Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning December 17, 2017

Growing in Grace  
Growing in Community  
Life Lessons on Maturity with the Corinthians  
  
Christmas in Corinth   
How can an immature church help us rejoice in God’s gifts?

1 Corinthians, The Book

Today’s advent theme is “joy,” and if we have read carefully, we can celebrate four gifts that Paul helped the Corinthians to remember, all of which come from God’s grace in Christ Jesus.   
Let’s unwrap them one at a time. . .   
  
❖ We rejoice in God’s gift of Jesus and His sacrifice.  
        The Corinthians’ infighting blinded them to the Paradox of the Cross:  
            The Cross teaches us that true power lies in humility, not force.  
                1 Corinthians 1-4  
  
❖ We rejoice in God’s gift of one-another.  
    The Corinthians’ individualism blinded them to the Paradox of the Church:  
        The Church demonstrates God creating unity through diversity.   
                1 Corinthians 5; 6:1-11; 8-11; 16   
  
❖ We rejoice in God’s gift of the Holy Spirit as well the spiritual gifts.   
    The Corinthians’ pride blinded them to the Paradox of the Spirit.  
        Spiritual gifts do not make us spiritual (but His graces do).   
                1 Corinthians 12-14

❖ We rejoice in the gift of a human body, and our union with the risen Christ.  
    The Corinthians’ view of the body blinded them to the Paradox of the Resurrection:  
        Today’s weak, death-bound body is a gateway to an eternity with God.  
                1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 7; 15

*Growth Principle #23: In the gift of His Son, God makes our joy complete by the presence of His Spirit, who empowers us to love and serve one another as we look forward to His return and our own resurrection.*

1. God’s gift of Jesus means we can rest in His love for us, and truly love others.  
  
We can embrace the fullness of the Good News of Jesus only when we have embraced the bad news of our own sin. Many have a “feel good” view of “The Christmas Story” involving a long journey, a “no vacancy” sign, some shepherds, and a little later, some magi for good measure. But we must see past the sentiment and symbolism to this historic reality and WHY Jesus had to come and die for us. This is what transforms Christmas from materialism to Messiah, and fosters the humility that allows us to set aside self and take up our cross. Are you taking up your cross? 1 John 3:16

2. God’s gift of the Church means I can learn to love others who are not like me.

Our successes are found in our shared strengths, but unity is forged in our individual weaknesses. The body is weakest at the joints, but the joints make a body all that it is, and enable its versatile movement. Jesus came to save His CHURCH, a FLOCK, a BODY, a TEMPLE, a FAMILY, not a group of random individuals. Are you patient with others? Ephesians 4:15, 16  
  
3. God’s gift of His Spirit means I can walk with Him and overcome sin in my life.

The Corinthians valued competence over character. The Spirit empowers both, but Paul helps us see that apart from love, our gifting becomes a source of pride and self-centeredness. The fruit of the Spirit (love, JOY, and peace) should control the gifts of the Spirit, for then, the gifts have an environment for the greatest growth and effectiveness. How is your walk with Jesus? Romans 12:6-13

4. God’s gift of a body means what we do with our body matters, now and for eternity.

Many of the Corinthians thought that what they did with their bodies didn’t matter, since they now were “spiritual” beings. Paul explains that our bodies are affected by our behavior, and destined to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus’ glorified body. So what we do physically reflects who we are spiritually, or at least should. Are you careful with your body? Philippians 3:20, 21