

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

6/19/2011

The Core Basis of the Church 2Corinthians 13: 5-13

Jesus' message was earth shaking. But his ministry was confined to Galilee and Jerusalem. It was Paul who carried the good news of Jesus to Asian Minor, Greece, and finally to Rome.

One of the churches Paul established was the church of Corinth. Corinth was a large cosmopolitan city in Greece. The city had a large population of gentiles and dispersed Jews. So it was an ideal place for evangelism.

At first, Paul's ministry in Corinth was a big success; however, within a few years, the Corinthian church was rocked with dissension and infighting among its members.

The conflict was caused by those whom Paul called secularized Christians. They introduced unchristian ideas of church leadership into the community of the faithful.

They insisted that the elders and deacons should be elected on the basis of social status, mellifluous voice, and eloquence of speech rather than commitment to Christ, earnestness in worship, and sincerity in prayer.

Another thing that disturbed Paul was the fact that the secularized Christians showed little interest in worship. Some of them even declared that non-participation in worship was OK, because they were saved by faith anyway.

We can sense Paul's profound aggravation and grief from his Letter to the Corinthians. "I write you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears."

What does this Corinthian episode teach us? It teaches us that without worship, Christian faith will atrophy. Without the oxygen, we cannot live. Likewise, without worship, our faith cannot exist for long. Paul refuses to compromise this point.

When I became your pastor five years ago, I was told that it was customary that on the day of the annual church meeting, some members had congregated in the fellowship hall to strategize how to push their agenda through the meeting, while worship service was going on.

There is no doubt that Paul shed his tears for JAUC. That is a thing in the past. But we need to be reminded that such a habit always looms before us, unless we are mindful of it.

If we emphasize committee work, fellowship, and other church activities apart from worship with brothers and sisters in Christ, we are falling into the Christian malpractice that distressed Paul so much.

Participating in worship is the key to being Christian. But that is not the entire message of Paul. He has one more important thing to say.

Paul declares that God loves those who are faithful in worship, of course, but God loves those who showed little interest in worship, as well. "God makes no distinction," he writes. God is absolute and unbounded love.

God encourages the faithful Christians to keep on praying, to keep on worshipping. God gently persuades the secularized Christians to change their hearts, to experience the joy of looking up to the Holy, to the most high.

So for Paul, the church is a worshipping community; also the church is a reconciling community. In the most well known passage of his letter to the Corinthians, Paul entreats his people; "God is reconciling the world to himself, entrusting God's message of reconciliation to us." Then he concludes, "You are called to be ambassadors for Christ."

Notice, those words were written with both the worshipping Christians and the secularized Christians in mind.

God uses all of us, even us, as his earthen vessels, as instruments of his grace, indeed, as ambassadors for Christ. None of us is left out. None at all.

That is good news, good news, indeed.

Thanks be to God.