



Sermon Notes

Term – Spring 2019

Series – Journey to Easter (1 Corinthians 13)

Gathering & Date – the 10, 31 March

Title – No record of wrongs

Preacher – Paul Langham

Reading – Acts 18:1 – 11 / 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Main message of this talk in one sentence – that God, unlike us, keeps no record of our sins

Main points –

2 opening questions

- What's the worst thing you've done in the past month?
- What's the worst thing someone's done to you this year?

It's easier to learn something designed to fill your head than it is to learn something designed to change your heart ...

Paul founded the Christian Community in Corinth during his 2nd Missionary Journey, somewhere around late 50 / early 51 AD. He spent 1 and a half years there, longer than anywhere except Ephesus and Rome. Over the following few years, he wrote a number of letters to the churches in Corinth, of which only 2 survive. Paul had a very fraught relationship with these churches and they wounded him more grievously than any other group.

So it's extraordinary that he wrote 1 Corinthians 13, one of the highpoints of the New Testament – and a passage universally regarded as a masterpiece summary of love – to this church.

We so often read the passage (not least at weddings) as something to which to aspire, or something we need to become ... it's better to read it primarily as a portrait of Jesus. In 1 John 4:8 we are told that

God is love

So we can read the central part of 1 Corinthians 13 as follows

⁴ God is patient, God is kind. God does not envy, does not boast, is not proud. ⁵ God does not dishonour others. God is not self-seeking. God is not easily angered. God keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ God does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ God always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ God never fails

Paul could write 1 Corinthians 13 not because he practised behaviour management, but because he had met the One who is agape ... and invited him in. Christlikeness cannot be 'learned' from a programme – there is no short cut to becoming more like Jesus: it can only come from spending time with him.

No record of wrongs

Can it really be the case that God does not retain knowledge of our sins? How can that be? Is it believable? Neil has been talking the last couple of weeks on 'shame' and how that can stop us experiencing the fullness of God's presence and blessing.

The 2 questions at the start (or at least the first) were, I imagine, easy for us all to answer. We all keep a

record of wrongs – certainly our own ... But following the logic of scripture, if God is agape love and 1 Corinthians describes him accurately, he keeps none!

Remember – it's easier to learn something designed to fill your head than it is to learn something designed to change your heart ...

How can Romans 8:1 be true if God does keep a record of wrongs?

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

So what happens to sin? The bible gives a number of answers – for now, let's consider just two

1. the scapegoat ... in Leviticus 16, we read of the people's sins being symbolically placed on a goat which was then driven out of the camp, never to be seen again. The Hebrew word 'shawlach' simply means 'send away.'

In the New Testament, whenever the phrase 'forgiveness of sins' occurs, the word forgiveness is the Greek word 'apheontai', which means ... 'to send away'.

Jesus uses the word throughout the gospels e.g.

- When he says to the paralysed man lowered through the roof, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'
- When he says of the woman who anoints him with oil 'her sins are forgiven'

Paul uses the same term in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians and Colossians

2. covered over ...

love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

In Jesus' story of the Prodigal son in Luke 15, the son returns to his father, covered in pig-filth and all the stains of his journey ... and the Father flings himself around his son, covering him. He then covers him with the best robe in the household.

None of this is to belittle sin or soft pedal the reality of judgment – the bible is clear that the world will one day stand under the judgment of Jesus. But ahead of time, God has – in Jesus – acted decisively to offer everyone an escape from judgment. On the Cross, Jesus won our salvation and covers us in his own righteousness, covering over whatever multitude of sins we can list against ourselves with his extraordinary, agape love.

So finally, why do we remember our sins? Two reasons spring to mind –

- We are in danger of **repetition** – remembering what we have done can be helpful in stopping us do that thing again
- We sometimes need to make **reparation** – putting things right with someone else

What we do not need to do is to allow the record of our own wrongs shackle us in guilt and shame – Jesus has dealt with our sins and brought to fulfilment the words of David in Psalm 103:12

as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

For further thought and prayer –

Read Psalm 103:8-13 and meditate on David's words

Questions

Are you aware of your own record of wrongs preventing you living the life of freedom Jesus promises?

How can you help one another believe the truth that God keeps no record of wrongs, that he has

- acted decisively on the cross to deal with sins once and for all
- 'sent away' your sins
- covered you with the righteousness of his Son

What does this mean for the record you keep of the wrongs of others?

Please find my companion pdf on forgiveness if you would like to pursue this further.