

3.4.18

O. INTRO:

- Scripture talks about followers of Christ as members
- The words that are translated "member" can mean several things
- A common word means, "limb"...as in arm, or leg...a body member
- Another word means a part of a family...a family member.

When a person becomes a follower of Christ they become a member of the family/body of Christ.

In a general or universal sense...the body of Christ is all Christians in all place and times.

But as individual believers living our lives in specific places and times...we willingly join a local family/body of Christ worshippers

The Body of Christ universal (all believers from all places and times)...cannot function as your family/body local.

Your brother in Christ from another place, like Asia, is not going to bring you a meal when you get sick.

And as fun as it might sound, the apostle Paul, your brother in Christ from another century, is not going to meet you for coffee and help you think through personal and biblical questions.

You need a local body/family to be a member of...your time and your place.

Some churches have informal pathways to becoming a member.

- The pathways are there just not overt

Others have formal pathways...like we do.

Neither is right or wrong, biblical or unbiblical...but the distinction is not in whether churches have members or not...all do...or that some have pathways and some don't, all have them.

For instance in most churches without formal membership pathways if you walked off the street and said "I want to lead a Bible Study or be in leadership"

The church would respond...you will need to be around for awhile, participate in the ministry, demonstrate sound beliefs and behaviors first.

So there is a pathway even if it is not formalized and communicated.

Our pathway is:

1. Become a part of a small group...why?

2. Attend a membership seminar...why?

3. Communicate that you have committed your life to Christ and have been baptized by immersion, and want to join with in us...why?

-Count me in...God has called me here.

If you have questions about formally joining this body...please let me know and I'll do my best to explain.

tell not selling

You can attend the New Member seminar next Sunday without any strings...if you plan to attend...please RSVP.

Prayer**O. INTRO:**

Robert Ingersoll was labeled "The champion blasphemer of America."

He was a lawyer, civil war veteran, and committed atheist.

People paid money to hear him talk.

He had a sign on his office door that read "I don't need salvation."

He loved to say that he deserved to be struck down and if God existed he would kill him in the next 20 seconds...then he would start counting to 20.

Sometimes as he did people would nervously began to move away from him...nobody wanted to be collateral damage if God did decide to strike him dead.

When he got to "18, 19, 20" he would walk away with a smirk on his face...point made, so he thought.

He did, by the way die...in 1899.

Of course he was wrong but if you read some of his backstory you see some of what made him into this kind of man.

But regardless of what he experienced growing up...he had to come to a point, or several points in his life...where he learned to trust himself.

I don't mean using reason and experience to gain confidence in his skills and knowledge...that's a good

thing

He became his own absolute authority...not good

He was a proponent of Thomas Paine, an activist, author who died about 100 years earlier.

Paine had been influential in the French and American Revolution

Pain wrote a book that was popular in the US around 1790 called "The Age of Reason".

In it Paine attacked the Bible, Christianity, and organized religion in general.

Many Americans at that time (just twenty years after the Revolution) were far from God...it was large scale awakening that helped turn people back to Christ.

My point is much of what we experience today is not all that new...Revolutionary war, Civil war, and all times before and since.

Human reason has always stood ready to substitute for faith.

There is a place for reason...it is a gift from God.

It has been used by believers for the good of others and the glory of God.

However, reason as a gift from God has never by any necessity, been at odds with faith...even though some think it has been.

Throughout history, and continuing to today...some of the best thinkers have been Christians.

And there are many brilliant people who do not have faith...Ingersoll was smart, Paine was smart.

So Intelligence is not the key to a life of faith or unfaith...there are smart people on both sides.

Faith is the key to the life of faith.

It comes down to it for everyone to decide who will they trust...who is my authority. (And as I said there are multiple decision points along the way to deciding)

When human will and reason become totally absolute, independent of any standard outside of the person...then that person has decided to have faith in self.

When a person trusts himself or herself...above all else...then what rules them is their own desire...they have nothing...to anchor their lives and choices to.

Strangely, in practice when this happens...everything becomes a sort of game...you see this in culture at large.

Politics, news, war, poverty, truth, criminal justice, business, church, morality...nothing is anchored in a final and ultimate authority so its all just what we make it to be or want it to be.

People in important positions of influence and power can say things that are just not true...do things that are terrible...because all that matters is what they believe should happen...or want to happen.

So words, actions, life itself...becomes like a game...if you ever watch what is happening in the public arena and think..."They are treating life and people as if it is all a game!"

You are right...they are.

But everyone, at some point...will realize its not a game...and we don't make the rules as we go.

Ingersoll...did meet God...but it was not at the end of a "20 second countdown"...it was when God willed that Ingersoll would die.

His countdowns were silly shows of human hubris...he thought he was playing a sort of game...but it was not a game.

God is a joyful being...but he doesn't play these kinds of games...the stakes are too high.

Life with God is joyful...and there is reason to celebrate, laugh, have fun.

But its not a game...we must not play at this...we must live by faith in God.

Today we finish the winter season, next week we begin our Easter season.

Heb. 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Think of this like a relay race where those who have finished their laps have handed off the baton and are watching the next generation run.

They didn't run a race of perfection but it was a settled direction...they trusted God not self.

So now it's our turn to run so let's throw off everything that hinders.

He's not referring to sin in this statement.

Here is talking about things that aren't "wrong" but don't help us run the race...like putting a weight in your pocket.

If you are training you might add weight to build strength...but this is no training run, this is real life.

Get rid of what doesn't help you run.

Paul told the church at Corinth that just because something is "legal" doesn't mean it is helpful.

We should not just ask "could we" but "should we?"

Will it help?

What do I really want to do with my life? And will this help me in that?

Then he says we should get rid of the sin that entangles our feet as we try to run.

So there is the stuff that slows us down and then there is the stuff that can take us down.

If you know what you want to do with your life...what you want it to count for...the things that slow you down and that take you down...are not seen as good things but as enemies of the good.

And this is not a sprint but a long distance run...so its not just about doing well in spurts of devotion but we need to settle in for the long haul.

Perseverance is an important word in the New Testament.

To perseverance implies things are hard, or not exciting, or boring, or taking a lot more effort and time than we originally thought.

You don't talk about persevering through something that is fun, exciting, fulfilling.

What's important about this point is that we swim in a culture that believes what is "good" ought to come naturally, never be boring, and should feel fulfilling at all times.

If its not...move on...something's wrong.

Something is wrong with this marriage, or job, or church...I don't feel passion...it is hard...so it must not be good.

The problem is that chasing the exciting life takes people into dark, empty and unfulfilling places.

It is the good life that takes endurance...lots of plodding.

Look at what Jesus did and what we are to do.

2. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him

endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We are to consider those who have gone before...the great cloud of witnesses...but we are to fix our gaze on Jesus.

The word used for Jesus' "endurance" is the same word used to describe how we are to run our race...endurance and perseverance come from the same word.

We are to run with endurance looking to Jesus and how he endured the cross.

He saw through the cross to the joy set before him.

Then he sat down at the right hand of God...which means...he finished his race.

His work was complete.

I like to watch and read historical biographies...they are of course...about people who have done notable things...notably good or bad.

There isn't a series on PBS entitled "American Nobodies: the Stories of people who lived their lives and then died in obscurity."

But when I read the stories of notable people, even the ones who did good things...I am struck by the fact that...just like the nobodies, they are dead.

And often what they did...has been undone by those who came after them. (This was Solomon's fear, and he was right)

What Jesus has accomplished though is final; it cannot be undone...even when the world itself is undone.

A life lived following him, likewise cannot be wasted...so we must

3. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Consider is a translation of a word used in calculations...like "Do the math in your own life."

Consider him...what was the outcome, what did his life look like, what does it mean?

We are still in the race, we must not quit before the finish line...we have to be sure to not grow weary and lose heart...so we consider him...and remember that...

4. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Jesus shed his blood, others listed in Heb 11 died for their faith.

But for those who are still alive...the challenge is...get perspective...**you can endure...so endure.**

To be honest with our struggles is a good thing...to feel sorry for ourselves and to believe no one struggles like we do...is not helpful.

It is often used as a mental escape clause..."I have reason to give into sin, because my life is just so difficult...my struggles are so unusual."

The gospel says you have power, opportunity...to not give in to your sin...that's the good news.

I read of a Christian leader who entered into immoral relationships because he reasoned "I do much for people and I do so much for God, I work so hard...I should get some special accommodations in life."

I'm not kidding...he became such a self-focused person he believed he deserved to sin.

As if sin is a "reward"...rather than a curse.

But such is the strangeness that can come when we begin to look for reasons why we should be able to sin (or why we just can't help it) rather than why we must not sin and need not sin.

Paul says..."Just keep struggling...keep running...no your struggles are not more difficult than others...so you can, if you will keep, going."

And in regard to those struggles...don't forget what is behind them.

5-6. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

*Discipline could be because of sin...or it could be the discipline of being pushed to grow up.

We tend to think that if we suffer it indicates that God is not there, or not involved, or he doesn't love me.

That has been a common thought through the ages.

So Paul quotes from Proverbs 3:11-12...God is a good parent, and good parents discipline their children.

The imagery that the "discipline of God" evokes today is of a Zeus type being tossing thunderbolts down on the heads of hapless humans who are scurrying around trying to get out of his way.

"Zap...take that!"

That's not it at all...this is a parent who loves a child too much to leave them childish.

It could be the discipline of turning them from sin; it could be the discipline of allowing struggle so they might grow up.

There are parents who loved themselves more than their children...and left their children to their own ways.

These children grew up unprepared to be adults...and often, ironically...did not feel loved by their permissive parents.

So...we must learn to...

7. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?

Again discipline is not just punishment.

The word "disciple" and discipline have the same root.

Learner/learning.

Hardship does not always mean God is mad, but it does always mean God is dad.

There are human parents who try to keep all hardship from their children...but this just doesn't work...it doesn't help them.

Parents give out appropriate levels of discipline/testings/stress/discomfort...so the child can grow to the next level.

God is not a foolish or wicked parent...if you are disciplined it means he is your dad.

8. If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

To make his point he gives a hypothetical situation in their case.

If God did not discipline you...God would not be acting as your father...you would not be his son/daughter.

On the surface this is counter intuitive...

"No, if God were truly my father he would give me what I want. He would keep all pain and trouble from me."

Why do you think that is true?

"Because he could keep all trouble from me and if he could then he should."

God does not exist to solve our problems; we exist to bring him glory...and his glory is our greatest good.

But think again of a parent of even average skill and discernment...will they keep **all** trouble from their children?

No...Then why is there the expectation that God would?

That is his next point.

9. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

Think about it? Does your expectation of how God should act match up to reality?

10. Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.

Now the comparison becomes distinction...human fathers vs. God.

Your earthly parents "parented" for a relatively small amount of time...then you left home.

And their parenting was what they "thought best"...meaning, it was not always the actual best.

Even if they did the best they knew how...all human parents have limited "know how."

God parents as a father who knows exactly what is needed in the larger scheme of things...he always knows best.

As a dad...I had to apologize a lot to my kids...often.

I still get sad when I remember certain things I did or didn't do.

When Corrie was in High School I was helping her prepare for a trip changing her windshield wipers.

The wiper blade was off and she allowed the wiper arm to strike the window cracking it.

I was not gracious about it at all, she already felt bad and I didn't help.

Last week, 15 years later, I was cleaning ice off my windshield wipers...and I became sad remembering that day...I wish I had done better.

Just messing with windshield wipers can remind me of my imperfection as a dad.

Don't worry...I don't need counseling for it...I felt bad for a few minutes...and I am grateful I didn't ruin Corrie.

My point is our parenting will always fall short...we will need to confess those shortcomings and ask for forgiveness.

God will never have to ask you to forgive him for what has happened in your life.

Think carefully about that...some would disagree...but they would be wrong.

Job felt that God had cheated him, ripped him off royally.

In fact Job had done everything "right" and everything in his life had gone wrong.

He demanded that God fess up...Job felt that God needed to tell him he was sorry and make things right.

God's only answer was to ask Job where he was when God was making the world.

This infuriates some people...how dare God condescend to me...who does he think he is anyway?

Doesn't he know how much Job suffered? Or how much I have suffered?

That was not Job's thinking...Job apologized for accusing God of wrongdoing.

God knows who he is...sometimes we forget.

God's purpose in discipline is that we would share in holiness...that we would become like him.

Holiness means he is set apart from sin...free from impurity...he does no wrong...it's not in his heart or actions.

Holiness, when pursued in relationship to the Christ...compounds our joy and satisfaction.

To share his holiness is to share in his joyful life.

But to experience the value of discipline leading to holiness we need faith...because

12. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

The outcome is good...the process doesn't seem so good.

But I am encouraged by this verse.

I don't enjoy discipline...it always seems unpleasant and painful when I am in it.

So I'm glad to hear that I'm not alone in this...the writer of Hebrews thought discipline to be painful as well.

But whether we ever love the pain of discipline or not...and I can't imagine that we would...we can learn to love the results.

Paul again uses an athletic term... we can love to be "trained by it."

So trusting God through difficulty requires faith...because the painful process leads to good results...but this it takes faith eyes to see this **while** you are in the process.

Closing the gap on faith and love is going to involve some discipline...do not be confused or surprised by that fact.

1Pet. 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

CONCLUSION:

Thomas Pain wrote the "Age of Reason" in the 18th century.

Reason for him, and for many today disproves faith.

This of course is a great faith...to believe so strongly in your reason.

God is the most rational, reasonable being in existence...

Reason: "The power of the mind to think, understand, and to form judgment by a process of logic."

God's knowledge is immediate and complete...he knows all things...he made all things.

He knows the end from the beginning...he knows how you are made and for what purpose he has made you.

So the most reasonable thing for a human to do is to have faith in God.

That's why Heb. 11:2 says..."Consider Jesus...so you will not grow weary"

As I said this was a word used in calculations..."Reason it out, think it through..."

Heb. 11:3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Do not be afraid of reason...it is the friend not the enemy of faith.

Reason that is humble, open to the truth of what is...should lead to the facts of the gospel.

The fact is the gospel is true.

This is not arrogant, or irrational...it is the truth and gift of God.

It is not reasonable to have final faith in self...it is reasonable to have final faith in God.

(JIM...story of desperation)