

Five Points of Paul’s Last Day with the Ephesian Elders: TEACHING, TRANSPARENCY, TEARS, TEND, TRUST

1. Godly Leaders Do Not Hold Any of the TEACHING Back from God’s People

- a. All of the Gospel is Profitable
 - i. True and genuine love for others means that we will do and tell them what is profitable, what is to their advantage and their good
 - ii. The doctrine of the Cross is humbling and encouraging
 1. It is humbling b/c it teaches us that we are enemies of God – so sinful and wicked that God had to send Jesus to die to redeem us, i.e. “through the blood of His own”
 2. It is encouraging b/c it teaches us that God is so merciful and that He loves us so much that He did send Jesus to die for us to redeem us
 - iii. The doctrine of the cross teaches us to lay down our own lives for the sake of others – profit has a cost
 1. Luke 14:25-33
- b. Teaching ALL of the Gospel will threaten some
 - i. Even though some things which were profitable must have made him *want* to shrink back, to remain silent
 - ii. It is hard to love well – speaking the truth in love is costly to one’s own honor and approval in the eyes of others
 1. You may be despised for speaking what is profitable
 2. You may lose influence, an “ear”, for speaking what is profitable
 3. You may lose friends, for speaking what is profitable for them
- c. The profit is in the speaking of the gospel
 - i. “I did not shrink back...to preach to you”
 - ii. Teaching publically and privately
 1. EBF believes that what profits us is the gospel of the cross and resurrection and authority of Jesus – the doctrine of the cross
 2. Both in public gathers and in private gatherings in homes
 - iii. Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks
 1. Everybody needs the same message – from the religious and the irreligious, the moral and the immoral, the ‘godly’ and the ‘ungodly’
 - a. There is not one way for Jews, or moral people, and another way for Gentiles, or an immoral people
 - b. There is not one way for a knowledgeable people and another way for an ignorant people
 2. The supposedly “good people” do not need grace and the supposedly “bad people” need the Law
 - a. Everyone needs the gospel of God’s merciful grace towards us in Christ Jesus
 - b. The religious and the irreligious both need Jesus and only Jesus, and both are far off from God without Him
 - i. Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Older Brother (Luke 15)
 3. Ephesians 2:11-22 – both have access to the Father through one Spirit
 - a. There is only one way, and this equalizes all men – the Apostle has not shorter distance than the most wicked Barabbas of us all
 - iv. The gospel message is one of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ
 1. What is repentance?
 - a. Realizing that there is a God and you are not Him. Realizing that you are guilty of hating Him and His rule over you. That you deserve His wrath and that He has every right to utterly crush you.
 - b. Realizing that you have sin. It is yours and yours alone, and that you long to be rid of it and turn your back on it every form.

- c. It is to stop entrusting your hope and delights in yourself or in any other created thing, to cease depending on them for life.
 - 2. What is faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?
 - a. Realizing that He is the Son of God who answers for my sin by being utterly crushed in my place, as my advocate and substitute.
 - b. Realizing that He and He alone rids me of my sin and gives me His Spirit to enable to walk the way that I am supposed to live.
 - c. Depending upon Him for my hope and delight, to take me up into His life, and that I will stop at nothing until I know Him as He is and am formed into His image
 - i. The world may mock you for it, call you a fanatic and a fundamentalist, but it makes no difference to you. That is repentant faith
 - 3. Further defined as “the Word of His grace” and “all the resolve of God”
 - a. Thus, grace is the defining description of the gospel – God gives blessing according to His own resolve and His own determination and His own desires and His own delight
 - b. The gospel of the grace of God
 - i. The power of repentance and faith is the good news of God’s grace towards us
 - ii. God’s grace is offensive to the religious, thus the temptation to “shrink back” at “the plots of the Jews”
 - c. All the resolve of God
 - i. “resolve” is better than “counsel” b/c counsel can mean “advice” today
 - ii. The gospel is not good advice about what we must do, it is good news about what He has done and is doing and will do– the announcement of God’s resolve to bring sinners whom He has called all the way into the fellowship of His presence through the sacrifice of His Son, the gift of His Spirit.
- d. What we ALL need the most is the gospel of God’s *grace*, His resolve to redeem and delight in, and sanctify us; the message of humble repentance from pursuing empty impotent things and from denying God’s worthiness of our highest love, adoration, and obedience, and turning to entrusting our entire souls to Him and Him alone through Jesus Christ
 - i. The gospel is the means of our salvation, and it is also the means of our growth
 - ii. “The gospel is not just the A-B-C’s of Christianity, it is the A-to-Z of Christianity.” – Tim Keller
 - iii. It is not merely the first step on the stairway of truth – it is more like the hub in the center of the wheel of truth, holding all things together and from which all things find their center
- e. The implications of the centrality of the gospel are vast:
 - i. The gospel of grace is the preeminent display of God’s power
 - 1. Romans 1:16
 - 2. Angels long to look into it – 1 Pet 1:12
 - 3. Through it we receive all God’s promises – 2 Cor 1:20
 - 4. It is the “light of the glory of God” – 2 Cor 4:4-6
 - 5. It is the means of our growth and transformation – Col 1:6
 - ii. The gospel of grace is sufficient for all our needs
 - 1. Galatians 3:1-3
 - 2. V32 – entrusts them to “God and the word of His grace”

3. Every stage of renewal or revival comes through a re-discovery of the significance of God's kindness in the light of our moral depravity – the gospel and at least one of its implications
 - a. Therefore, we are changed by recognizing both aspects, repentance and faith
 - i. We are able to see the worst about us, and repent of it towards God, because we have the Lord Jesus Christ to answer for us (faith)
 - ii. Without such grace of God, we will never be able to truly look at how broken, sinful, and wicked we can be – we will never be honest enough with ourselves to truly change
 1. “Only with the support of hearing Jesus say, ‘You are capable of terrible things, but I am absolutely, unconditionally committed to you,’ will you be able to be honest with yourself.” – Tim Keller
 - b. For example, the ability to forgive someone who has deeply wounded you comes as you more deeply grasp the significance of how deeply you wounded God and how completely He has forgiven you at the cost of His Holy Son's blood
 - i. “through the blood of His own”
 - ii. Matthew 18 – the forgiven one forgives, the one forgiven much loves much, the person humbled by mercy shows great mercy towards others
- f. The gospel of grace – that God has performed all our righteousness for us, and we receive it by faith alone – will bring opposition from the self-reliant, both religious and irreligious
 - i. They will want us to “shrink back” from proclaiming the holy wrath of God against sin AND the grace of God in Jesus Christ
 - ii. Everyone, even the most irreligious, is trying to earn their salvation by worshipping something.
 1. All persons need a sense of worth or value. Thus everyone has a worshipful faith in something from which they must derive that value. But these things control and disappoint us if we find them, and devastate us if we lose them.
 - iii. Everyone, even the most religious, is rejecting Jesus as Savior. Even our religion and morality are efforts to merit God's favor, to put him in our debt and to maintain control of our lives. We may use Jesus as Example or Helper, but we are our own Savior.
 - iv. So in our natural state, the motives for both serving God and rejecting God are identical.
 1. In both cases we seek to maintain independence from God by denying that we were so sinful that we needed to be saved totally by grace. Instead we seek to earn our own value.
 - v. Why do religious people, whether spiritual or political or ideological, persecute the gospel of grace?
 1. Because the gospel is more threatening to religious people than irreligious people.
 2. Religious people are very touchy and nervous about their standing with God. Their insecurity makes them hostile to the gospel of grace, which insists that their best deeds are useless before God.
 3. One of the ways we know that our self-image is based on justification by Christ is that we are not hateful and hostile to people who differ with us; one of the ways we know that our self-image is based on justification by works is that we persecute and seek to destroy or control others.

“The persecution of the true church... is not always by the world, who are strangers... but by our half-brothers, religious people, the nominal church. It has always been so. The Lord Jesus was bitterly opposed, rejected, mocked, and condemned by His own nation. The fiercest opponents of the apostle Paul were the official [religious leaders]. The greatest enemies of

evangelical faith today are not unbelievers... but the church, the establishment, the hierarchy. Isaac is always mocked and persecuted by Ishmael.”

— John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*

2. Grace Leads to TRANSPARENCY

- a. “You yourselves know how I lived among you”
- b. There is a life lived openly before those around him in such a genuineness that he expected these men to really know him
 - i. This means that they must have seen him at his most vulnerable
 - ii. Too many of us in gospel ministry protect ourselves from being truly known
 1. Why?
 2. Because we aren’t trusting in God’s grace – we are insecure and afraid of what people will think of us if they really knew how weak we were, how selfish we can be, how far away from Christlikeness we are in experience
 3. In other words, we don’t trust that Jesus’ death and resurrection are sufficient for us
 - a. So, we hide the bad parts and present the good parts
 - b. Neither of which exalt Jesus, they exalt us
- c. This is the spiritual fruit of integrity, or truth
 - i. What you are in private is what you are in public because you are not trusting in your own goodness, but in the grace of God
 - ii. Religion and philosophy in general says that God and salvation are only for those who are good.
 - iii. The gospel is also exclusive. It says that God and salvation are only for those who know they are not good and can only be saved by grace.
 1. But the gospel has a far more inclusive exclusivity!
 - a. Anyone can belong to God through the gospel at once, regardless of record and background, regardless of who you have been or what you have done or how weak you are.
 - b. Religion is for the noble, the able, the moral, the strong, but the gospel is for anyone.
 - c. Jesus actually said that the able, moral and strong are in general farther from the kingdom than the moral failures and the spiritually weak (Matt.21:31).
- d. Grace is exemplified under duress
 - i. Grace humbles our character
 1. Served the Lord with all humility and tears
 - a. This word, *humility* (ταπεινοφροσυνη) means “lowly minded” or “unassuming”
 - b. Paul uses it in opposition to “selfish ambition” and “conceit” in Philippians 2 and is further expounded as “regard others as more important than yourselves.”
 - i. Jesus “forgot” or “emptied Himself” of His own rights in order to glorify the Father and save you and me.
 - ii. This emptying ourselves of our rights, of our mastery, of our lives, is what it means to be humble
 1. It is to “forget ourselves for the sake of another” to think of ourselves as “lower”
 2. The world’s vision of confidence is vastly different:
 - a. The natural bent of the human heart places confidence upon our own performance, our adequacy

- i. It is that part of yourself that works for a verdict of acceptable, significant, and special based upon its performance (determined in different ways for different people)
 - b. Thinking of our own glory (reputation and worthiness)
 - i. For example:
 - 1. It says, “I am acceptable *because* I am beautiful and attractive”
 - 2. It says, “I am acceptable *because* I am wise, wealthy, or strong”
 - 3. It says, “I am acceptable *because* I am woke, or constitutional, or I love my country.”
 - c. Gospel humility is the *forgetting* of the self, like a body part that is functioning normally. You don’t notice a body part until it doesn’t work correctly, until there’s something wrong with it.
 - i. Your soul does the same thing: it is always drawing attention to itself, because it has something incredibly wrong with it, about how it looks, how it was treated, how it feels.
 - ii. We are overly sensitive to criticism because it reveals our inadequacies and there’s something wrong with our souls – we are believing that our performances make us somebody – we forgot grace!!
 - 1. When our hearts are working well, really believing in God’s grace, then we forget about our self, like when your body is working well, you don’t think about it. You only think about your body when it isn’t working well, when it’s injured or tired or sick.
 - 2. You don’t go around talking about how great your toes feel, yet you can’t get through the day without feeling ignored, or feeling snubbed, or feeling mistreated, or looking down on yourself.
 - 3. The Ephesians would have seen Paul repent, for repentance is simply another word for low-mindedness – to turn from trusting in myself and entrust myself to God alone for all things
 - a. “Parents who know how to repent in front of their kids give them a greater gift than a Harvard education.” – Scotty Smith
- ii. Grace empowers our work
 - 1. I taught publically and privately
 - a. In the synagogues and Hall of Tyrannus
 - b. In your homes
 - 2. I worked with my own hands to provide for myself and those with me
 - a. I lusted after no gold, silver, or clothing
 - b. Demonstrated to you all the principle of grace working through weakness
 - i. Share in the toilings of the weak
 - ii. For Jesus said “it is more blessed to give than to receive”
 - 3. Truly resting in God’s grace, in God’s giving to us, we are freed from the dominating lusts to obtain security, comfort, and pleasure right now in a sinful manner
 - a. Because Paul trusted God’s provision (grace), he didn’t need to seek wealth from the Ephesians, or even goods and services
 - b. He worked, labored, toiled, suffered to provide what he needed, because he trusted the God who gave His Son for him would not hold back what he truly needed

iii. Grace compels love for one another

1. When our souls are resting, truly resting in God's acceptance and delight in us because of Jesus, then we can pour our lives out for others, even when they oppose us or despise us
2. This empowerment to love our enemies and to serve others, actually giving them power and making ourselves vulnerable, is costly love that leads to tears
3. With a longing so deep for their good that our tears are shed when they suffer and tears are shed when they flourish and tears are shed when we part ways

Conclusion:

How can we be transparent like this, freed from the fear of what others will think of us, of their disapproval, of our own disapproval of ourselves? We are freed by listening to what Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4, "It is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For, I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am acquitted because of this. The one who judges me is the Lord."

He has found the secret of freedom from Law, the freedom of judgement, the freedom from the clamoring need to be approved by men or even approved by his own soul. The Lord has already judged him in Christ Jesus. The verdict is in: righteous by faith! Delighted of God! Beloved of the Lord! Adopted by the King! What more resolve must you have to be full in spirit than the resolve of God to do all that. And all that is exactly what He has done, according to His own resolve and only the depths of the riches of His grace towards you in Christ Jesus. So, repent without fear! Be known without fear! If you are in Christ through repentance towards God and faith in Him, then you are fully known and fully loved and the grace of God keeps you even when your heart condemns you or your hearers condemn you. In Christ there is no more condemnation – so do not give yourselves back to slavery, but love in the freedom of God's grace.