

God's Love in the Word

1. Intro & Context

- 8 years ago our sister-in-law Caroline contracted aggressive breast cancer
- At the time the church really rallied around her and Pete and the girls and showed them great love and care
 - People making meals
 - Others visiting to take care of the girls
 - Another family let them rent a house they owned for little or no cost because Pete had given up work to care for Caroline and the girls
- It was a difficult time
 - For anyone going through cancer ... it's a harrowing time
- How do you care well for someone who's going through an experience like that?
- How do you love a person who's facing such suffering?
- How does a church ... show love in such a time?

2. The word that builds the church of Christ

- This term we're looking at the theme – God's love in action
- Last week, we looked at Romans 12 and God's love in the body
 - How God gives every follower of Jesus gifts that are to be used to love and serve one another
 - Such as - the gift of a house, hospitality, practical care shown to Pete and Caroline
 - That each person is like a member of a body that's required to play its part if the body is to function effectively
- Ephesians 4 picks up on very similar themes
 - Speaking about the building up the church
 - Using gifts
- However the new dimension that we see in this passage is the vital role the word of God plays in loving one another in the body
- The word of God ... the gospel ... the good news of Jesus ... is VITAL if we are going to love one another
- Why?
 - We're going to look at that this morning
- Let's unpack this passage and you'll see what I mean
- Read 11-13
- As with much of Paul's letters, these few verses are dense!

- Not helped by the fact that is way smarter than most of us and thought it was perfectly normal that verses 11-16 should be written as one long sentence!
- Which means it's complicated and not easy to unpack
- So ... going to do a nerdy thing and flow chart the text for you to see the logic of what Paul is saying

- v11
 - He = Jesus gives gifts to the church
 - What are they? They're people
 - Specifically
 - Apostles
 - Prophets
 - Evangelists
 - Pastors and Teachers
 - Apostles and Prophets > are the ones that laid the foundation of the church and established the truth about Jesus > Peter, James, Paul
 - Evangelists > those who travelled around teaching and preaching about Jesus, but without particular responsibilities for a local church > e.g. Apollos or Barnabas
 - Pastors and teachers > similar roles > those who teach and pastor a church
 - Jesus gives these people to church
- Now what do you notice about each of these groups of people Jesus gifts the church?
 - They are all 'word' gifts
 - They are teachers and preachers of the word > good news of Jesus
 - They're counsellors, chaplains, marketers and management consultants
 - They're ministers of the word > given by Jesus to his church

- Why? v12
 - To prepare God's people
- What for?
 - Works of service
 - Better translation = work of ministry
 - Basically, preparing God's people to exercise their gifts to minister to or serve others

- Why?
 - **So that** the body of Christ may be built up

- In other words, to grow, strengthen and edify God's ppl / the church
- What's that look like? v13
 - Until three things happen
 - Church reaches unity in faith and knowledge of Jesus
 - Becomes mature
 - Becomes like Jesus
- See what Paul is saying?
 - Jesus gives the church these preacher, pastor, teachers
 - To equip and encourage the rest of the church to minister to one another
 - So that as the church ministers to / serves each other ...
 - It is built up ... in unity, maturity, & Christ-like-ness
- But wait there's more!
- What will it look like when a church is growing in unity, maturity and in Christ-likeness?
- Looks like two things ... one negative and one positive
- Have a look at the negative v14
 - *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*
- In other words ... he wants them to be mature and Christ-like so they're able to discern the truth about God's word and what it means to live as disciples of Jesus and not get distracted and led astray
- The thing we ought to see is in v15-16
 - *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*
- He wants them to be mature and Christ-like ... is so they can continue to build each other up
- Let's sum this up and bring it together
- Jesus gives the church ministers of the word ... not to do all the ministry
 - But to enable, equip, and mobilise others in the church to utilise their God given gifts
 - So that as they minister together ... they build one another up in unity, maturity and Christ-likeness

Application

- The gospel therefore is the foundation of the church
- It's the profound truth that
 - Christ came to earth and
 - gave himself up on a cross for broken, sinful people like you and I
 - so that we could be forgiven and
 - have a right and eternal relationship with God
- It's the gospel ... that creates a church
 - It's the gospel that brings a bunch of people from different backgrounds, locations, cultures and educations together
- Look at this church
 - Young, old, Aussie, Chinese, Korean, white collar workers, tradies, male female, Dragons & Sharks supporters
 - But what unites us is the shared conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour
- And it's the word of the gospel that motivates the church to serve and minister to one another
 - When believers are gripped by the grace of God shown to us in Jesus ... that's when they will willingly and joyfully serve and minister to one another
 - Only if you get Jesus Christ gave up everything to come to serve you to the point of death on the cross ... are you going to serve and build up others
 - As Tom said last week ... your heart needs to be transformed first before you begin to use your gifts and serve others
- Which is why we want you to be regularly getting into God's word and reminding yourself of the gospel and its implications for your life
- Which is why we want to encourage you to read the Bible with your kids and pointing then to Jesus and discipling them in their faith and understanding of the gospel
- Unity, maturity and Christ-likeness doesn't come through
 - motivational talks
 - amazing music
 - slick programmes

- It comes when disciples of Jesus saturate themselves with the gospel that the HS then uses to transform hearts and minds to be to live for Jesus and build his church

3. The word that builds disciples of Christ

- The makes it clear that the church is not a building ... church is the people of God
- So if disciples of Jesus are to build the church ... that means disciples are to build other disciples
- How do we do that?
 - Works of service (v12); and
 - Speaking the truth in love (v15)
- In other words ...
 - Loving people the gifts God has given us
 - Loving people with the word God has given us
- Word and deed go together
 - You cannot separate the two
- As Paul Tripp says ...
 - In our care of one another we're "to bring more than a heart of compassion, a willingness to listen, and a commitment to help a bear someone's burden". We're "to bring the heart changing truths of scripture to people in the midst of their situations and relationships"
- Why?
- Why is the word of God so vital in the way we love one another?
 - Because we need to care for people's spiritual needs as well as their physical, emotional or psychological needs
 - Loving others means being concerned for the whole person
- **Illustration - Caroline**
- While the practical care was greatly appreciated by Peter and Caroline during her illness, ultimately it was the spiritual care they received that sustained them, gave them hope and guarded them against self-pity and despair
 - Listen to what they wrote to family and friends not long before Caroline died
 - *This has been an incredibly difficult time but God has been teaching us lots, particularly where our hope lies. If it's in this world then we despair, if in the promised world to come then we are secure and have peace. [...] If our hope truly is in the world to come and in this*

hope we have peace, then [we] want to spend our [remaining] days living for the Kingdom, not just saying we do but in our actions building a Kingdom here.

- *I am grateful for the ways the Lord is slowly working a change in my thoughts and desires to the point that I am starting to see my illness as a blessing at times because it drives me to God's word and the loving arms of my Saviour and away from the desires of this world - my aim has to be to glorify Him as His faithful servant regardless of my longevity, comfort levels or earthly desires.*
- It was the word of God that gave them the comfort and hope they needed to get through such a time
- When it comes to putting God's love into action ... the most loving thing you can do is help others move from wherever they are towards Christ
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 - Because it's an ongoing process until you meet Jesus
 - Whether > pre-Christian, new Christian, long time disciple of Jesus ...
 - Bringing the word of God to bear ... so that you might encourage and equip them to move towards Christ
- This might happen formally ... like in a GG, Youth group, 1:1, family devotion, youth discipleship group
 - Regardless of the setting ... the essential ingredient is the word of God is opened, read and responded to
- Because it's the gospel that is powerful to change lives
- But it can just as easily take place informally
 - Morning tea after church - "I was really struck by that verse in the Bible today"
 - Text message to friend with a verse of scripture to encourage them
 - Chatting while driving somewhere in the car > "What did you take out of the bible talk?"
 - Talking while washing up / tidying the kitchen > ask kids what God has been teaching them lately
 - Around the dinner table > "can I share what I read in my devotion this morning?"
- You build others as disciples of Christ, with and through the word of the gospel

- v14 Paul tells us one of the reasons we need do this is
 - To discern false teaching and the deceitful schemes of men
 - This is not just false doctrines and false teachers
 - It's every kind of teaching that undermines the faith, maturity and Christ-likeness that disciples of Jesus are to attain
 - It's the messages and things the world teaches that undermine a Christians faith and lures them away from Jesus
- Examples
 - There is no absolute truth ... truth is relative
 - As long as you are loving others ... it doesn't matter what you do
 - Unless I have freedom to do what I want, I'm not really fulfilled
 - Life is about getting the most out of it for yourself
 - My rights supersede everyone's else
 - It doesn't matter what I do sexually, as long as its consensual or I don't hurt anyone or as long as I love them
 - You're only accepted if you are ... skinny, good looking, successful, rich, athletic, well liked
- These are all teachings of the world that the disciple of Jesus needs to contend with and wrestle with
- What's the best way to help and love one another in and through that?
 - Constantly reminding ourselves of the gospel
 - Because if we believe these ideals and worldviews and are led astray by them ... what it shows is there's a gospel gap
 - That is ... there's a gap between what we believe or understand about the gospel that we need to be reminded of to bring us back on track and no longer tossed back and forth by the waves of world ideals and teaching
- Because what does the gospel teach us?
 - Life is not about being free to do what I want ... my freedom is found in following the one who gave up his freedom for me
 - At times I will put aside my rights for the sake of others, just as Jesus put aside rights as the Son of God to go to the cross for the sake of sinners like me
 - It does matter what I do sexually ... because my relationship is best expressed when it mirrors the sacrificial love our bridegroom Jesus – showed to his bride the church

- My value is not tied up my looks, wealth, success, or popularity ... my true value is found in Christ who showed how much he valued me by going to the cross for me
- And so we need keep reminding one another of the gospel ... so that as we speak the truth in love ... we're able to stand firm in the midst of false ideals and teaching the world
- v14 also says we need to remind ourselves of the gospel to guard ourselves against the cunning and craftiness of men and their deceitful schemes
- Because every day ... you and I will be presented with choices that look very alluring, very enticing and very tempting ...
 - And without a gospel foundation that builds you up in unity, maturity and Christ-likeness ... those things will look very appealing
- The world will say ... this is way better than Jesus
 - This lifestyle
 - This addiction
 - This moment of pleasure
 - This success ... is better than Jesus
- The reality is ... when we believe that lie ... we forget about Jesus and we get sucked into and chase after these things ...
 - Inevitably we'll make decisions that are ungodly, sinful and lead us away from Jesus, rather than towards Jesus and Christ-likeness
 - Paul Tripp
 - "What controls your heart will exercise control over your words and behaviour"
- It's in those moments you need to speak the truth in love ... so that the truth of the gospel can have its transforming affect on their heart
- Because unless the heart is transformed ... a person's words and behaviour will never change
- And so if you are seeking to minister to a fellow brother or sister in Christ who is
 - Struggling with sin
 - Struggling to walk in God's ways
 - Who's heart is controlled by things that lead them away from Christ ...
- Then part of showing God's love in action ... is speaking the truth in love so they may see that true fulfilment, true joy, true comfort, is found in Jesus and Jesus alone

- Not saying ... that when you see a brother or sister dealing with sin ... that you just roll out every Bible verse that says
 - Don't do that
 - Do this
 - Don't be sexually immoral
 - Do flee immorality
 - In your anger do not sin
 - Be slow to anger
- That's just legalism and is of limited value
 - Because all you're doing is saying ... "try harder"
 - Problem with that is ...
 - all you're doing is pressing the 'will' and it does nothing for the heart
- The only way lasting change is going to happen is when we speak the gospel into that situation that will transform the heart

- What's the gospel antidote for anger
 - God withheld his anger from you ... even though you deserved for him to pour it all out on you... he showed you grace and compassion and gentleness and kindness
- What's the gospel antidote for self-righteousness
 - Knowing before God that no-one is righteous ... only God is righteous ... yet Christ makes you righteous by taking away your unrighteousness at the cross
- What's the antidote for materialism & greed
 - Knowing that Jesus Christ even though he was rich, was willing to become poor as a man and on the cross ... so that we might have eternal riches
- What's the antidote for an unwillingness to forgive ... the gospel

- **Illustration – Forgiveness**
 - Joe > wife had an affair with his best mate Todd > married
 - Sometime later, by the grace of God, his wife and best mate repented and wrote letter of confession to Joe
 - Accepted and forgave them
- How does a man who was betrayed by his wife and best friend forgive like that?
- Because the gospel teaches him that Christ forgave him so much more ... and how could he withhold forgiveness when Jesus has forgiven him
- To forgive like that ... that's moving towards Christ!

- You and I can love one another till the cows come home ... but it will rarely change people on the inside
- Only the gospel will change people on the inside and only then will they grow in maturity and become more like Jesus

4. Conclusion

- When Jesus Christ came into the world ... he loved people as he showed compassion and kindness, and brought healing and comfort
- But his primary purpose was not to help others ... his came primarily to proclaim the KOH and call sinners like you and I to repentance and faith
- He had a word to proclaim ... a message to make known
- And that word was the life giving message of the gospel

- Friends, if you're a disciple of Jesus, you are to love one another
 - Jesus commanded us to do that
 - And like Jesus that will include the way we care for and treat others
- But it also means 'speaking the truth in love'
 - Building the church of Christ and therefore building disciples of Christ as you remind one another of God's love to us in the gospel

- For the gospel is what ...
 - grows people as disciples of Christ
 - strengthens believers to stand firm in Christ
 - provides comfort to those who are suffering
 - transforms the hearts of those in sin

- Next week ... we're going to look at God's love in listening
 - This is critical
 - Because if we're going to love people well ... we need to listen well

PRAY