

The fellowship of Christ's sufferings

We are doing a study on the essential attitude for preserving the unity of the body of Christ as we operate in our spiritual gifts. It is the attitude of humility. NOT I.

And we are now examining the what living the NOT I BUT CHRIST life is all about.

Ultimately, it is a matter of putting on the love of Christ. The NOT I BUT CHRIST life leads us onto the NOT I BUT OTHERS life.

Last Sunday, I introduced three fundamental aspects of this NOT I BUT CHRIST life.

/They are (1) the destination of the journey, (2) the gift we receive along the way, and (3) the surpassing power that propels us forward. \

We began with the destination -the goal of this NOT I BUT CHRIST life.

Rom 8:29

*29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to **become conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;*

It should come as no surprise that the goal of this NOT I BUT CHRIST life is..Christ!!

/The goal, the destination is conformity to the image and likeness of Christ.\

We then saw how Paul expresses this succinctly in Philippians 1:21:

Phil 1:21

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST. Paul reached this place in his walk. It's the destination.

/It's a life now of absolute simplicity. \

/Second, God has given us a gracious gift to enable us to attain the goal.\

Phil 1:29-30

29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

/The NOT I BUT CHRIST life includes the gift of suffering for His sake.\

Suffering is a gift when it's suffering for Christ.

Phil 3:3-11

3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, 4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

Whatever things were gain to me before I became a believer in Christ I have counted but loss for the sake of Christ.

/Whoa. What a 180-degree change in attitude!\

Those things that were gain to him - this was everything he thought was great about him and his life before His encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus.

/The things he was most proud of. The human advantages that gave him confidence.\

/He lists them in verses 5-6.\ In a minute I'm going to ask you to make your own list. So I'll help you by making His applicable to our situation now. Here's Paul's list:

5 circumcised the eighth day,

*/your religious credentials *

of the nation of Israel,

/your nation – the United States for most of us

of the tribe of Benjamin,

/your “tribe” - your pedigree: family ties, ethnicity, hometown

a Hebrew of Hebrews;

/your standing among in your community. A great _____. the best in all the ways that are most valued in your culture.

as to the Law, a Pharisee;

/your education and training – a scholar and legal mind,\ knows the important books inside and out

6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;

/Passionate about the “right” things\, to the point of persecuting those who you have decided are the wrong, evil people who displeased God in your view.

as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

/Doing everything you thought was required to please God, to be a good person.\

OK, that was Paul.

Now – what is on your list?

What did you think made you a good person before you believed in Christ?

What things did you do that you thought were pleasing God?

What about you was most impressive?

What resources did you rely on to get ahead and get out of trouble?

What were your passions?

Want to live the NOT IT BUT CHRIST life?

/Make that 180-degree change in your attitude toward those things.\

We come to understand that, you know what? The things I thought were important before I was in Christ aren't really important at all in comparison to Him.

7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Count them as loss, as unimportant, for the sake of Christ.

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,

/Yes, this does involve suffering. But it's worth it!\ We gain the greatest treasure: coming to know Christ. He has all the treasures, all the riches, & surpassing power.

Suffering depletes our own resources./ But suffering also simplifies our lives.\ It strips away excess baggage – the extra weight that made it difficult to run our race.

Suffering takes us from a complex life, to a simple life of devotion to Christ.

9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

/Paul learned that coming to know Christ includes participating in His sufferings.\

And there is something very tender and unique about sharing the sufferings of Jesus Christ. This is the most meaningful suffering of all.

We are participating in His sufferings, not ours.

/He received hostility from sinners, from His own people, from religious leaders. \

If they did it to Him, they'll do it to us. A slave is not greater than his Master.

/He lost friends, family, His dignity, and finally, His life.\

We will participate in these sufferings. /When we do, those will be the most intimate and precious moments of fellowship with Him.\

1 Peter 4:13-14

13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

/We are being conformed to the likeness of Christ. And that includes being conformed to His death. \

This is a profound demonstration of the attitude of not I but Christ.

And not only that: Paul came to realize that the power he needed to live this life did not come from him. It came from Christ. It is the power of Christ's resurrection.

/ So third, the power to live this NOT I BUT CHRIST life does not come from us. It comes from Christ. \

We may start off thinking that the power to live this life comes from us. But by hard experience we learn that it does not. It cannot.

/Our suffering will reveal this: the power can only be of God and not of ourselves.\

2 Cor 1:8-9

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; 9 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

When affliction comes into our life, at some point we find that the burden is beyond our own strength. This is painful - but it leads to something fantastic.

/We learn the lesson that we should not trust in ourselves. We need to trust in God who raises the dead.\

2 Cor 4:7-12

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; 8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 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. 12 So death works in us, but life in you.

Living for Christ leads to living for others. Our afflictions become channels of comfort for others. Death works in us so life can work in others.

NOT I BUT OTHERS is the third essential attitude. We begin that next Sunday.