

June 2015
Volume 21 Issue 06

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CPRC Newsletter

The Church with Open Doors

Once far away, now near

"Too long-winded" some-one says. "What is he trying to say?... So why does he not say that?" Many readers complain about the letters Paul wrote to the congregations in which he ministered. Compared to the parables of Jesus they make for heavy reading. Read the parable of the prodigal son – it is so clear: God the Father is like the father in the parable – long before the prodigal son returns to his father's home, his father was waiting for him, ready to receive him. The reader understands: God is like the father who is ready to receive his run-away son long before the son has started on his journey back to the father's home.

But the letters of Paul are different.

They are difficult to understand.

Many readers avoid reading the Pauline letters.

We often read a chapter from a Pauline letter and when we close the Bible, we have only a vague idea of what we have read.

But there is some hope.

It does help if the reader remembers that in his letters to the Romans, Corinthians and so forth, the writer Paul always addressed a community of early Christians who were real people of flesh and blood.

Help – Paul's letters are answers to existing problems

These early Christian communities lived at a specific time in a specific place (Rome, Corinth, Ephesus etc.) – and as a specific congregation, each congregation has its own particular problems and questions.

A letter of Paul normally does not address a number of issues. Paul's strategy was rather to address the one or two issues a specific congregation struggled with.

This is the key to Paul's letters: try to find the one or two issues

Paul addresses in a specific letter, and the letter should be easier to understand.

Once we know what the specific problems of a specific congregation were, it is easier to understand Paul's response in his letter to the believers in Rome, Corinth or Ephesus etc. Paul's letters are usually responses to particular problems in specific congregations. If we then read his letter as answers and responses to a specific problem in that congregation, it becomes a bit easier to understand. Let us do that with Ephesians.

Those far away – in Ephesus

In Ephesians 2:12 Paul addresses the congregation in Ephesus, a city in Asia Minor (today Turkey). He writes: "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world."

Quite difficult to understand on the first reading.

One thing is clear: The recipi-

Christos anéthe! Christos aléthos anéthe! Christ has risen! Christ has risen indeed!

ents of the letter once had a difficult time. At that time, in the past, they were “separate from Christ”. That is not too difficult to understand: For whatever reason, the recipients once were separate from Christ – they did not yet believe Jesus was the Messiah and Lord.

Paul refers to that: it was the time when they were “separate from Christ”. When Paul then continues, we read again phrase which is difficult to understand: “you were... excluded from citizenship from Israel and foreigners to the covenants”.

What is Paul talking about? Did these inhabitants of the city Ephesus had claims to be citizenship in Israel? No, that cannot be. They lived in Ephesus, Asia Minor, today called Turkey – they would hardly benefit from a citizenship from the state of Israel. But no! Israel only came into existence about from 1947. So what does that mean – “citizenship of Israel”?

The “Citizenship of Israel

However, once we know: 1) who the recipients were and 2) what the main issue is which Paul addresses, This Letter becomes a little easier to understand.

It helps if we know that: 1) the people with “citizenship of Israel” were Jewish Christians, like Paul himself. 2) In almost every congregation in the ancient world, the chosen Jewish Christians were the leaders. The reason for that was that Jesus’ followers and the 12 disciples were all Jews. When, after Christ’s death small congregations were started in Ephesus, Corinth, Rome etc, the natural leaders were also the Jewish Christians.

This Jewish leadership developed naturally: Jesus was the Messiah for the Jews, the first disciples and followers were Jews, the holy book they used in their worship service, was the Septuaginta, the Greek Old Testament. The believers who were the nearest to this holy book, were the Jewish followers of Jesus.

In the churches and congregations Paul ministered to, it was almost taken for granted that the leadership would be in the hands of the Jewish believers – they were the ones who knew the Old Testament, they waited for the Messiah, who now had come in Jesus, who was a Jew and brought up in a Jewish environment.

So, in almost all the congregations the Jewish Christians were the congregational leaders. The Gentile, non-Jewish believers still had to learn a lot about their new religion. But they were not the leaders. One say that the Gentile, non-Jewish believers normally occupied the back-seats in the early Christian congregations. They were the newcomers, the ones who had a lot to learn how to read the Old Testament, and who Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David, Saul and others were.

In other words, the structure of

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away (the Gentile believers) have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13)

most early Christian congregations consisted of Jewish leaders, with the rest of the congregation made up of Gentiles, non-Jews.

It is easy to see the danger of a potential divide between a 90% Jewish leadership and 90% non-Jewish members.

From sidelines to centre stage

That was the challenge which Paul was addressing in his Letter to the Ephesians. He wanted to encourage the Gentile believers, who made up 90% of the ordinary members but were normally not part of the leadership, to prepare themselves to do that. If we remember that this was the problem Paul addressed in this letter, Ephesians becomes a easier to understand.

Paul’s first step, in his Letter to the Ephesians was to help the Gen-

tile members of the congregation in Ephesus to get rid of their inferiority complex, and realise that “in Christ” they who once were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel...” now “have been brought near”.

The Ephesians believers should remember that they were not marginal members, standing on the sidelines of the congregation, looking in to the centre where all the important events took place. They should realise that their place is right in the middle of the congregation, where the decisions were discussed and made.

Paul’s message is simple: You who are far away, should come to the centre, to the middle. See v 13: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away (the Gentile believers) have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

You Gentile members (Paul writes), always standing at the back and on the sidelines, you should know that you don’t have to remain on the sidelines. You who were once far away (when still pagans) have been brought near, to the centre of the congregation – by the fact that you are “in Christ”, that is, connected to the risen Christ.

Paul’s message was clear – you Gentiles should never think you are not good enough to be leaders in the congregation. No, although you “once were far away, (you) have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). You represent the important, equal partner to the Jewish believer.

An important truth which every believer should remember: When I am “in Christ”, that is, connected to the living Christ by my faith in Him, I have been “brought near to God – and near to my fellow believers – in Christ. I should no longer regard myself as not able to contribute to the building up of my congregation. No – Christ has “brought my near” – I am hear to give my contribution.

Called to Serve

Christians are identified by a variety of names in the Bible such as *believers*, *brothers*, and *saints* but one title we seldom call ourselves is "servants of Christ."

However, that is exactly what the Lord tells us to be. After His disciples wrangled about who was the greatest, Jesus turned their thinking upside down with a call to become great in the kingdom by being a servant of all.

Christ is not just our Saviour but also our Lord and Master, and we have a responsibility to follow his example. Just as He served his Father by caring for people, so we serve God by lovingly meeting the spiritual needs of those around us.

Service is essential for spiritual growth

God is continually at work in the believer's life, transforming his character into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

A major hindrance in this process is self-centredness. Serving others is one of the tools that the Lord uses to set us free from the slavery of selfishness.

Service is required to achieve God's purpose for our lives

The Lord has designed specific works for each of us to accomplish in our lifetime. If we only take in and never give out, we will miss much of what He has planned for us. Never forget that you have a calling which is realised only by lowering yourself to the level of a servant.

Look for the opportunities that the Lord will give you today to serve someone.

Take your place alongside Christ, who was the ultimate servant of all. *John Piper*



From Church Council Meeting

Cleaning around church & helping unemployed to make a living.

Project OPHELP was asked to assist with arranging people to clean area around the church". The council decided that:

1. . Straatwerk's Project OPHELP will be asked to recruit, organise and oversee homeless people who will clean area around church before church services on a Sunday morning. This will include:
2. OPHELP providing a foreman every Sunday morning to oversee cleaning and compensate the workers with cash to those who have helped.
3. OPHELP handling all the cash payments and invoicing CPRC only for the direct costs involved (labour, cleaning material).
4. OPHELP managing a rush of too many interested persons, if it should occur.
5. OPHELP (and CPRC) inviting the recruited persons to attend the worship service after cleaning.
6. This outreach will be financed by CPRC's Benevolent Fund (which depends on contributions from members and friends).

Should you wish to contribute towards this cleaning work, choose any of the following options for payment:

1. Put your cash gift in an envelope marked "Benevolent Fund" and put it in the plate.
2. Alternatively, make out a cheque to "CPCR" and write on the envelope "Benevolent Fund", and put it into the collection plate.
3. Or: make an EFT, an electronic payment. into the CPRC Bank account.

Here are the bank details:

Bank: FNB Branch: Long Street Branch nr; 201709

Bank account in name of: CPRC

Account nr: 50061426729

Reference: Your name (voluntary) + Cleaning project

“Mike’s funeral service - what a blessing!”

That was Stephen Keys-Transfelt reaction, after he attended Mike Pretorius’ funeral service at the Ebenezer Uniting Reformed Church, as well as the short prayer service at Beth Shalom, where Mike lived - and also Stephen Keys-Transfelt and Hannes van der Merwe.

Far from being depressing, the whole occasion was wonderfully uplifting and inspiring, says Stephen – “the funeral service, as well as the short house prayer meeting at Beth Shalom, arranged by members of Mike’s congregation – as well as the burial. It made me realise that a funeral can be a great blessing – a testimony that Jesus the Messiah conquered death on the cross, and therefore, for us who believe... death is not the end!” This made Stephen aware that every believer should think ahead about his or her memorial service. “Write down some guidelines how you want that service to be. That can be your last powerful witness of God’s grace – even though you are dead.”

What should be done to make sure my memorial service will be a witness to God’s grace?

To start with: Do no let your memorial service be a burden on your beloved ones. Make financial provision for the costs by taking out a funeral policy. This does not have to be a costly affair. For a monthly premium of R80 a policy can be bought which will provide R15 000 for funeral costs.

A second step: Make sure you have a will. This can done without spending a lot of money. Be careful before appointing a bank to be your executor.

FINANCE APRIL 2015

In March 2015 (the first month of CPRC’s 2015/16 financial year) CPRC’s major income items showed welcome improvements. Although the Thank Offerings and Donations “held their ground” during April 2015, unfortunately the Pew Collections dropped back considerably. Contributions to the Benevolent Fund, which CPRC utilises to provide assistance in respect of needy causes, dried up almost completely. The key results for April 2015 are –

- Thank Offerings for April 2015 again were the highest for many months. However, they are still not at the level (in excess of R20 000 per month) required to enable CPRC to meet all its commitments from its non-investment income;
- Pew Collections (although still on budget) were R2 883 (31%) lower than in March;
- Contributions to the Benevolent Fund were only R50!;
- For the second month in succession, very welcome donations of R1500 were received.

<i>April 2015</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Over/(Under)</i>	<i>% variance</i>
Thank Offerings	14 300	18 333	(4 033)	(21%)
Pew Collections	6 270	6 490	(220)	(3%)
Sub Total	20 570	24 823	(4 253)	(17%)
Benevolent Fund	50	713	(663)	(93%)
Donations	1500	666	834	125%
Total	R22 120	R26 202	(R4 082)	(16%)

It is still very early in the 2015/16 financial year to predict trends for the rest of the year. However, we should take note of the cumulative results for the first two months – we need to keep the 2015/16 targets in mind and do our utmost to achieve them.

<i>Cumulation (2 months)</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Budget</i>	<i>Over/(Under)</i>	<i>% variance</i>
Thank Offerings	28 360	36 666	(8 306)	(23%)
Pew Collections	15423	12 980	2 443	19%
Sub Total	43783	49 646	(5 663)	(12%)
Benevolent Fund	700	1 426	(726)	(51%)
Donations	3 000	1 332	1 668	125%
Total	R47 483	R52 404	(R4 921)	(9%)

Although that it certainly not our main objective, these targets are key for CPRC to meet its goals for the year.

If you wish to deposit or transfer your Thank Offering, Donation, etc. directly to CPRC’s bank account, the details are:

NG GEMEENTE CPRC A/c no: 50061426729

FNB Long Street, Cape Town

Branch code: 201-709

CPRC FINANCE COMMITTEE

The blessing of a memorial service

Say “funeral” or “memorial service” and you can hear some people say “No thanks, I steer clear of those services... I have sympathy with people who have lost loved ones, but I won’t be able to handle such an emotional experience”.

Those who say that are mostly people who speak from

These two partners are bound together by Christ himself to create “in Himself the one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross (v 15-17)”.

Let us pray that this “one new man” will also be visible in our CPRC congregation where people from different cultures and colours worship God, and in the whole Reformed Church.