

January 27, 2008

'The Gift, the Image, the Heart'

A couple of weeks ago I talked to you about God's gift to us of the physical world and the gift of the challenge of the flesh as a training ground for the human spirit.

We talked about the eternal spirit at the core of the human being locked in mortal flesh.

We talked about the challenge for the spirit being of overcoming the flesh.

And then we talked about how when you give your life to God in spirit and in truth He pours out His Holy Spirit in you.

You then realize that your home is with Him and you want to be there.

We expanded that to fill over twenty minutes somehow...

It seems simpler now...more compact...hummmm

When talking about God's creation, man, we talk about God putting in us a spirit which is a likeness of His own and in that sense we are created in His image.

And...we talk about man, the material being, living in the material world.

Here is where it gets interesting because the physical being occasionally has a few problems.

Gluttony, sloth, lust, wrath, greed, envy, pride...for starters

It is surprising, although it shouldn't be by now, how easy it is to slip in any of the aforesaid directions.

...and how hard it is not to.

God knows... he does.

And God doesn't set the bar low... no, no, no. What does He ask us to do?

Leviticus 19:2 "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Luke 6:36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

God not only created us in His image but desires that we be maintained in His image...in spirit and in the flesh at least some.

The Bible often shows us a principle of 'mirroring'

I wanted to say 'reflectology' but that word is already taken.

So I'm using 'mirroring'

It is an interesting sort of justice. Where God essentially says

"Do what you see me doing or I'll do what I see you doing"

Do what you see me doing:

Be Holy because I, the Lord your God, am Holy

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Or I will do as I see you doing:

Luke 6:37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged.

Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

...and then the big one...the different one:

**John 13: 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another.
As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

God doesn't wait for us to move first on this one.

He leads in this dance.

...and He keeps leading...He keeps loving

He never wants to leave us unloved and alone

But some choose to be out of His sight

...not to talk to Him

...not to listen to him

...not to love Him

Because we can choose...we can turn away...we can walk away

What's a father to do?

Genesis 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

It's not good to be alone...well maybe after a house or a boat full of people for a week or more...it's pretty good for a little while...maybe

"I will make a helper suitable for him."

So he made woman.

Now when gluttony, sloth, lust, wrath, greed, envy, pride pop up man has some one to point it out to him before God has to do something about it.

I used to be my own worst critic...until I got married...

The reality is that we have an obligation to correct, in love, each other in a way that we build each other up...

Tricky stuff that...

There is actually a fair amount of value to that idea

...accountability

...being willing to accept the counsel of those charged with loving us...to see when we have a heart problem

...and it's not just our spouses

We are social creatures according to design and our capacity to love is a God gift and often pretty amazing

...but it is a God gift... and people separated from God often can't get a handle on the gift.

Love is a God gift and people separated from God often can't get a handle on the gift

So in dealing with these un-loving people we are often too quick to drop into the worldly justice plan

We judge people to be judgemental, gossiping about someone being a gossip, try to ignore the ignorant, eye for eye, tooth for tooth kinda stuff.

We don't want to love people who don't want to love us

And they don't want to love us because we don't want to love them

It's kind a of a three year olds philosophy of life...

You go first...no you go first...no you first

And because we are in the will of God when we love and outside the His will when we don't ...we become the people separated from God who can't get a handle on the God gift of love.

Our pride says "you love me first then I will love you" but it won't work because pride stands between you and the God gift and even if others love us first it leave us incapable of truly loving them back...instead we end up loving their love for us...they make us feel proud that we are loved...and we slip further and further away

The human heart is weak and flawed...not just David's...but mine and yours too.

We were built with limitations and failures as part of our program...lest we boast...

That's why we need God and why we need each other

My friend Bill say's "Papa had to weak up my strong sos He can strong up my weak"

Limitation plus God equals capacitation

Phil 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me

When you are strong in the flesh it's pretty easy to forget about God

...not to talk to Him

...not to listen to him

...not to love Him

Because we don't feel we need Him we can walk away

And achieve lots of goals but do nothing of real consequence

It's in our weakness and our brokenness that community becomes vital and that family becomes vital

Limitation plus community equals strength

Penny told me a story the other day of her advancing blindness and one of her close friends who was deaf and each having a number of kids would walk out together and call the kids in her friend saying I see them over there and Penny yelling for them and listening for their answer. Two women...one mother

What may be a barrier to some basic everyday stuff can be a blessing...a gateway to some great eternal stuff...an opportunity to share God's love...

If we let pride or sloth make us hide our weakness or infirmities we miss out on the blessings we should be receiving

Penny told another story of a lady at her church who entering the lobby of the church where Penny was seated rather than have to talk to ‘the blind lady’ literally tip-toed past her to get to the bathroom. Unfortunately Penny’s retinitis pigmentosa only has her partially blind so after sneaking past was surprised and mortified at Penny’s “Good morning Harriet!”

When we look away from people rather than look out for people we exhibit sloth...do not be a sloth.

Loving people isn’t easy...but it’s worth it.

2 Corinthians 9:6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.

Paul here is talking about money but not only about money because money is only one way that we can care for people.

When you turn your eyes away from people you look away from the image of our God and you lose sight of who God is

You can choose to do this...to look away

Or you can look until you see the image of our God in the least loveable of the people around you

...and you can start by seeking His heart in your heart

Ask God to put in your heart the heart of Christ

Look for the weakness in your own heart...

Now...there’s something that we can do...find weakness

Let me tell you...the one thing human beings can do well is find weakness

...but then ask God to repair the weakness...something that only He can do...

Let God fill up your heart.

2Cor 9: 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. *13* Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

14 And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. *15* Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!