

Order of Worship for Sunday, February 28, 2010

Pre-service song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: AWANA

Call to Worship: Psalm 147:1-11 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“He Has Made Me Glad”

Song # 214

“Thy Word”

Song # 184

“How Firm a Foundation”

Song # 408

“How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds” (new words, old tune)

Song # 123

“Give Thanks”

Song # 170

Offering

Special Music:

Message: “Diversity in Unity, Part 6, Tongues” (Ephesians 4:15)
By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song:

“Heal Our Land”

Song # 800

Parting Word of Grace

VESPERS

5:30 P.M. in the Library

We will be studying Article #9 of the Statement of Faith
What we believe regarding Christ’s Return

“The Prayer Closet”

February 14, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Vance and Carol Johnson, Evangelical Theological college of the Philippines:** that their witness for Christ will draw many to the Savior; that they will exemplify peace in Christ in contrast to fear, turmoil and hatred of radical Islam; that they will not grow weary in well-doing; that their prayer and financial support will remain strong
2. **President Barak Obama:** That the weight of his office and the extent of U.S. power in the world will instill humility of soul; that politics will not push him to bitterness or despair; that he will be increasingly clear on the difference between a Judeo-Christian worldview and that of Islam in terms of human freedom and dignity
3. **Dick Miller and the Music Building:** that the Lord will bring the necessary funds to complete the project; that Mr. Miller will have patience and not grow discouraged; that the Lord will continue to protect the workers; that the Lord will fill the building with new ministries and great music!
4. **Military Personnel of the week: Pvt. Cody Henneker** (Grandson of Dick and Jane Miller):
5. **College Student of the week: Tiffany Wubbolding at Canyonview Christian Equestrian College** (daughter of Danielle):

The message today is “Diversity in Unity, Part 6”. We are still working on the fourth chapter of Ephesians. I have entitled this particular portion – we are going to be looking specifically at 4:15-16 – I have given the title “Tongues”. I know that for most of us as Christians who have some familiarity with the church that the moment you put the word “tongues” up on the screen or mention “tongues” out in the body, everybody is thinking “talking in tongues”. But I am not talking about that. I am talking about something else! Go with me to verse 12 of Ephesians 4 – rather to v. 11 – and notice that Paul says *“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers to equip. . .”* What is the common theme amongst all four of those? They do their job by wagging their tongues, right? There is a disposition, a kind of perception, a continuing thought in the life of the church that the important things that get done are done by the people who talk, like me. I am a talking head! Bring on the camera, I am ready to go! I want us to think about that, to think about that in terms of what Paul actually says. Go with me now, if you would please, and we are going to read right down from verse 14 to verse 16 of Ephesians four and you notice what it has to say: *“...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”* What would happen if my neck ceased to function, if my shoulders froze, if I could not bend at my waist or move my legs? The body needs to work in all of its parts. This is not an assembly of talking heads; it is an assembly of serving servants. That is what we need to be clear on.

We know in a general sense that we have been called by God to a life of faith. That is fundamental, fundamental for all four of the offices [given by Jesus to the church]. It is by faith in the work of Jesus on the cross that we find two essential beginnings. What we find is forgiveness. I appreciate Mark virtually every week when he either begins or concludes the time of singing he reminds us that we are sinners. It is absolutely a certainty that every person in this room has needed forgiveness by the time you got here today. So we are those who stand in continual need of forgiveness. We are also those who have received from God the power to resist and actually overcome sin. That is the beginning. God has called us to forgiveness and overcoming the power of sin. The Spirit encourages us and gives us hope. We have hope because we know that we are being guided through life by a loving Father, a Father whose love was so great that He sent His sinless Son to die for our sins. That is fundamental for the Christian faith. Nobody is a Christian who does not understand that and live by that. This is the reason, by the way, that there is a difference between experiencing the difficulties of life as God’s wrathful punishment on the one hand, and experiencing the difficulties of life as God’s disciplining into spiritual growth that we would reach maturity. The one who does not know forgiveness, trembles at the presence of God and fears that God is going to strike them down. But the one who knows the forgiveness of God and His love through Jesus Christ realizes that the Father’s hand comes in order to correct and to guide and to strengthen and to lead in the proper path. That is the beginning.

The continuation is that we would grow into maturity. We begin with forgiveness and we grow into maturity. We are going to be talking about maturity. The maturity of the believer is the central thrust of Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 4, for the well-being and effective functioning of the church as a whole depends on the maturity of its members. The body in local churches, Paul says, builds itself up in love. You find that right at the end of 4:16. In verses 11 and 12 we read that Jesus gives the church apostles and prophets, evangelists and pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry to build up the body. In the end we find that the body functions together in order to build itself up in love. That is the question we need to be asking ourselves: what are we about? Are we about the business of building up the body of Christ? Answer the question by marking in your own little box, make your own little box: this week I encouraged so and so and so and so and so and so and so, that they would walk faithfully and know the love of God. That would be a great idea. It is a fundamental task that God has given to us.

Paul writes in verses 14-16 once again, “...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” We ought to be thinking to ourselves, when he is talking about maturity, what sort of maturity does he have in mind? We will quickly discern that there are two kinds of maturity, two aspects to this, that we want to be conscious of. One, of course, is emotional maturity. The other is mental or intellectual maturity. Paul refers in the verse to being tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. This describes the emotional swings and enthusiasm, the disappointments and highs and lows. We expect, don't we, we expect children and even younger adolescents to be subject to profound and powerful emotional swings in their lives; a sudden enthusiasm for this and then a reconsideration and disappointment – we have raised five children, as most of you know. It took some getting used to how they rock and roll, right, through their younger years. You were hanging on, never knowing what was going to happen next. You expect that with the young. But you do not expect that with the mature.

It is interesting; I have been following the Olympics a little, just on the Internet. I am always impressed with an Olympiad; how many of you are? When you see what those people do to achieve their level of expertise, the excellence. And yet, what I have noticed is how many of them, this year maybe more than others, once they are off their sport, drop away and manifest horrible immaturity, unable to abide by the standards and expectations of the Olympic Committee; unable to uphold consistently the honor of the nations they are representing; falling into stupid, self-centered, self-glorifying behavior. You say to yourself, what's going on, what gives with these people? What a disappointment. We do not expect people who have come to the level of maturity to be so variable in their behavior; and yet this is what is being delivered to us.

But with Christians too, there is a certain kind of believer who seems to have an insatiable need for seminars and for conferences and for books and for cds and dvds and concerts and retreats; and they go off and they go up, then after a while they go down. They buy a bunch a stuff and they know this is the answer; six months later half the stuff is on the shelf unread and they are off to another conference. What goes on? What is that? What is this swinging to and fro and being caught up by this and then caught by that?

Winds of doctrine describe so accurately what can happen to the young and uninformed believer. An immature faith does not yet know the difference between tested depth and novelty. An immature faith has not yet tested things through the variable seasons of life, through both failure as well as success, through times of uncertainty as well as times of affirmation, times of hesitation as well as times of excited agreement. Am I saying that the only way you can be a mature believer is to be old? One of the most amazing experiences of my life was stunning. I recall the first time I preached. I preached in a Presbyterian church. That was stunning all by itself! But I went in and stood there and I looked out and virtually about eighty percent of the congregation was as old as Harlan! I said to myself, “Self, these people have been Christians longer than you have been alive. What do you think you can say to anybody in this room?” I didn't hesitate to talk, of course. But I have found this verse which was extremely comforting and is also something to pay careful attention to. This is what we are told in Psalm 119:99-100. These are not the ones we normally memorize, but we would be wise to do so: *“I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation,”* says David to the Lord. *“I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.”* In light of the financial seminar we had this last week – very wise, very good, very biblical; if you missed it, too bad – there is another fact about that congregation of Presbyterians. There were about 250-300 people there; it represented the cream of that particular town, a very wealthy city. Nini and I were going to seminary. Well, I was going and she was sending. We tithed, we tithed off of our gross income. Our income was so low that the poverty line was a ceiling we couldn't reach. We gave equal to the highest five percent in that congregation.

There are two things [David] tells us about growing up. We are to meditate on the Word of God. We are to meditate, reflect, think, process, consider, weigh; but that is not all. We are [also] to keep, we are to do. Now how quickly do you grow up? When you are not sure you have enough money to buy all the food you need for the month and you still write the tithing check first. Why does it make you grow up? Because you believe in God. You say, God, I'm trusting your supply.

Maturity comes as and when a person learns to think carefully and thoroughly and reflectively. That is what experience does. If you burn your hand you learn to think carefully about fire. Maturity is proven as and when a person keeps or does what they know they should do. Careful thinking says you don't drink and drive and you wear your seat belt. Maturity says no thanks to drinks and clicks the seat belt. A fool says, can't happen to me! In one sense the Bible is a book full of lessons asking you to think carefully and act rightly.

Well that is one introduction to maturity. Maturity, however, has other aspects. Maturity includes gaining a sober perspective on humanity. Paul refers to deceitful schemes and human cunning and craftiness, and those are things carried out by people. Early in the gospel of John we have a statement about Jesus' own maturity. John 2:23-25 we are given a statement about Jesus' assessment of humanity. *“Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part...”* – now get the picture, there is Jesus – signs, preaching – then the crowd comes running – *“...but Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.”* What did Jesus know? Jesus tells us later on. He tells us, as recorded in Matthew 15:18-19, he tells us what is in the heart of man. Do you know what is in the heart of man? Sure you do. Jesus said, *“But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”* Oh! A number of us have been studying the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon is no less accurate in his statement as to what the natural condition of the human heart is. This is what he says, *“The hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live.”* Ah! A sober perspective on people. Jesus in the seventh chapter of Matthew makes this observation: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you...’ [you're out of here] “...you workers of lawlessness.”* Men are deceivers, and they are often self-deceived. So before we listen to some persuasive speaker and become caught up in the lovely ideas and the promises and all of the beautiful pictures that he spins out we should ask ourselves, is this real? Where does this come from? Where does it lead? Just because someone comes and says, I come in the name of the Lord, I am offering you the promises of God, this is the way to enter into His full and glorious blessings! Still we should say, ‘Is this real? Where does this go and from where does it come? You need to weigh everything that is being said by the Word of God, because the world is filled with deceivers.

A persuasive speaker, a dramatic media event, a powerful singer, celebrities: any of these individuals can work a powerful influence on an untried or an unsettled mind and heart, especially if the speaker is cunning. This potential is greatly increased in a culture that claims to believe in “open-mindedness,” particularly when they confuse open-mindedness with having no convictions. “I'm available; persuade me!” “I want to be swept off my feet; I'm hoping that something is going to grab me, swing me around and just fill me with ecstasy: I don't care what it is; I'm just looking for the experience!” That is our culture.

Maturity never entrusts itself blindly to men. For, men are deceivers, and they are self-deceived. What does it mean that they are self-deceived? It means they believe their own lies. Do we get it? I was talking with someone earlier today, speaking of someone. They were so sincere! So? We confuse the need to be open to people and accepting

them where they are with being open to any and every idea that people have, accepting every idea as equally true. We are told and we hear that it is more important to establish relationships with people than to insist on this or that doctrine or truth. I mean, after all, what we want is to stand together, right? Why would we let something small like truth get in the way? Do we sacrifice truth on the altar of relationships? Let me be very blunt. Y’all, when you go to school and you’re talking with your friends – because it is in adolescence where this is the most bitterly fought battle: “I want to be accepted. I don’t want to stand out. I want to be included. I want to be part of the definition. I don’t want to have anything that pushes me where I am uncomfortable.” The reason it is so bitter with adolescents is that they still try. Many an adult has ceased to try. So we end up living with the truth buried out of sight so it causes no trouble. It is so confusing to try and match up my love for God and His truth and my love for sinners and their lies.

Love never surrenders the truth. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life...”* And then He said this, *“...no one comes to the Father except by [the truth].”* Maturity: standing your ground, not blown off course, not tossed to and fro, not subject to intense rises, deep descending falls, but walking steady. Mature.

Human cunning and deceitful schemes include far more than false doctrine, but certainly false doctrine is included in the range of human cunning and deceitful schemes. Virtually from the birth of the church it was necessary to distinguish between true and false teaching. Sometimes this arose from ignorance and error. People make mistakes. They advocate their erroneous thinking because they just don’t know the truth. But other times it is deceit. We can be certain that in the early days of the church some argued for the need to observe the Law of Moses from the mistaken certainty that that was the way of righteousness; but not all. 2Corinthians 11:13 Paul writes and warns, *“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.”* He concludes that little section by saying, *“Their end will correspond to their deeds.”*

As I have said before, there are probably more deceitful schemes and schemers today in the name of Christ than any time in history. What do they say to us? They say things like this: “I will make you rich. I will make you well. I will solve all manner of your problems.” All you need to do is send them money for this or for that, or read their book or take their seminar or follow their diet and exercise plan or get their tapes and on and on. But what they do not tell you is this: 1) Jesus is the Son of God. 2) He died for your sin and He has already secured your salvation. And here is the hook: 3) He calls you to live a life like His own, a life of sacrificial love for others. You see the teachers tell you, “I will make your life glorious!” Jesus says, “I will lead you in the path that I took.” I hesitate to go into any detail describing the conflicting model or picture of salvation between Christ and the false teachers. By offering a differing gospel they lead you to a different Jesus. 2Corinthians 11:13-15, the fuller statement reads in this manner: *“...such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.”*

Recently, as you know, Nini and I were back east and had the opportunity to attend church with our son Ian and his family. I very much appreciated the observation that was made by the pastor of that particular congregation. He said this, the world celebrates success now; but the word of God points us to endurance to the end. It is the ability to endure that is the evidence of the presence and the blessings of God: the ability to sustain, to remain true, not to be blown off course.

There is more; the objective or aim of salvation is that we will actually come to delight in God and the doing of His will; that we will love Him, not as a duty, because we ought to love, but because nothing is equal to Him in goodness and beauty and all that excites our wonder and thanksgiving. It is a fundamental fact that false teachers wed us to this world. If you are involved in some kind of teaching or activity or focus or whatever, and you are finding yourself drawn more and more intensely to embrace the things of the world, to set your hope on the

accumulation of this or that, or other kinds of things; if you are more and more excited about the increase of your possessions, and if the reality of God is fading from your mind, then you are walking with a false teacher. For you see, the truth weds us to Christ. You have no idea what a knife wound it is to the heart of someone like myself to hear people say, “I have such a hard time reading the Bible, I have such a hard time praying.” What are they actually saying? “I am alienated from my Father; I have no interest in spending time with my God.” O my goodness! Do you know what I say to a couple that comes to me and says, “You know I really haven’t said more than ten words to my wife for the past six months”? “Oh? Well I am sure you are in a longstanding good relationship, no need to worry about it. No need to worry about or attend to any of the details. You can go on for a long time further. I’m sure you’ll be all saved in the end.” Forgive me the mixed metaphor.

This is what it means, ultimately, to say that Jesus is the model of the fully matured man. For Jesus not only knew the Word; we are told that he spent every moment He could going into the wilderness to be alone with His Father.

Paul says in Ephesians 4:15-16, *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...”* The sentence does not stop there, as I pointed out earlier. He continues, *“...from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly...”* Jesus, you notice, does not just give His Word and His Word handlers to the church and say, go take care of things guys. Lots of teaching necessarily goes on in congregational life, but a congregation is not a class. A church is not a school. This is essential for our understanding of the church as the body of Christ. Preachers and teachers are called to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ; but so are choir directors, youth workers, AWANA leaders, church secretaries, deacons, deaconesses, nursery workers, even the White Cross Ladies. The call is the same: grow up! Don’t be children! Function to the fullness of your ability so that you might bless! Don’t be distracted and blown off course. Even widows who can only give a mite are expected to give the mite. Each one is to do his part. Church life and growth is not limited to the work of skillful tongues, good talkers and glib speakers. It requires strong arms, skillful hands, compassionate hearts, perceptive eyes, swiftly moving feet. Let me ask you a very simple, straight-forward honest question; you give me a very simple, straight-forward honest answer: how many of you would rather have me or Dick Miller build the music building? Alright then, I’m going to talk about it. If I built the music building we would still be wondering what was happening over there! Not much would be happening. I would be pondering and figuring and pondering again and hoping someone would come along and help me out: and then Dave Conley would send Dick over.

Someone asked me recently what keeps elders in the church from being like worldly bosses, just telling others what to do. That is a good question. I’m quite sure that there are lots of elders that do exactly that. That after all is the world’s concept of authority and leadership. It is pervasive in the church. But that does not mean it is in agreement with what the Bible teaches, what the Spirit empowers or what Jesus is looking for and building. Diversity in the body does not mean hierarchy, that is, an ascending scale of worth and power. Jesus responded to this confused perception among His disciples with the following (Mtt.20:25-27): *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.”* That is not rhetoric; it is not verbal window dressing. The work of the church is not to sort out people according to their degree of importance, not even in terms of their maturity or their relative likeness to Jesus. Notice that the reason that elders and church leaders in general need to be more mature is because it is maturity that enables you to be a slave servant of others. This does not come naturally. Patience, availability, flexibility, humility, gentleness, not taking offense at what others say or do, steady hopefulness: all I’m doing is picking things out from the Beatitudes, the fruit of the Spirit and what Paul says about love in 1Cor.13.

To be like Jesus is not to be the same as Jesus. But we want to be like Him; we want to be mature.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we want to grow up and be like Jesus, each of us in our several different ways. We want the Spirit of our Lord to be the Spirit that animates us. We want the image of His perfections to be the ideal after which we discipline our lives. We want You to be pleased with us as you see formed in us the character of Your Son, for Father we know that You love Your Son more than any other. And so we would be loved by You as You have loved Him. We pray, Father, in His name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Young people are often encouraged to seek out a role model for their lives. What role models of Christian maturity have you had for your Christian life? What attracted you to that person?
2. Is meditation on the Word and Christian life an important part of your spiritual walk? What do you find is most helpful for meditation?
3. Does your view or impression of “the average person” agree with Jesus’ view as expressed in John 2:23-24 and Matthew 15:18-19?
4. Have you ever been “caught” by the persuasive speech of a deceiver?
5. Have you ever been persuaded to trust some teacher or preacher that they could make you rich, healthy, or otherwise favored by God?
6. Do your private dreams and unspoken prayers incline more to worldly success or to endurance for Jesus’ sake?
7. Who do you see as most important in the church and why? How does your view match Eph.4:16? See also Romans 12:3-5 and 1Cor.12:7 and 14-26.
8. What do you consider to be the most important two or three qualities for an elder?
9. Do you agree with Jesus’ comments of friendship: 1) accepts a friend’s authority; 2) fully informs a friend of purposes and plans; and 3) loves a friend sacrificially? Which criteria seems the most challenging?
10. How would you explain to a non-believer the truth that we are “...holy to the Lord”?