THE CHURCH THAT CHANGED A CONTINENT AND THE MAN WHO LED IT

FIRST CORINTHIANS

STUDY NUMBER 2
Wednesday, May 1, 2013

Brief Review: Paul and Silas became the first Christian missionaries to invade Europe, crossing the northern Aegean Sea from Troas (Turkey) to Neapolis (Kavala), Greece. They were led by the Holy Spirit to Philippi, to Berea, Thessalonica and then southward to Athens and finally to Corinth (as far as Greece was concerned). Paul would spend 18 months in Corinth, establishing a strong Pentecostal church. Later, while he was doing the same thing in Turkey at Ephesus, he received word of challenges back in Corinth and addressed those challenges in this letter we know as First Corinthians.

Chapter Two
Paul's Ministerial and Evangelistic Approach in Corinth

1 Cor. 2:1-7 [The Message]

You'll remember, friends, that when I first came to you to let you in on God's master stroke, I didn't try to impress you with polished speeches and the latest philosophy. [2] I deliberately kept it plain and simple: first Jesus and who he is; then Jesus and what he did—Jesus crucified.

[3] I was unsure of how to go about this, and felt totally inadequate—I was scared to death, if you want the truth of it— [4] and so nothing I said could have impressed you or anyone else. But the Message came through anyway. God's Spirit and God's power did it, [5] which made it clear that your life of faith is a response to God's power, not to some fancy mental or emotional footwork by me or anyone else.

[6] We, of course, have plenty of wisdom to pass on to you once you get your feet on firm spiritual ground, but it's not popular wisdom, the fashionable wisdom of high-priced experts that will be out-of-date in a year or so. [7] God's wisdom is something mysterious that goes deep into the interior of his purposes. You don't find it lying around on the surface. It's not the latest message, but more like the oldest—what God determined as the way to bring out his best in us, long before we ever arrived on the scene.

I have been asked on occasions why I sometimes use The Message in my teaching. It is because I am teaching basic Gospel truths to people with a variety of backgrounds spiritually. People well-versed in Scripture and know it well look down on The Message. In my own studies I still use the King James, which I dearly love and cherish.
But, in teaching, I will use videos, pictures, object lessons or any other teaching mechanism I can find to impart the truth of the lesson.

Why was The Message written? The best answer to that question comes from Eugene Peterson himself, who wrote this version from the original Greek: “While I was teaching a class on Galatians, I began to realize that the adults in my class weren’t feeling the vitality and directness that I sensed as I read and studied the New Testament in the original Greek. Writing straight from the original text, I began to attempt to bring into English the rhythms and idioms of the original language. I knew that the early readers of the New Testament were captured and engaged by these writings and I wanted my congregation to be impacted in the same way. I hoped to bring the New Testament to life for two different types of people: those who hadn’t read the Bible because it seemed to distant and irrelevant and those who had read the Bible so much it

PAUL’S ARRIVAL IN CORINTH AND WHAT HE FACED

In 1954 I took a course in I Corinthians based on a text book by Dr. Charles Erdman - a set of books I still have and use regularly. I still enjoy Erdman’s telling of Paul’s arrival in that great Greek city:

“The contrast here is not between Paul’s message at Athens and his preaching at Corinth, but between his own preaching at Corinth and the preaching of other teachers who had been more philosophic in their discussions and who had led the hearers to think so much of the messengers that they declared themselves THEIR followers instead of claiming to be followers of Christ. It was this very peril that Paul avoided by the simplicity of his speech and the plainness of his preaching. He had been with them ‘in weakness’ by which he may have referred to that humiliating bodily infirmity which was so sore a trial to the great apostle; or he may have been recalling the mental distress and spiritual depression as well as the ‘fear’ and ‘much trembling’ which made his first appearing in Corinth an experience of unparalleled distress. He had been alone in the great city, hoping for the arrival of his coworkers, Silas and Timothy; he was depressed by the surrounding mass of dense heathenism, discouraged by the pride and self-sufficiency of the Corinthians, repelled by their impurities and moral corruption, and saddened by the bitter and blasphemous opposition of his own Jewish fellow country-men.”

FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS / ERDMAN / WESTMINSTER PRESS / PAGE 31

Paul reminded the church at Corinth he came to them with the simple Gospel. He said that he himself was not a great orator. And his message was Jesus Christ! Nothing
more, nothing less.

This certainly has been the method by the greatest preachers throughout history. The message is Jesus....even above and beyond key issues of the times.

1 Cor. 2:8-10

The experts of our day haven't a clue about what this eternal plan is. If they had, they wouldn't have killed the Master of the God-designed life on a cross. [9] That's why we have this Scripture text:
"No one's ever seen or heard anything like this,
Never so much as imagined anything quite like it—
What God has arranged for those who love him."
[10] But you've seen and heard it because God by his Spirit has brought it all out into the open before you.
The Spirit, not content to flit around on the surface, dives into the depths of God, and brings out what God planned all along.

You have heard me say many times that Scriptures MUST BE TAKEN IN CONTEXT. In that light, I know of very few scriptures more abused than verse 9. Here it is in the familiar King James:

1 Cor. 2:9

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

How many funerals have you attended where you heard the speaker say, “Well brother so-and-so lived his life of faith not understanding the incredible things that God prepared for him in Heaven....but now he knows.” THAT IS NOT WHAT THIS VERSE IS ABOUT.

Paul was writing that RIGHT NOW there are certain things that cannot be comprehended by mere human understanding. We are not aware of attending angels. We are not fully versed on God’s transcendent mercies toward us. We go through our days blithely unaware of the fantastic opportunities all round us. NOW. WHY ARE WE SO UNAWARE? Paul answers:

1 Cor. 2:10

But you've seen and heard it because God by his Spirit has brought it all out into the open before you. The Spirit, not content to flit around on the surface, dives into the depths of God, and brings out what God planned all along.
In other words, God reveals these new depths and heights as we diligently seek Him and follow His direction. The verse in question (9) is NOT about eternity; it’s about NOW!

Paul writes in verse 10 about “the depths of God”. In chapter 3, which we study next week, Paul upbraided the Corinthians for not growing up in spiritual matters.

As a young boy I spent every Saturday morning at the Morningside Public Library in Sioux City. I would ride my Goodrich Flyer bike the mile or so to the library and read and read and read. In those days - grades 4-6, my favorite books were written by Walter R. Brooks - the Freddy the Pig series. I still have some of them in my library just for the sake of nostalgia. But I don’t read them anymore. Honestly, people, I’VE GROWN OUT OF THE FREDDY THE PIG books. But there are followers of Christ - who have been followers for decades - who still choke on first grade material and realities.

Paul challenges the believers to get into the deep water with God. “But....pastor....can we really learn and know those things?” Yes. How?

1 Cor. 2:11-16

Who ever knows what you're thinking and planning except you yourself? The same with God—except that he not only knows what he's thinking, [12] but he lets us in on it. God offers a full report on the gifts of life and salvation that he is giving us. [13] We don't have to rely on the world's guesses and opinions. We didn't learn this by reading books or going to school; we learned it from God, who taught us person-to-person through Jesus, and we're passing it on to you in the same firsthand, personal way.

[14] The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There's no capacity for them. They seem like so much silliness. Spirit can be known only by spirit—God's Spirit and our spirits in open communion. [15] Spiritually alive, we have access to everything God's Spirit is doing, and can't be judged by unspiritual critics. [16] Isaiah's question, "Is there anyone around who knows God's Spirit, anyone who knows what he is doing?" has been answered: Christ knows, and we have Christ's Spirit.

Is it possible that God wants to reveal His nature and character to you and me? Yes, it is. Jesus told us He would send us a marvelous teacher who would lead us into truths we never considered before:

John 16:7-14
So let me say it again, this truth: It's better for you that I leave. If I don't leave, the Friend* won't come. But if I go, I'll send him to you.

[8] "When he comes, he'll expose the error of the godless world's view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: [9] He'll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; [10] that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; [11] that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted.

[12] "I still have many things to tell you, but you can't handle them now. [13] But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. He won't draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said. [14] He will honor me; he will take from me and deliver it to you.

* FRIEND - the Holy Spirit

I am a through-and-through Pentecostal. I was baptized in the Holy Spirit at the age of 13 with the initial physical evidence of speaking in tongues as the Holy Spirit enabled me to do so. Yes, I believe in that doctrine fully and have experienced it.

But I find many who seek for the baptism in the Spirit so they can claim they have spoken in tongues. That's wonderful and proper; but it's not the REASON for the baptism. The REASON for the baptism is for spiritual POWER and spiritual KNOWLEDGE OF GOD. Who said so? Jesus!

In Acts 1 He told the disciples they would receive POWER.

In John 16 Jesus told them the Holy Spirit would lead them into spiritual, heavenly truth and revelations of God. Why is this necessary? Because (verse 14) we do not learn of God only by reading and study, though that is mandatory, to be sure. But we learn of God as the Holy Spirit day by day leads us, guides us, into new depths of understanding of Himself.

In my own life, I have found that the infilling of the Holy Spirit spaws FAITH, without which it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). In sixty years of ministry (licensed at 17 although I was not in full-time ministry until I was 23) I have preached in literally hundreds of churches. Frankly, in many of those churches I have not seen an abundance of faith. Those faith-lacking congregations and leaders were dictated to by the economy, the culture of the city, and the experience quotient of the pastor. As I read the book of Acts, I do not find those criteria as relevant in the progress of the church. Everything about the activities in the book of Acts smacks of the impossible, of the supernatural, of
the exercise of great faith. Paul explains this situation very succinctly in:

1 Cor. 2:14

The unspiritual self, just as it is by nature, can't receive the gifts of God's Spirit. There's no capacity for them. They seem like so much silliness. Spirit can be known only by spirit—God's Spirit and our spirits in open communion.

It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will make this study of I Corinthians relevant to your life. I do not have the capacity to do that! (1 Cor. 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.)

It was Saturday afternoon, January 5, 1963. A tiny red Buick Century convertible bearing four people plied through a snowy state route 60 into the little fishing village of Vermilion, Ohio. The car was pulling an 8-ft rental trailer which contained everything the family owned. I was driving the car, Darlene sat beside me and in the back seat were a very young Debbie and David. We had never been in Vermilion in our lives. The snow was piled up everywhere. And it was freezing. We had perhaps $500 to our name.

The reason we were there was to start a church in that 10,000 person town, tucked against the shore of frozen Lake Erie. I had never pastored, never sat in a board meeting, and hadn't the foggiest idea of how to start a church. That's when the miracle happened.

The moment we drove into the city limits, the Holy Spirit made it very clear to me exactly what we were to do and how we were to do it. Eighteen months later, we dedicated First Assembly of God with 268 persons in attendance. Everything was a matter of faith, believing God and ACTING on what the Lord told me. God had helped us to purchase five acres of land (near the gorgeous new multi-million dollar high school) and build a lovely brick church building and furnish it - all for $53,500. Our debt was $45,000. The church was the talk of the town. The mayor, Louis Rauh, was a terrific help and even gave the prayer at the dedication. My successor in that church, after we moved on the next year, led the church to even greater victories.

Today, it's a different picture. On any given Sunday morning there might be 50 in attendance. We drove through the property this past February and it looked pretty grim. The church leader told me it was pretty much impossible to do much in that "hard town."

Not true, of course. God is not willing that one person in that community be lost. So there must be a way to reach them.
I have followed that principle everywhere the Lord has allowed me to pastor - four churches in all. The first three the Lord allowed and equipped Darlene and me to start. This church was already going by the time we came on the scene. Everything is "by God's Spirit!"

Paul understood that as he established strong churches all across Asia Minor (Turkey) and Europe. "We have the mind of Christ," he declared. May that be so of every one of us today!

Next week: I Corinthians 3 - the chapter of the Bible that has challenged me more than any other! Don't miss this study.