

Title: The Gift of Faith

Text: 1 Corinthians 12.9

Theme: same as title

Series: 1 Corinthians #57

Prop Stmt. While faith is the foundation and operation of every believer, some are gifted with an intoxicating God-centered confidence that blesses all in the body.

Read Text:

There is a song that is often sung around thanksgiving, which goes like this:

Now thank we all our God
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mother's arms,
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

I have been reading a rather voluminous account of the Reformation, by a first rate historian who goes into incredible detail about this movement which forever has changed the face of Europe. One hundred years after Martin Luther posted his 95 theses on the castle door in Wittenburg, Germany was a land of divided loyalties. Theologically, there was a war between the Lutheran, Reformed and Roman Catholics. Politically there was a major turf war going on between remnants of the Holy Roman Empire. In Germany, this played out in what became known as the 30 years war (1618-1648). By some estimates, 40% of the population was killed during those awful years. In the city of Elenberg, Saxony, there was only one pastor who remained in the city because all of the others left. During that war, this man conducted 4,500 funerals including that of his wife. (3x a week – 30 years) As the war was finally coming to an end, his city had been taken over by the Austrians once and by the Swedish – twice. There was almost nothing left of the city and the people, but that did not stop the Swedish general from setting a heavy tax upon the people. Rinkart and his congregation pleaded for mercy from the general, to no avail. Then this pastor, turned to his people and said, “Come, my children; we can find no mercy with man – let us take refuge in God.” And there in the presence of the general, they knelt and prayed. The general was so shocked by what he witnessed, he changed his mind and lowered the tax to one-twentieth of what it had been. This pastor, who had witnessed so much carnage, so much destruction and grief, was the author of this hymn. This man was defiant, but not as many of us understand it. He had a defiant thanks. He refused to be ruled by bitterness, for he understood that we have no right even to the air that we breathe. His suffering, his sorrow, his pain, gave him no right to anger, no right to expect or demand from God. He had a defiant thanks!

All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,

The Son and Holy Ghost,
Supreme in highest heaven;
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore

We are studying the book of 1 Corinthians because we are learning more and more about what it means to be genuine followers of Jesus Christ, and how we are supposed to do this thing called life – together as believers. On Sunday mornings we worship together in this corporate/group setting. This is so important for us to do this, but life in Christ is more than this. We are called to help each other learn and grow and we have to be involved in each other's lives in order to do that. But, therein is the rub. Because you are not like me, and you are not like others. How on earth can people who are not like each other get along? You have to understand and apply the gospel. The gospel teaches us that we are sinners. We are first rate, class AAA sinners. Martin Rinkhart knew that. He saw the affects of that all around him. To the person without Christ, sin produces pride and becomes the occasion of boasting. The rapist boasts of his power. The drunk boasts of his ability to binge. The addict boasts of his abuse. The thief boasts of his exploits and the list goes on. But, to the follower of Christ, sin is the occasion for humility because we understand that sin is not out there, it is in here, it is in me. Realizing that God is holy, that God is just, that God cannot tolerate sin, and can in a moment evaporate the sinner with perfectly righteous justice is terrifyingly awesome. And then to realize that this same God sent His Son in order to be the recipient of this perfectly righteous justice is devastatingly humbling.

This God who does not need us, has called us, saved us, and placed us into his family, all by His grace, and now He says – you live by this grace. You, who deserve justice – the righteous penalty for your sin is eternal separation from God in hell – have instead been shown mercy and have received grace. You have been given a forgiveness that you could not earn and name that you do not deserve and an inheritance and a standing that you are not worthy of, but God does it because God loves to show off his grace to the most undeserving, unworthy recipients. Now, he calls us to live like it. But the believers in Corinth did not get it. They did not connect the dots. Many of them were acting as if they were something special, they were spiritual giants in a church full of pygmies. Earlier in this book (4.7) Paul asks a very penetrating question, “What do you have that you did not receive?” Think about it! You were born into this world buck naked. You did not have a thing, not even one stitch of clothing. You are born with nothing, and you will leave with nothing, which means that everything in this life is on loan to you. Since everything is a gift, “why do you boast as though” it was yours all along?

I have no right to be a genuine follower of Christ and part of His true church, except by the right and the authority that God has provided through Christ. The gospel is the ground, the foundation of a defiant thanks! If you ever do a word study on grace, and thanksgiving and joy, you will find that these ideas go together like thunder and lightning. They were made for each other. Are you bitter? Angry at your world – God?

Others? Sure, you have probably been sinned against – welcome to the club – what are you going to do about it? I was in a mall the other night (not something I particularly enjoy – mind you) and I remarked to one of my girls that all of the mannequins were so angry. They looked so depressed. Of course, if I had to wear what some of them were wearing I would probably be depressed to. Are you going to hold on to that perceived right of attitude? There is only one thing – you need to jump into the fountain of the grace of God and drink deeply. Now, people, let’s connect the dots. What is the church? It is not a building, it is people who have truly jumped into the fountain of the gospel of Jesus Christ and have accepted His life and death in place of their own and embraced Him as Savior and Lord! The church is people who have been humbled by the grace of God. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The gospel humbles us. But, when you come to faith in Christ, you are given a new standing, a new position, a place at the table, and along with that a responsibility and ability to minister to others in the body of Christ. The ability to minister, the empowerment for service is called a spiritual gift. This is what we are studying in 1 Corinthians 12. These gifts (read grace) are given to undeserving people to minister to other undeserving people to help them become all that the God of the universe has made them and called them to be. To some he has given the gift of wisdom, to others knowledge and in 12.9 we read, “to another faith by the same Spirit.” So again we see that God has graced the church through the manifestation of the Spirit as seen in the *gift of Faith* which along with the other gifts is given to bring spiritual help to all of the members of the local church.

What is the gift of faith that this text is talking about? The gift of faith in 12.9 is not the same as saving faith. Saving faith is a gift from the Spirit which is given to every believer.

1. **Saving Faith is a gift from the Spirit given to every believer.**

This is great stuff and we have some very good words that explain this. One of those words is regeneration.

- a. **Regeneration**

Regeneration means new life. You are born into this world, spiritually dead. You have a soul, but you do not have the life of the Spirit of God in you. You are physically alive but spiritually dead. And if you die in that condition, you have no hope, which is why living in that condition is so pointless, futile, frustrating and illogical. But you don’t see it that way. You think you have the answers, even though your life is an internal and sometimes external mess. But, when the Spirit of God opens the eyes of your heart, when the Spirit of God breathes spiritual life into, gives you a new heart, he is giving you the faith to believe in God. That is why, even the faith to believe in Christ is a gift of grace from God. Spiritually dead people cannot hear the voice of God to answer the call unless the Spirit of God gives them ears to hear. But, when the Spirit of God gives you the faith to believe – you call upon Christ to save and you believe. Regeneration produces justification.

b. Justification

Justification means that you are declared righteous in the eyes of God. When you by faith alone trust in Christ alone (not in your goodness – you have none) (not in your efforts – they are worthless), God transfers your sin from off of your account, places it upon Christ and takes the infinite righteousness of Christ and transfers that to your account and then, Almighty God, ruler of heaven and earth, Eternal Judge of the Universe, lowers the gavel upon the heavenly bench and in the courtroom of glory declares you to be righteous. Because you have a righteousness that did not come from within you. That is justification. You can only be declared righteous through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Justification brings about sanctification.

c. Sanctification

Sanctification has three parts. You are given a new standing. As a follower of Christ, you are set free from the penalty of sin. Never, ever, ever will you have to pay the penalty of your sin. Never will you be condemned and sent to hell. Never! “There is therefore now, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8.1 All of this comes about from saving faith. But, saving faith leads to persevering faith. Just as every believer has saving faith, every genuine believer has persevering faith.

Transition: Saving Faith produces persevering faith.

2. Persevering Faith is the ongoing gift from the Spirit given to every believer to continue with Christ.

a. Sanctification (part 2) – Galatians 3.1-5

Growing as a follower of Christ is driven by faith, just as becoming a follower of Christ is based on faith. We do not grow as believers simply because we obey the rules. We follow the commands of Christ because we believe and love Christ, and we love Christ because our hearts have been changed by the Spirit of God. Our love of Christ is driven by our faith. Our obedience to Christ is driven by our faith. And our faith is a gift to us from God. The evidence of this saving faith and this persevering faith is seen in our actions.

3. Saving Faith and Persevering Faith is seen in good works. – James 1.14-19

You cannot have a biblical view of faith if you limit faith to an academic level. Faith drives our desires and our desires drive our actions. Faith involves the intellect, but it is so much more than an intellectual system. Have you heard the one about the theologian who had a choice between going to heaven or hearing a lecture about it and chose the lecture? Sadly, it is not a joke, it is reality for too many “Christians”. They would rather study about the faith instead of living it. But coming to faith in Christ while it involves knowing certain truths about Christ is more than getting all of the answers right on a quiz. Theology impacts our affections and our affections impact our actions. How are we

saved from our sin? We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone. But what kind of a faith is it? It is a growing, maturing, God-obeying, Christ-loving, Christian-loving, people-caring faith.

Theology – Affections – Actions
Belief Passion Behavior
Faith-driven – Love-driven – Christ-exalting obedience

Now, since, saving faith and persevering faith and faith-driven obedience is given as a gift to every believer, the gift of faith in 1 Cor. 12 must be something that is different, since not all believers have the same gifts. Different believers have different gifts. In fact they do not have the same amount of the different gifts, nor do they have the same amount, of the different gifts at the same times. All believers have to believe, otherwise they would not be believers. And all true believers have to believe the right things about Christ. And all true believers have a faith that is seen in their perseverance and in good works. It is not perfect in anyone of us, but it is evidently there. So, what is the gift of faith? Here is where I am a bit cautious because while the Bible speaks about the gift of faith, it does not come out and define it. Based on what it is not (as we have seen from the Scriptures) it seems to me that the gift of faith is a special surge of God confidence that is not given to every person at the same time, for the same duration.

4. **The gift of faith is a special surge of God confidence.**

a. **It is not given to all, at the same time, for the same duration.**

b. **It is given by the Spirit.**

i. To accomplish an amazing task (mountain-moving faith – Mt. 17.20)

This faith “enables a believer to trust God to bring about certain things for which he or she cannot claim some divine promise recorded in Scripture.” D.A. Carson¹

Or as another said, a “mysterious surge of confidence which sometimes arises within a man in a particular situation of need or challenge and which gives him an otherly certainty and assurance that God is about to act...”²

The difference in this faith (#4) is that the object is not revealed in Scripture. Therefore, all believers (faith-ers) have the first 3 types of faith, because the objects of faith are revealed in the Word, but this 4th type of faith is different in that it's object is not revealed to all, but only to those who have that gift at that time. Therefore, those who think they have that gift, must be humble and honest, like the 3 Hebrew boys. God is able and we believe, but if not – we still win!

¹ Carson, D. A. Showing the Spirit, p. 39

² Dunn, J.D.G. Unity and Diversity in the NT, p. 211

This surge of God-confidence can be a great benefit to other believers. This is the “hey – we can do this” attitude that God uses to encourage others. I think that what some call “vision” is simply a surge of God confidence that He is going to do some unique and wonderful things. I believe that this church is going to be a church of 3,000 to 5,000 happy, growing, learning, authentic people involved with each other and engaging this world at a heart level and that we will be part of planting other churches and that we will be part of helping this community in so many tangible ways, (food, shelter, gospel-driven addiction ministries, etc.) that we will have an expanded internship program, and I think and dream beyond that. Is that the gift of faith? Or is that self-centeredness arrogance? I don’t know. That is why I stake my life on the gospel. If this other stuff comes about, then we will know it was the gift of faith. If not, then it was just desire. But sometimes, the gift of faith does not have to be real big stuff like that.

When I was in high school, I knew a girl whose father was a pastor. This man left his wife and kids for another gal that he did not marry. His wife (let’s call her Jean) had a settled confidence that one day he would come back home. Life was very, very hard. The consequences of his sin were enormous. She could have divorced him, and I believe that she had biblical grounds to do that, if she chose to do that. She did not. Now, she could not point to any promise in the Scripture where God said, “your husband will come back to you.” She just had this confidence that he would. Could she be wrong? Sure. But, this is what she really thought was from God. Years later, many years later, he came home and she took him back. I think Jean had the gift of faith in that situation. Now, that true story of repentance and reconciliation is fine for us, because we are at a distance. But, what if this lady is part of our church, and she is part of a group in your Adult Fellowship, and in that group is another gal, whose husband left her, or a man whose wife left him for another? And let’s say they also have biblical grounds for divorce. This is where it gets sticky. So, let me give a couple of ground rules:

- 1) I cannot hide behind “gifts” as an excuse for disobedience.

I saw a young father one day in the gathering space with his son who was throwing a fit. The dad said to his wife, “here take him, I don’t deal with this very well.”

- 2) Do not judge someone’s spirituality based on their level of giftedness.

Since a faith like this operates differently in certain believers for different situations, it is easily misunderstood and criticized. Jean could catch it from both sides – right? There are those on the outside who are saying – “throw the bum out.” You are crazy to wait on him. Then there are some who may say to others in a similar situation, “Hey, Jean’s husband came home, don’t you think that God could do the same for your spouse?” What is the implication? If you don’t wait like Jean waited, then you are not as spiritual as she – right?

- 3) Faith like this without love is an incredible waste (13.2)