

3. Encouragement and righteousness

April 13, 2008

We all would like to be encouraged. It has been that way from the beginning of our childhood. Even babies would like to be encouraged. When a baby does something new, his mom and dad talk to them in baby talk with soothing voices, the baby giggles and repeats what he or she did.

As the children grow up, they expect their parents to watch them and encourage them in school plays, sports and other activities.

When we have our own jobs at workplaces, we still would like to hear encouragements from bosses and others. But encouragement without proper guidance is like adding fuel to fire. We cannot have true guidance other than the one from the Lord Jesus.

Apostle Paul, like a spiritual father to the Christians in Rome, encouraged them and edified them with words and reminded them that the righteousness from God is the only thing that saves us, nothing else.

We are living in the age where we hear so many different voices than the Lord Jesus that distract us from following Him. We need to pay attention to the voice that comes from our Lord Jesus through the Word of God which is the Bible.

A. THANKFULNESS FOR THEIR FAITH

Romans 1:8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Why does Paul thank the Christians in Rome? Have they sent him a gift? Supported his ministry? No, he was thankful for their renowned faith. This tells us something about Paul's priorities: He was grateful that people throughout the Roman empire were taking notice of the Roman believers' vibrant and steadfast faith.

Can your faith in Christ be said in the same way? Can the people around notice your faith and how different you are than before as well as other people who claim to be Christians yet their lives do not reflect?

Apostle Paul was not interested in making the biggest church in the world, rather making Christ known. Our church motto is: "Knowing Jesus and making Him known." I believe that it sums up everything we do and should do as the followers of Him.

B. PRAYING FOR THE FELLOW BELIEVERS

Romans 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the Gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers,

The Roman believers did not know of Paul's prayer support, but the Lord knew about it and honored it.

I know that many of you are praying for our church and graciously include me in your prayers. You have no idea how much I appreciate your prayers, because I need them.

Speaking of praying for others, we need to talk about this. We all are very good at praying for ourselves as well as asking others to pray for us. Nothing wrong with that.

But what about praying for others? As you read a Calvary Chapel Magazine or newspaper, the Lord tugs your heart to pray for that person in the article even though you may not know him or her personally. Do you stop right then and pray for them? I hope so. If you do, it shows that you are not only an intercessor but also you are an obedient servant of God.

When someone comes to you and asks you to pray for them, what do you do? This is what I do and the leadership of our church as well as the majority of Calvary Chapels do. We pray right there and right then if it is at all possible. By doing so, if my bird brain forgets to pray for them later, I still have kept my promise to pray for them. Besides, it is an encouragement for the person to see you praying.

C. FACE TO FACE

Romans 1:10-12 making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you. 11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established-- 12 that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

This is the pastor's heart in Paul the great missionary.

Despite their good testimony, if they wanted to deepen their faith, the Roman Christians needed further instruction in the Gospel. Which is why Paul had been praying for an opportunity to visit them. He wanted to impart "some spiritual gift" to them, that is, to minister to them in such a way that they are strengthened or "established" in their faith. Paul also knew that he would benefit from his time with the Romans because they would encourage one another.

I, too, get an encouragement from you guys often.

When you get encouraged by the Word of God, I get encouraged by you.

When you get ministered by the Holy Spirit, I get ministered by you.

When you become obedient to the Lord, I rejoice and am grateful to the Lord because of your obedience.

When you get saved by the grace of God, I give all the praise and honor to the Lord who snatches out another captive from the hand of Satan and set one free.

D. ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL

Romans 1:13-15 Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. 14 I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. 15 So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you who are in Rome also.

Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon marched with the protection of their armies to enforce their will upon men. Paul was eager to march with Christ alone to the center of this world's greatness entrenched under Satan with the Word of the Cross, which he himself said that the Gospel is offense to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.

Eventually Paul arrived at Rome at the expense of the Roman government – not as a dignitary, but as a prisoner. When our hearts are set on a thing, and we pray for it,

God may grant us the blessing. But, it may be, in a way that we never thought of.
Proverbs 16:9 A man's heart plans his way, But the Lord directs his steps.

Before we move on to next verse, we must ask why the Lord wanted apostle Paul to go to Rome where thousands of gods were worshiped. A Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca once called "Rome – a cesspool of iniquity". It wouldn't be much different than raunch Corinth. The difference was the influence Rome had. During that time, if you want to be somebody, you had to go to Rome. Whatever Rome did, the rest of the known world did. God precisely positioned apostle Paul to establish Christianity in Rome so that it eventually spread out all over the world.

E. NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

Let's think about the resistance and ridicule of the Gospel that existed in Paul's day. The majority of Jews hated the Good News, because it undermined their system of self-achieved righteousness.

To the Romans, Jesus was no more than a Jewish carpenter who was crucified as a criminal in a small sliver of conquered land in Philistine. Why would anyone put their faith in Him? Besides, most of the followers of Christ in Rome were slaves. What could this little Jewish tentmaker Paul possibly teach to the citizen of great Rome?

Let me put this in our term: People say, "Who believe the creation theory? It is so much like fairy tale. God created everything about 10000 years ago? This is the 21st century, folks. The human intelligence increases by second. As long as we believe something sincerely, we all go to heaven wherever that is. You don't need to be so narrow minded that you insist Christianity is the only truth. What is the truth? There is no absolute. You ought to be ashamed to believe in such a bigotry." Does that sound familiar to you?

Are you ashamed of Jesus Christ? Do you hide your faith in Christ because others might call you names or make fun of you? Is that why you appointed yourself as God's secret service agent? Let's see what Jesus says about that:

Mark 8:38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.

If this country becomes a total chaos because liberals get the complete control, and they start to persecute all born-again Christians physically, can they find enough evidence in your life to put you away in prison?

The Gospel of Jesus is more than information. It is a power, and God's power at that. The power to change sinners to saint, from unholy to holy and righteous in the eyes of God.

F. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Here is the definition of Righteousness:

When applied to God, the word refers to His good perfect, and holy nature and His ability to do only what is right. God cannot sin. He cannot condone sin. He cannot

be unjust. And He cannot make any mistake. He always and in every way acts in accord with His perfect moral nature and His Word – the Bible.

When applied to humans, righteousness is what God demands of us in terms of how we live. He requires that we live in perfect obedience to His moral law that we conform to it inwardly as well as outwardly. A fat chance on that.

Since no one is able to do this because of our own sins, someone must earn righteousness for us. That's what Jesus did. He lived a perfectly obedient life under the law. His every thought, motive, action and word was pleasing to the Father in heaven. Then He died on the cross to take the punishment for our unrighteousness.

God does not ask men to behave in order to be saved, but to believe. It is faith in Christ that saves the sinner. Eternal life in Christ is one gift that is suitable for all people, no matter what their need may be.

When we put our trust in Jesus, His righteousness is imputed to us – that is, God counts us as righteous, even though we still sin, because Christ has given His righteousness to us.

Believers grow in righteousness in this life but will never be perfectly righteous until heaven.

V17 caused the great reformer Martin Luther to realize that all his effort to work his way to God had been futile. In order for him to be accepted by God, he had to have the very righteousness of God granted to him in Christ. And so do we.

Justification is a sentence by God making someone to be as if he has never sinned. But righteousness from God on man is a continual treatment by God for the man who received Jesus as his Savior and Lord as if he has never sinned.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) Instead of expecting someone to encourage you, you encourage others. You'll be surprised that you are the one being encouraged in the process.

2) Don't be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. As a matter of fact, you should be proud of being chosen by God to be His child and to have eternal life over all others.

3) Ask someone if there is anything you can pray for them about before you leave the church. They will be encouraged and you will be encouraged.