay, I was, I was, I was driving drunk, but I pay my taxes every year. Is that going to help? It's not going to help you.

It doesn't matter. You still got to pay the wages for the drunk driving. So personally speaking, I'm not sure about how you feel, but personally speaking, I am not confident.

And it would pay us, pays well to ask how even Paul can be confident. Because he, he says in one of his letters, letters to Timothy, he says, I'm, I'm the chief of sinners.

It's not, he doesn't say I was the chief of sinners and I became a Christian and now I'm a good person. He says, I am, I am now present tense, the chief of sinners. How, how can Paul be so confident about all this or anyone?

[11:42] Well, I'm just going to let that question hang out there for a bit. And, and Paul knows it's an unsettling question. That's why you see there in verse 11, Therefore, because of what I just said, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

But what we are is known to God and I hope it's known also to your conscience. We're not commending ourselves to you again, but, but giving you cause to boast about us so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearances and not about what's in the heart. For if we're beside ourselves, it's for God. And if we're in our right mind, it's for you. Now, you may not be able to notice it right there, but what Paul's doing in part is he's reasserting his authority as an apostle.

And he's also taken a swing at his detractors, at the teachers who've come through. So, you've, you've, you've read 1 Corinthians. So, the fact that he's both defending himself and taking a swing at the people who are attacking him.

You might ask, since again, you've read 1 Corinthians. Well, shouldn't Paul be willing to be wronged? He, he, he told the Corinthians to be willing to be wronged.

[13:01] Remember in chapter 6 when he's talking about law 6? But, but here he is, is defending himself. And not only is he defending himself, which might be acceptable in some cases, he's, he's also attacking people. Look at that, the section where he says they, they boast about outward appearances, but not the heart, or not the heart.

And the implication is they've got nothing in the heart to boast about. That's pretty harsh. And didn't, didn't Jesus say, love your enemies?

And, and, and, and turn the other cheek. So, so you might ask, reading this part, again, if you've read 1 Corinthians, and you've read what Jesus says about this, where is the cheek turning, Paul? Why aren't you, why aren't you turning your cheek? Well, to answer that question kind of a roundabout way, let me ask you again, another question. What, what, what do you think's happening on Sunday when Ife is preaching?

And you might say, well, he's, Ife's telling us about the Bible. And that's, that's true. But that's not all. Paul writes to Timothy, I know you've heard this verse, so just bear with me, it's from chapter 2, or the second letter to Timothy, chapter 3.

[14:20] See, all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God or woman may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Like I said, I know you've heard that before. It's very familiar. And what Paul is saying there is that the instrument that God, God uses to, to make newborn baby Christians, mature Christians, is, is the word, is the scriptures.

Now, I know that no one here might, would say this at this point, but I imagine that someone else might say this. They might say, okay, I believe that about the Bible.

That's true. It's just sermons I don't like. Right? But, but, but if that's you, and again, I don't think it's anyone here.

I can't imagine anyone here having that thought in their heads. But if you do, right after Paul writes that, he goes directly to this. I charge you. He's speaking here to Timothy, who's a pastor.

[15 : 26] I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who's to judge the living and the dead, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.

So, so, so Paul moves directly from what the word is and what the word does to commanding, charging Timothy to preach it.

And he does that because preaching is the vehicle Jesus uses to apply his breathed out word to your soul.

That's what happens. When he preaches, assuming he's not preaching anything heretical, when he preaches, Jesus administers medicine to your soul.

You don't always feel like medicines, just regular medicine that we take, it doesn't always feel good going down, does it? Sometimes it tastes bitter and you don't like it at all. But I think the same thing is true sometimes for spiritual medicine too.

[16 : 28] But when he preaches faithfully, Jesus administers medicine to your soul. Jesus gives you himself in the sermon for your food and drink.

It's sacramental. It's not a sacrament, but it is kind of a sacramental moment. But it's a little bit like what he does with communion, where he also gives himself to you. But then what happens if people were to come around Holy Trinity?

And again, I'm not saying I don't know anything about anything that's going on at Holy Trinity, so please don't think I'm, I'm not, I'm not meddling or doing anything of that sort. But, but let's say that someone comes around, some people come around Holy Trinity and start talking.

Yeah, I feel, well, he's always talking about sin. And, and the cross. And, and, and all that.

And it's, it's a Bible this, and it's the Bible that, and the Bible that, and the Bible this. I wish he'd just be more personal. I, I, I wish, I wonder if he really, really cares about you.

[17 : 34] I wonder if he loves you. I just don't feel the love. Now, if that kind of talk spreads around a congregation, and people believe that kind of talk, what happens?

All the good that Jesus promises to do for you through preaching, all that goes out the window. You don't listen to somebody you can't trust, or you won't trust.

That's, that's what happened, what's happening to Paul in Corinth. But worse, it's worse because Paul isn't just a lowly priest like ourselves. He's a, he's an apostle, right? So, so throwing Paul over is throwing Jesus and his word over.

Paul cannot let that stand. No pastor, no pastor who loves his people can let something like that stand. Because in this case, and in any other case like it, Paul's attackers, they're, they're not just attacking Paul.

They're stealing food from the children of God. So, so Paul defends himself, and he attacks his attackers. Here's Paul's defense.

[18 : 55] We've seen, we've already seen his attack. His defense is, is something like this. Well, look, knowing that judgment is coming, I persuade others. He's talking there about preaching Christ and him crucified.

That's what I'm about, he's saying. God knows it. You know it. In your conscience, he says, you know who I am, and you know why I do what I do.

I'm not commending myself. I've given up my whole life to persuade those in the darkness to come into the light. That's, that's Paul's point.

In fact, he, he says later, you in Corinth, or earlier, you in Corinth are my letter of commendation. I persuaded you. I don't mess around trying to impress you with visions or tongues or spiritual experiences.

If I'm beside myself, I'm having some kind of ecstatic moment. If I'm having a vision of some kind, that's between me and God. I'm not going to tell you about it.

[19 : 57] You don't need to be impressed with me. You need Jesus. So, I'm in my right mind when I'm with you. So I can keep Jesus before your eyes and ears and in your heart.

Every good pastor does that. I know EVE does that. You've got an excellent pastor. You do. For the, I trained him myself.

That's how I am. Just kidding. Just kidding. For the, for the love, for the love of Christ compels us. And the us there is Paul and his companions, the people who are there with him when he's writing his letter.

Now, Paul's not saying, you could be confused here. Paul's not saying, there in verse 14, our passionate love for Jesus directs everything that we do.

It's not, he's not referring to his and his friends love for Jesus. It's Jesus's love for Paul and his friends and for the Corinthians, as bad as they are, and for the whole church.

[21:06] It's Jesus's love that drives Paul and the others to do what they do. Because we've concluded this, that one has died for all, therefore all have died.

And he died for all that those who live might no longer live for themselves, but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

That was in, that's verse 14 and 15. Now, you remember the question that we left hanging a minute ago. How can, how can you, how can Paul, how can, how can I or anyone else have confidence before the judgment seat of Christ?

Since everything is going to be revealed. The lies I've told, the people I've hurt, the things that have come out of my mouth and through my keyboard and the things I've, I've, I've, that've gone through my head.

I can't undo any of them. And I can't make up for any of them. So the revealing will reveal that I deserve death and damnation.

[22:17] But, then I hear, one has died for all. Therefore, all have died.

Do you hear that? I've, I've already died. I've already been damned. The wages have already been paid.

There's, there's, there's, there's no penalty left to be meted out. It's, it's all been meted. All of it. Because God and Jesus bound me.

And if you believe in Jesus, this is you too. God and Jesus bound you to himself. And he suffered death. And he's endured his own everlasting wrath on his cross.

So there's no more wrath left. No more penalty left. Here's how, I don't usually like to read long, long, long swaths of texts from someone else.

[23:17] I like to read my own long swaths of texts. But not other people's. But this is from Richard Linsky. He's a Lutheran. And he's talking about this, the past, this, these, the whole section of this, of his epistle. And he writes, no balance will be struck for the believer between the sins he committed and the good works he did, as though the latter offset the former.

All his sins will be utterly wiped out by the blood of Christ, removed as far as the east is from the west, cast into the depths of the sea, blotted out, yea, blotted out as a thick cloud, and not to be found forever.

All the imperfections of his good works, of your good works, will also be removed forever. However, no inquisition will or can be made into any believer's sins.

In their place will be found only Christ's blood and his righteousness. You've already died. You've died with the man on the cross.

I imagine that when he realized this, this reality must have struck Paul, when he first figured it out, like a thunderclap.

[24:37] His conscience, haunted by the sound of the thudding stones pounding into Stephen's flesh, he oversaw Stephen's judicial murder.

But then to see the cross and all of its power. I murdered Stephen, but Paul would think, but the man who murdered Stephen died with Christ.

I'm a new man now. I'm free. Have you ever, maybe some of you have, I have, have you ever worked in a place that has a quota? Like a certain amount of stuff you've got to get done every day. I used to work in a call center, and we had to take 100 calls a day. And they had a little call path you went through. But if you didn't get to your 100 calls in a day, you got a warning.

And if you got three warnings, then you're fired. So everyone's very feverish during the day to get those 100 calls in received.

[25:43] And if the guy next to you says, hey, I've got to go to the bathroom. Can you take some calls from me? You're saying, no, I can't take any calls from you. You just got to hold it because I'm not going to help you. If your life depends on carrying a sack of rocks up a hill, you're not carrying anyone else's sack of rocks.

You're just carrying your own sack of rocks. But what happens? What happens when the man says, come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you rest?

What happens when he takes the sack of rocks off your shoulders? Well, then you're free. You're free. Then you don't have to worry about your bag of rocks.

Then you can take your neighbor's calls for it. Jesus died for me, Paul's saying. And I died with Jesus. So I'm not controlled by self-love and self-interest anymore.

I don't need to save myself. Or justify myself. Or impress you with myself. All that's gone. I'm free of it all.

[27:00] The love of Christ now controls me. So from now on, he says in verse 16 and 17. So from now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.

Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. Paul's saying here. I'm not going to be competing with the teachers that have come through there.

They can have all the flash. They can have all the fame. I don't regard anyone according to my flesh, my fallen self anymore. If I did, I'd be trying to impress you.

But I see you as you are, he's saying. Your sheep. You need your shepherd. Your children.

[28:04] You need your father. That's why, and you read this in 1 Corinthians, that's why when he came to them, Paul says, I resolve to know nothing among you except Christ and him crucified.

But, you know, I think there's an implicit question for the Corinthian church here. But are you, are you Corinthians regarding me in the flesh? Us in the flesh. A friend of mine down south recently became a rector of an Anglican church down there.

And after a few months, a vestry person came to him and said, Look, I think you're an okay preacher. You're fine. I got the insensitive.

He didn't like his preaching. But then he said, you're fine. But you need to lay off the sexuality stuff. Because you mentioned it a couple of Sundays ago when my son was here.

We tried to get him to come to church. He wouldn't come. He finally came that Sunday and you mentioned it. And then he said, I'm not, I'm never going back to that church again. I have a bunch of fundamentalists.

[29:17] Why would I, why would I ever come back there? And so you need to stop. You need to stop preaching about that. That's the flesh talking.

That's regarding someone according to the values and the principles of the fallen nature. The flesh thinks approval is more powerful than the truth.

But Jesus says it's the truth that sets you free. Paul is not the apostle that the Corinthians want.

He's not winning their approval. But he's not saying what they want to hear. But he's an apostle.

And they need him because Jesus sent him to them. Paul, it's not only that I regard other people with the eyes of the flesh.

[30:22] I used to regard Jesus according to the flesh. Maybe you might remember Paul used to think that Jesus was a blasphemer who claimed to be God's son. But he really wasn't. He would have thought that Jesus had been cursed by God publicly because he hung on a cross, which was a tree.

And became, came under God's, God's curse. But all that changed the moment that Jesus met Paul on the road. All that went away. And maybe you, I don't know. Again, I don't know all of you. Maybe you used to think of Jesus as a fine teacher among many fine teachers. Or a revolutionary. Or whatever it might be. But if today, if right now, you know Jesus to be your Lord and your God, who has taken on your flesh, who's removed your sin, who's risen, who's been exalted, and who intercedes for you right now.

Well, if that's you, you are a new creation. The old is gone. One day, this is what that new creation language refers to.

One day, Jesus is coming back, and all of the devastation of death and sickness and poverty that sin has caused will be blotted out.

[31:41] And Jesus will make all things new. You can read about that in Revelation 21. But here's the thing. You're the first. If you believe in Jesus, you trust in him, you are the first movement in that symphony.

He's already beginning to play the music. You're a new creation. And you might say as I'm talking, you're thinking that, well, now I've got, okay, but I still sin.

I sin all the time. I just sin before I came here. I'm probably going to sin tonight. And yeah, me too. I do. But here's a question, a better question.

Do you wish you could be rid of it? Do you go to Jesus and confess it? Do you look for the day when those tired old chains will fall off?

Only new creation longs for that. And if you long for it, you are a new creation. And one day, the new will be shorn clean of the old forever through waiting for.

[33:01] And all this is from God. Paul says it right there in verse 18. Who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Now, people can turn this around.

And they'll say things like, and maybe you've heard them, God has a lot to answer for. All the terrible, horrible things in the world and then all the bad things in my life, all the pains I've had to endure.

God's got some explaining to do if he wants to reconcile with me. That's got it backwards. Because in the beginning, God said to us, all of us through Adam and Eve, trust me and I will give you every good thing there is to have.

And I'll protect you from every bad thing there is out there. But we said in our first parents, nope, I'll take what I want now and I'll decide for myself what's good and what's bad.

And we don't need your help or advice. We're just going to do our own thing. So we took our inheritance and we left our father's house.

[34:13] And we wonder why we're in the pigsty. This is an Internet meme. Maybe you haven't seen it. But humanity is riding a giant bicycle down the road.

And we take a big stick that God said not to take and we shove it into the front spokes and we tumble onto the ground. We scrape ourselves up and we say, why would God do this? It's not God. God's not the problem. It's sin. It's the beast that lives in the depths of each of our hearts. And at the core of that beast, what's driving all the problems in Corinth and all the problems in Binghamton and all the problems here in Syracuse is that the flesh wants to be God.

I want my way. I don't want your way. I don't want God's way. I want my way. Mine. That's a first.

Yeah. So after no, I think mine is the second word that kids, kids, mine.

Mine. So that's why I do what I want and I say what I want and I think what I want and then I blame God for the mess. We're the mess we see in the world.

[35:20] So if there's got to be reconciliation, and there is. If there's going to be reconciliation, God's got to reconcile sinners to himself. That's the way it's got to work.

Not the other way around. That's why Christ died for all because in Christ, verse 19, 20, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are.