

January 2014 Housegroup Notes

Notes Pertaining to Sunday 5th January 2014

“Motto Verse 2014”

Main Reading

2 Corinthians 3: 4-18 (key verse – 17: “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”)

Supplementary/Background Reading

Exodus 34: 29-35

Background

Jewish Christians have entered the Corinthian church (which was composed mainly of Gentile Christians), and are persuading their non-Jewish brothers/sisters, that they must embrace the old covenant (the Jewish Law as given to Moses) in order to be acceptable to God. Paul has to counter this false teaching, and explain that Christ has instituted a new covenant, to be lived out not through letters inscribed on stone but through the Spirit of God living in believers’ hearts. This brings freedom from having to obey all the minutiae of the Mosaic Law (a common theme in Paul’s letters – see, for example, Galatians).

Ice-breaker

Have you ever had to obey a rule/law which you thought was overly-restrictive, but which had to be followed nonetheless?

OR

Describe a time when you were freed up from having to do something you really didn’t want to do. How did that ‘release’ make you feel?

Study

1. As Christians, are we confident of our salvation because of our own good works? If not, what is the sole basis of our hope? (See verses 4-5)
2. What does Paul say is the key difference between the old covenant (“of the letter”) and the new covenant (“of the Spirit”)? (See verse 6)

3. In what way do you think the old covenant, as written in the Law of Moses, “brought death” (verse 7)? Why would God institute something “that condemns men” (verse 9)? (Clue – see Galatians 3: 23-25)
4. Despite its limitations, the old covenant/Law was accorded a certain “glory” by God (see verses 7, 9, 10, 11), as symbolized by Moses’ face when he returned from meeting God. What did Moses have to do, to protect the Israelites from the radiance of the old covenant? (See verse 13)
5. The radiance of the old covenant is as nothing, compared to the radiance of the new covenant that Christ has instituted (verses 9-11). As Christians, however, do we have to shield non-Christians from the brilliance of the new covenant? (See verses 12-13 and 15-16)
6. In our motto verse for the year (2 Cor 3: 17), Paul then explains that God’s Spirit brings freedom. Based on the preceding verses, what do you think this is freedom from?
7. Does this mean that, as Christians, we are now free to do whatever we like? That we are now bound by no laws at all? (Clue – see Galatians 6: 7-8)
8. Whose glory must our lives now reflect? What kind of transformation does the Spirit enable, bit by bit each day, in the believer? (See verse 18)

Application

1. Are there any little ‘rules’ or ‘laws’ that you impose on yourself (perhaps instilled into you in childhood?), that you still keep, in an attempt to win God’s favour?
2. Can the keeping of those self-imposed laws justify you (make you righteous and acceptable to God)?
3. If not, what is the only thing by which we are justified? (See Romans 3: 21-24)
4. If there are any such ‘laws’ that you impose on yourself to try to earn God’s approval, try to name **at least one** that you are going to ditch immediately.
5. Is the glory of salvation through faith in Christ, something to be kept to ourselves?
6. Ask God to place on your heart **at least one** person, with whom He wants you to share, in the next fortnight, what Jesus has done in your life.

January 2014 Housegroup Notes

Notes Pertaining to Sunday 12th January 2014

Core Values: “The Spirit Enables...Inspired Worship (More Than a Song)”

Main Reading

John 4: 19-26 (key verse – 23: “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks.”)

Supplementary/Background Reading

Amos 5: 21-24; Matthew 25: 31-46

Background

The word “worship” comes from the Old English words *weorth* (“worth”) and *scipe* (“to ascribe”). Therefore, to worship God is to ascribe worth to who He is and to what He has done, is doing and will do. However, whilst we may vocalise these feelings in prayer and song, those things we **do** in our day-to-day actions which follow the commands and example of God, constitute worship just as much (if not more so). Indeed, our actions reveal what we truly “ascribe worth” to, in our lives.

In this passage, Jesus describes to the Samaritan woman He meets at a well, the true nature of worship. He explains that the Father is looking for worshippers who will worship Him “in spirit and truth”. Precisely what He means by this, we shall now explore.

Ice-breaker

Describe a time when you felt “lost in wonder” before God, such as you had never felt before. What was the worship activity? Why did it make you feel so intimate with God?

OR

Describe an action you once did (**not** a prayer prayed or a song sung), that you felt was a real act of worship from you to God. In what way did this constitute “worship”?

Study

9. Verse 20: the Samaritans and Jews disagreed about the primary place where God was to be encountered (the Samaritans thought it was Mount Gerizim, the Jews maintained

it was the temple in Jerusalem). In verse 21, Jesus explains that God is no longer to be met in restricted places: He is available to be worshipped anywhere. Do you find it difficult to worship God in any place other than church or at home? Or have you ever had a strong encounter with God in a place you were not expecting? If so, who do you think makes that possible?

10. In verse 22, Jesus tells the woman that the Samaritans worship “what [they] do not know”. (The Samaritans only regarded the first five books of the Old Testament as Holy Scripture, not the entire Old Testament as the Jews did. Therefore, their knowledge of God was limited, because they studied only a partial revelation of Him.) What does this tell us about how **we** can better know God today? Does this say anything to us about the Old Testament, as well as the New?
11. In the key verse (23), Jesus says, somewhat cryptically, that “a time is coming, and has now come, when the true worshippers will worship...”. This theme of the “already and not yet” is one that runs throughout the New Testament. What do you think it might mean? (Clue: think of the crushing victory that the allies won in Europe in the days immediately after D-Day [6th June 1944], but which was not fully realised until VE Day [8th May 1945]. As a metaphor for God’s battle with evil, which biblical event is akin to D-Day, and which event will be akin to VE Day?)
12. Again in verse 23, Jesus says that the Father is seeking “true worshippers [who] will worship... in spirit and truth.” With whom does John consistently associate “truth” in his gospel (see, for example, 1:14, 1:17, 8:31-32, 8:40, 8:45, 17:8, 18:37)? Jesus is effectively saying, therefore, that from now on God can only be approached in worship through whom?
13. Likewise worshippers must worship “in spirit”, and in verse 24, John reminds us that “God is spirit”. So John is saying that worshippers must have the same kind of nature and attitude as God. (On Earth we will not achieve this perfectly, of course, for we are fallen human beings, but we need to try to see ourselves and the world as God sees them.) If we do this, what kind of characteristics or attitudes will be developed in us...
a) towards our neighbours, b) towards our sin, and c) towards ourselves?

Application

1. The Amos and Matthew passages above, show that ‘worship’, unless accompanied by a God-like attitude to right-living, is of no interest to God. Name **one** good deed that you could start doing during the week, as a physical act of worship, of which your sung worship would be a reflection. Which do you think is more important to God?
2. The Bible links mission with worship like night follows day (see 1 Chronicles 16:23-24, Psalm 9:1, Matthew 28:17-19). If God is worth singing about, think of **at least one person** that you are going to try to tell about God, in the next fortnight. Be accountable, and let the group know next time, how you got on.

January 2014 Housegroup Notes

Notes Pertaining to Sunday 19th January 2014

Core Values: “The Spirit Enables... Biblical Teaching (Why It Matters, and How to Read Scripture)”

Main Reading

2 Timothy 3: 10-17 (key verses – 16-17: “All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man and woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”)

Supplementary/Background Reading

Joshua 1: 8; 2 Peter 1: 20-21

Background

This is Paul’s final (known) letter. He has been imprisoned (1:8) by the orders of the emperor Nero. He is chained up (1:16, 2:9) and cold (4:13). As persecution has increased, false teachers have appeared, preaching a diluted form of the gospel with no demand for personal morality (3:12-13; 4:3-4). Because of both this persecution and this false teaching, Paul has been steadily abandoned by other helpers (1:15, 4:10), and he is desperate that Timothy, who is like a son to him (1:2), does not go the same way. He therefore reminds his young protégé of his knowledge of Scripture, acquired since childhood, that this Scripture is true, and that his continued study of it will lead to spiritual maturity and godliness.

Ice-breaker

What is your favourite Bible verse, and why?

OR

Describe a moment or an incident that you were able to get through, by recalling something that you had read from the Bible. Why was the verse or passage so useful?

Study

14. In verse 12, Paul reminds Timothy that persecution is to be expected by anyone wishing to live a godly life in Christ, while others will be coned by false teaching which they hear and then pass on. Do you think Christians are persecuted today, and if so,

how? Do you think false teaching is as big a problem in today's Church as it was in the first century? If so, in what way?

15. What is Paul's antidote for false teaching (see verse 15)?
16. In verse 16, Paul says that "ALL Scripture is God-breathed". What Scripture was he specifically then speaking about? (Clue: not the New Testament, because the New Testament did not at that point exist.) Does this necessitate a change of attitude on our part as to the relevance to us of the Old Testament? Does it mean that the New Testament is not Holy Scripture?
17. Paul says that ALL Scripture is "God-breathed" (i.e. inspired by God, but written through the hands of men and women). What are the four key attributes of Scripture, according to Paul in verse 16?
18. In verse 17, what do these attributes, when combined together, ultimately produce? Can you get to that goal, without putting in the hard graft of actually reading Scripture?

Application

3. Reading the Bible (the *whole* of the Bible – even the 'boring' bits, like Leviticus!) is essential, if we are to grow into mature women and men of God. But how we read the Bible is not particularly stipulated in Scripture. All we're really told, is that it should be daily, and we should be careful to obey the teaching within (Joshua 1:8). How do you read your Bible? Do you use Bible notes, like "Word for Today" or "Daily Bread"? If so, what are the advantages of these? Do they have any disadvantages?
4. Instead of notes, do you read a passage of Scripture per day? If so, how much (half a chapter, one chapter, two?). What are the advantages of this system? What are the disadvantages? Do you follow a written programme, or do you make up your own, deciding yourself which book you will read next? What are the pros and cons of this?
5. Do you own any commentaries? If so, what are they? Are they whole-Bible commentaries (such as within the NIV Study Bible, or "How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour")? Or do you have any individual, book-by-book commentaries? If so, in what ways, if any, have these been helpful or unhelpful? (Hint: some commentaries are too big and detailed for the day-to-day user. A happy medium, in my experience, is the Tyndale Commentary Series or the New International Biblical Commentary Series.)
6. Be honest with your group if your Bible-reading amounts to little or none. (No one will look down on you – housegroups should be a place of acceptance and support.) That said, try to commit to some form of daily Bible reading and more detailed (weekly?) Bible study. Share your plans with your group, and let them know how you get on next time. Pray for each other, for a fresh commitment to daily reading of your Bibles.

January 2014 Housegroup Notes

Notes Pertaining to Sunday 26th January 2014

Core Values: "The Spirit Enables... Passionate Prayer"

Main Reading

Philippians 4: 4-9 (key verses – 6-7: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.")

Supplementary/Background Reading

Matthew 7:7; Mark 1:35; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Timothy 2:8;

James 5:13-16; 1 Peter 4:7

Background

Paul wrote his letter to the Church in Philippi, probably whilst under house arrest in Rome, and most likely around 61-63 AD. Philippi was a Roman colony and the leading city within the Roman province of Macedonia (Acts 16:12). The purpose of the letter is to a) thank the Philippians for their financial support of his ministry (4:10-19), b) to let them know his current situation (1:12-18), c) to exhort them to continue in the gospel despite growing persecution (1:27-30), d) to encourage unity amongst them (2:1-11; 4:2-3), e) to ask them to accept Timothy and Epaphroditus as leaders (2:19-30), and perhaps most importantly, f) to encourage the Philippians to reject the extreme opposites of Jewish legalism and Gentile "anything goes" libertarianism, because the cross of Christ demands holiness, but as a loving response to the Saviour, not from any idea of self-salvation (3:1-4:1)

Ice-breaker

How easy or natural do you find prayer? Do you tend to pray when you're struggling or need something, or do you pray at other times as well?

Study

1. In 4:6, Paul encourages the Philippians (and thus, us as well) to "not be anxious about anything". This is easier said than done, but remember that Paul was under arrest and did not know whether he would make it out of his situation alive, so Paul does put his money where his mouth is. What does he encourage us to do in such situations?
2. Does this include worries no matter how big or small? Which two words in verse 6 tell us this?
3. Prayers of request are welcomed and desired by God, but Paul reminds us, again in verse 6, that they must be accompanied by another kind of prayer. Which kind? Why is

this important? Is it unreasonable of Paul to expect thanksgiving when people are often living in really difficult situations? Why not?

4. What, in verse 7, does Paul say is the result of such prayer?

Application

1. Prayer is to the Christian, what air is to our lungs, or water is to fish. If we are to survive and grow as women and men of God, we absolutely MUST pray, and if at all possible, every day! If Jesus Himself needed to find time and space to converse with His Father (Mark 1:35), how much more do we?! Do you manage to get a daily “quiet time”? If so, how long does it tend to be, and what kind of structure does it take? Discuss this within the group. (Be open and honest: if you do not have a regular prayer time, no-one in the group should look down on you; we are all there to encourage and support each other.)
2. But prayer need not be (indeed, must not be) a once-a-day activity. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Paul says “pray continually”. Do you think Paul means this literally, that every moment of the day should be spent in prayer? Why not?
3. What we do learn from this verse, however, is that prayer can be done anytime and anywhere: in the shower, on the bus, in the village, before (or during!) an important meeting, as we’re falling asleep, etc. We need to live in a constant readiness to pray. Have you ever prayed in a place, or at a time, or with somebody, that felt a bit unusual? Did it make you feel embarrassed? Or afterwards, emboldened? Or perhaps both?
4. In James 5:13-16, James mentions different types of prayer. This can provide us with a useful pattern: ACTS. “A” is for “adoration”, praising God for all He is and has done. “C” is for “confession”, acknowledging before God our sin. “T” is for thanksgiving, thanking God for His forgiveness and provision. “S” is for “supplication”, bringing to God our own needs and the needs of others. Can I recommend that you also add a couple of minutes of silence, in which you ask God to speak into your heart (prayer should be a dialogue, not a monologue). If you are not yet in the habit of daily prayer, why not try this model? START SMALL!!! (Try 10 minutes at first, then build up gradually over the course of this year. DON’T try half an hour from the outset – you won’t keep it going.)
5. Pray for each other as a group, that each member will commit, or re-commit, to a) a stand-alone daily prayer time, however short, which can be built up over the course of this year, and b) the courage and boldness to start praying anywhere, as the Spirit moves us! Let the other members know what you are going to try to do, prayer-wise, and let them know next time how you got on.