

Challenges Of The Gospel

Introduction. In 2 Corinthians 6:11-13, Paul appealed to the Corinthians for mutual openness in affection and in speech. His own heart is open wide to them, but both he and they know why they can't reciprocate as fully as they should. Some of them have an uneasy conscience about their continuing pagan associations (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

Likewise, as believers we seek mutual affection and edification, but we realize that sometimes our members aren't what they should be. This can be adequately summed up by saying that they've failed to overcome the challenges presented by the gospel. To help us rise to the challenges, let's identify them and observe what can be done to stand strong in the gospel.

I. Be A Believer In A World Of Unbelief

- A. Someone has to believe in God and His Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 11:6; Matthew 16:17; John 8:21-24; 14:6).
- B. Once they are secure in these beliefs, they have to act in a way that demonstrates their faith (Matthew 7:21-24; John 3:16-18, 36).

II. Be Udenominational In A Denominational World

- A. The denominational world will say that one church is as good as another. But God's plan included an eternal plan in which He would manifest His will to mankind (Ephesians 3:4-11, 21).
- B. This eternal plan declares that there is only one church (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23). It has several characteristics that clearly mark it as different than man's religious ideas:
 1. It's guided solely by the apostles' doctrine and not man-made creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, confessions of faith, etc. (Acts 2:42; Philippians 1:27; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Galatians 1:6-9).
 2. It worships in spirit and truth (John 4:24) and included singing a capella (Ephesians 5:19), giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), observing the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), praying (Acts 2:42), and preaching (Acts 20:7).
 3. It's organized on a local, autonomous level with the church having elders, deacons, evangelists, and members (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1).
 4. It's designated as "church" (Colossians 1:18), "church of Christ" (Romans 16:16), "church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28), "church of the firstborn" (Hebrews 12:23), and "church of God" (1 Corinthians 1:2).
 5. It's entered as a result of people becoming saved after their belief, repentance, confession, and submission to baptism (Acts 2:36-47).

III. Live Securely In An Insecure World

- A. The insecure world is full of false standards including money and possessions (Luke 12:12-21, 33-34; 1 Timothy 6:17-19). The problem with them is that they are ultimately unsatisfactory (Ecclesiastes 5:10-12).

- B. Nothing can replace the insecurity and uncertainty of life (Ecclesiastes 9:11-12; James 4:14) except trusting in God (Psalm 46:1-3), putting God first (Matthew 6:33; 19:21), and serving Him (Philippians 4:6-13).

IV. Live Faithfully In An Unfaithful World

- A. There's unfaithfulness in the church.
 - 1. Christians give up on doctrine (1 Corinthians 15:12).
 - 2. Christians give up on devotion (Romans 7:4).
- B. There's unfaithfulness in marriage.
 - 1. Instead of always looking for greener grass, be content with the blessing of your spouse (Ecclesiastes 9:9).
 - 2. While you should positively work to improve your marriage and be optimistic, you must remember that God will judge if we don't treat our marriage (and spouses) with honor (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:7).
- C. There's unfaithfulness in parenting.
 - 1. A lack of teaching and instruction (Ephesians 6:4).
 - 2. A lack of discipline (Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17).
- D. There's unfaithfulness in business.
 - 1. A lack of honesty and integrity (Proverbs 11:1; 12:22).
 - 2. Respect what's right with everyone (Romans 12:17; cp. Matthew 7:12).

V. Live Godly In An Ungodly World

- A. There's always a challenge of us being in the world versus the world being in us (Colossians 1:9-10; 3:1-10; Titus 2:11-14).
- B. The key, however, lies in you taking control of your mind and deciding to be truly transformed (Matthew 15:17-20; Romans 12:1-2).
- C. This begins with your reverence for God, which isn't found as much today (Ecclesiastes 7:29).
 - 1. Our world can feel like a wilderness. We, too, live in a "crooked and perverse generation," where crooks are elevated and perversion is celebrated (Philippians 2:12-16).
 - 2. But Christians have to find the joy in Christ and let it make them joyful and optimistic. Then we can shine as lights because it's hard to joyfully and consistently proclaim the gospel when all you do is complain about your mission field.
 - 3. Grumbling about this cultural moment usually leaves us wistful for another. But we will never be faithful in the present as long as we are yearning for the past. Yes, we may face obstacles, setbacks, and tough days ahead. But in it all, and under it all, we are also joyful. And this cheerful courage comes not from ignoring darkness or looking only for the bright side, but from believing that the light will overcome the dark (1 John 5:19; cp. 4:4).
- D. Recalibrating ourselves to the proper attitude opens the door for us to serve God with reverence and godly fear (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Hebrews 12:28).

Conclusion. Thomas Carlyle had just spent two years writing a book on the French Revolution. He gave his only copy to a colleague, John Stuart Mill, to read and

critique. Then the unthinkable occurred: Mill's housekeeper used Carlyle's manuscript as kindling to start a fire.

As Mill reported the devastating news, Carlyle's face turned pale. Two years of his life were lost. Thousands of long, lonely hours spent in writing had been wasted. He couldn't imagine writing the book again. He lapsed into a deep depression.

Then one day while walking the city streets, Carlyle noticed a stone wall under construction. He was transfixed. That tall sweeping wall was being raised one brick at a time. He realized that if he wrote one page at a time, one day at a time, he could write his book again. That's exactly what he did.

When faced with seemingly impossible situations, we often see the wall and not the individual bricks, but taken day by day, task by task, the load is more manageable. Jesus prayed for daily bread. He didn't worry about tomorrow, next week, or next year. God's help comes day by day.

We're called to endure for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:58; 16:13; 2 Timothy 2:1-3). Paul exhorted the Corinthians to come out from the influences that threatened them (2 Corinthians 6:17) and perfect holiness by listening to Jesus (2 Corinthians 7:2; cp. Matthew 11:28-30). May God be with you in your quest to live while being challenged by the gospel. If we can help you to be in Christ or be stronger in Christ, this time right now is for you to tell us.

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