

2007-09-23 Discipleship - 2 Corinthians ch4 v15 (Ignite UK)

INTRO

Well, I want to thank Pastor Woodyard for allowing me to speak this evening. I always find it a joy and a privilege to be able to share the inspired word of God with fellow believers, and I am so thankful to be preaching from his pulpit tonight.

If you would, turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 15, and please stand with me in honor of the Word of God.

Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit says, “For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is multiplying to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.” You may be seated. Let’s pray.

Background

In case you do not know, we are currently in the middle of a 3 part series here at Ignite that focuses on our 3 purposes as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Last week, we looked at our primary goal; that primary goal as believers and as a church is to worship God. Last week Chandler Snyder taught us what worship is, how we worship, and why we worship. Next week, Keith Walters will be preaching on evangelism. Before Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father, He left His Church with the command to make disciples of all nations so that He would be worshipped from all tribes, tongues, and peoples that He created. Understanding that more will be the theme for next week. This week, we are going to be looking at discipleship and biblical training within the body. Specifically, we are going to be looking at why we disciple, why we have Fuel Groups, why we practice accountability, and why we preach the gospel every Sunday from this pulpit. Identifying why we disciple is our aim this evening.

Now, before we dig into our passage, let me give you some background information about what is going on here in 2 Corinthians. Back in chapter 3, Paul is explaining to the Corinthians that he, Silvanus, and Timothy were made ministers of a new covenant by God, and thus are credible to lead the Church. Paul says in chapter 3 verses 5 and 6, “**but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**” This new covenant of which he is made a minister by the grace of God is of the Spirit. It is of grace and righteousness founded in Jesus Christ. It is not like the old covenant of the law in which our standing before God, who demands sinlessness for eternal life, is based upon our keeping of the law, a covenant that leads to death, Paul says, since no one can perfectly keep all of God’s commandments. Rather, it is the covenant of life in that our standing before the holy and just God now rests upon the perfect, sinless, righteous merit of Jesus Christ via our faith. Paul says it is this new covenant, this covenant of grace and not of works, from which he ministers.

Paul continues discussion of his ministry in chapter 4 by telling us his aim or purpose as a minister of this new covenant of grace. In short, he tells the Corinthians why he ministers, why he preaches, why he discipled, and why he suffers for the gospel. After studying this chapter, I’ve realized that the reasons we disciple here at Ignite are identical to Paul’s, and Paul’s summary in chapter 4 verse 15 lays out his and our principal motives for discipleship. With that said, let’s go to the text.

POINT 1

The first concept I want us to understand tonight is that we practice discipleship here at Ignite for your joy in Christ. Church, hear me as I say it again. We practice discipleship here at Ignite for your joy in Christ. Look at the text. Paul says, “For all things are for your sakes,”

Paul is telling the Corinthians that his ministry of preaching, his ministry of discipleship, his ministry of evangelism, his ministry of prayer, and everything else he does is for the Church. Listen to these words Paul says in 2 Corinthians 1:6. He says, “But if we are afflicted, **it is for your comfort and salvation**; or if we are comforted, **it is for your comfort.**” He says later in chapter 1 verse 24, “Not that we lord it over your faith, but **we are workers with you for your joy.**” In chapter 2 verse 10, Paul says, “But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, **I did it for your sakes** in the presence of Christ.” Chapter 4:8-12 says, “We, the ministers, are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. **So death works in us, but life in you.**” Over in Philippians 1:23-25, Paul conveys the same idea to the Church at Philippi. He says, “I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary **for your sake**. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all **for your progress and joy in the faith.**”

Church, hear me on this. We do not choose to have Fuel Groups because it is tradition within the Baptist Church. We do not choose to disciple so that spiritually mature people can teach a class and have a means to boast in themselves or show off the knowledge the Lord has graciously given to them. We don’t disciple because we have to. Church, we willingly choose to disciple **for your sakes so that your joy** may be made complete in Christ Jesus. We practice discipleship so that you would learn to love the LORD your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. We have Fuel Groups so that we may help you view Jesus Christ as your treasure of immeasurable worth and as your pearl of price unknown. We want you to know the fullness of the Lord God Almighty and His Son Jesus Christ so that by fully and intimately knowing Them, your joy in the faith would be made full. Please understand tonight that discipleship is for your joy in Jesus Christ.

POINT 2

Secondly, I want us to understand that we practice discipleship at Ignite so that people can be conformed into the image of Christ. We practice discipleship so that people can be conformed into the image of Christ. Look back at 2 Corinthians 4:15. Paul says, “so that the grace which is being multiplied to more and more people.”

The way I want to approach this point is by looking at two questions. Question number 1 is, what is this grace that Paul mentions? Question number 2 is, what does Paul mean when he says this grace is being multiplied?

Let's begin with question number 1, what is this grace that Paul mentions? First of all, understand the definition of grace. Grace is simply unmerited favor from one to another, i.e. God to man. Grace is not earned. It is not deserved. It is freely given from the bestower to the receiver based upon the bestower's kindly disposition. So, what Paul is saying is that God is freely bestowing favor and gifts upon man, not because man has earned this grace but because God desires to grant grace. Now the question is, what exactly is this freely bestowed favor that the LORD is granting?

The answer lies in Chapter 3, where Paul is defending his ministry. Look at Chapter 3 verses 12-18. Paul says, **"Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech"** Knowing that we are ministers of a new covenant under Jesus Christ, a ministry leading to righteousness and not death, a ministry filled in glory, we use boldness in our speech. In our teaching, in our discipling, anytime we open our mouths, we boldly proclaim this new covenant of salvation by faith in Christ alone to you. Paul continues, **"And are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the LORD is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the LORD is, there is liberty."** Now catch what Paul says next. **"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the LORD, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the LORD, the Spirit."** In other words, the grace God is granting is the transformation of souls into the image of Christ. Paul says that we are beholding in a mirror the glory of the LORD so that when we see ourselves we should see a reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We should be seeing a transformation from unrighteousness and sinfulness into the perfect image of Jesus. This transformation in Christ's likeness is God's merciful grace that Paul is talking about in Chapter 4 verse 15.

Now that we understand the grace that Paul is talking about, what does Paul mean when he says that this grace is being multiplied? I'll be honest with you here, after studying the original Greek text I most humbly think that most of our Bibles do a poor job of getting Paul's intent across.

What I want to draw your attention to here is that what is translated from the NASB as, "being multiplied to more and more people" does not correctly give Paul's intent. This verse should correctly be translated, "being multiplied through the many" instead of "to the many." Let me explain what I mean here and show you the difference between the two because I think it is important.

In the first case, "so that the grace which is being multiplied to more and more people", the emphasis is on the multiplication of the grace and on the expansion of grace to many people. The second case, "multiplied through the many", means making more through the more, and it puts an emphasis on how the grace is multiplied to the many. It's not just that grace is multiplied. It's that there is a means by which the grace is multiplied, and that means is God through the many. It is this second case in which the original Greek text points to us as correct.

Paul says, “For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is being multiplied through the many may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”

Understanding this proper translation helps us understand what Paul is teaching. The point is that ministry and discipleship to the many in the Church leads to the multiplication of grace, namely the transformation of souls into the image of Christ, to more people. As the Church grows through discipleship and nurtures a more complete joy in Christ, the result is not only that the members of the Church become conformed themselves into the image of Christ, but it is that we become ministers of the gospel to the nations ourselves, just like Paul. This results in salvation to the lost and sanctification to the saved, both of which are God’s means of conforming His elect more to the image of Christ. Just as God spread grace through Paul as he ministered, so will more of this grace be multiplied within the Church and without as many more people become ministers of the new covenant of grace.

Know then that one of our purposes in discipleship and Fuel Groups is to work with you for your joy in Christ, for your sakes so that you may be transformed into the image of Christ in order that you may be the preachers that share the gospel of Christ to the world so that God may let His grace of conforming people more into the image of Christ multiply through all of us, the many. So, we practice discipleship so that people can be transformed into the image of Christ.

POINT 3

Lastly, I want us to understand that we practice discipleship at Ignite ultimately for the worship of God. We practice discipleship ultimately for the worship of God. Look at the last part of verse 15. Paul says, “May cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”

Here is what we see. As Paul ministers and disciples the church for their sakes, one of the results is that the church body should be edified and built-up to become a minister of the gospel of Jesus, just as Paul is, so that the grace of God which transforms His people more into the image of Christ may multiply. How will it multiply? It will multiply in the lost as God gives faith and salvation to His chosen people through the gospel, and it will multiply within the church as God more fully and intimately reveals Himself to us through His word by teaching us, admonishing us, correcting us, and instructing us. And as God’s free grace is given, whether it is given to the existing church or to His chosen out of the world, Paul says that there is only one response given by those who will receive grace. That response is worship and thanksgiving.

Folks, we have to be people that understand that without Christ, we stand as sinners condemned under the law. We stand guilty, fully deserving the wrath of God and the punishment of Hell. It is only by God’s grace that we are saved. It is only by this very grace of God that will multiply and super abound as verse 15 says, that we are made at peace with the Holy, Just God of the universe. And it is only by this grace that God continues to be involved in the lives of His chosen people to conform them more into the image of Christ day by day.

When we understand this, when we understand who we were outside of God’s grace, the only acceptable response is thanksgiving to the glory of God. The only response is

worship of the One who mercifully forgives us and makes Himself fully known to us. Folks, know that we disciple here at Ignite so that God's grace would mercifully abound to you and to those we minister to so that ultimately thanksgiving and worship to the One, True, LORD God Almighty would abound.

APPLY

Tonight we have looked at 3 reasons why Ignite practices discipleship. It is for your sakes. It is so that people may be transformed into the image of Christ. And, it is ultimately for the glory of God. But if we stop here with just this understanding, I believe we go away half empty. I am a firm believer that Scripture demands change. It demands some change in us whether it be a change of mindset or a change of action. So I want to leave you with one challenge or one point of application.

Tonight, if you are not already involved, I plead with you to get involved with discipleship. Get plugged in to a Fuel Group. Get an accountability partner. Church, my desire outside of being with Christ is to do whatever it takes to see that your joy be made full in Christ. That is my passion. I, along with the rest of the staff, want you to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. We want Christ to be your treasure. We want you to be faithful vessels who share God's message of grace, and we want you to be a people who worship God to the glory of His name. And it is through discipleship that we seek to accomplish this. Now that you know why we have discipleship, will you get involved?

Let's pray.