

“Wounded Love”
Pastor John Bronson

Ephesians 4:30-32

June 20, 2010

Order of Worship for June 20th, 2010, Father’s Day

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: ?

Call to Worship: Psalm 63:1-8 and Prayer

“Honor your father and you mother, that your days may be long in the land...”

Songs of Worship:

“Sweet, Sweet Spirit”	Song # 391
“Blessed Be Your Name”	Overhead
“Spirit of the Living God”	Song # 389
“When I Look into Your Holiness”	Song # 649
“How Deep the Father’s Love for Us”	Overhead

Offering

Special Music

Message: “Wounded Love” (Ephesians 4:30-32)

Closing Song “I Am His and He Is Mine” Song # 748

Parting Word of Grace

In honor of Father’s Day Vespers is cancelled

“The Prayer Closet”

June 20, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Vance and Carol Johnson, Evangelical Theological college of the Philippines:** that God will sustain them in faith and joy: that the Spirit will bring many to conviction of sin and faith in Christ through their efforts; that they will not grow weary in well-doing; that their prayer and financial support will remain strong
2. **President Obama:** that will open his heart and mind to understand the need for Christian morality to sustain a free nation; that the Spirit will empower him to discern fools and foolish counsel; that his love for his family will open his eyes to the nature of true moral goodness
3. **Vacation Bible School:** that the Lord will prepare the hearts of all who serve to speak openly of faith in Christ; that the Spirit will bring many unsaved and unchurched children for the whole week; that God will ensure good weather and safety for all; that many will be saved through faith in Christ as Savior and Lord
4. **Military Personnel of the Week: E4 Tim Hammonds** (son of Tom and Cindy Hammonds):
5. **College Student of the Week: Sam Sundahl, Perry Technical Institute** (son of Kirk and Marcia Sundahl): that he would be diligent in God’s Word and that his summer classes go well.

Today is Father’s Day. If the family as a social institution established by God for the perpetuation of humanity through the propagation and raising of children is under attack in our culture – and it most assuredly is under attack in our culture – the role of fatherhood is even more so. The reason or causes for this are far too many for us to pursue. The importance of this – the attack on fatherhood – the importance of this for society in general and for Christians in particular, is a question that Christians need to wrestle with. There are those who would strongly resist the notion that the traditional or biblical role of fatherhood is anything particularly noteworthy, let alone essential, for either the social order or for the family or even for raising children. Some would even say that the traditional as well as biblical concept of fatherhood is a negative and is best gotten rid of, something that has been imposed upon us. For such people, the facts of male and female are biological realities, but the variables of masculine and feminine, well these are really choices imposed on us and are the fruit of nurture, that is, our up-bringing; they are just cultural constructs. Now very curiously, those who would argue most vigorously that “feminine” and “male” or “masculine” are just cultural constructs, they will then turn right around and say, but on the other hand sexual preference – homosexuality – well that is genetically determined! You have to pay attention to what is being said to you on the media and around about, and listen for the times when they are irrational, because their irrationality exposes their prejudices and biases.

When I was at the [Ligonier’s] conference, I was privileged to not only hear great preaching, but I picked up a book entitled “The Masculine Mandate: God’s Calling to Men.” This was endorsed by Jerry Bridges, an author with whom I think a number of us are familiar. I have already read a substantial portion of it and I anticipate that this and some other materials will become a small group Bible Study. I am hoping to have a men’s group this fall and a husband and wives group. You might be looking for that. I am not going to deal with the issues of fatherhood today; I will deal with it in the proper course when we come to it in Ephesians chapter 5. But in the meanwhile I will return to it briefly at the end of today’s message.

We concentrated last week on Ephesians 4:29. The topic for today is “wounded love.” I want you to think for just a moment; how deeply have you been wounded by the people you love? How well do you carry those wounds? How willingly do you open your heart to those who rightly have the highest claim upon your affections and allow your love for them to break you? Ephesians 4:29-30 read like this: *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear, and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption – that is our verse for today; I am going to be concentrating on that verse – let all bitterness and anger and wrath be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.”*

I did not quite finish what needs saying last week in dealing with the 29th verse. Notice that in his statement Paul appears to think that we are able to control what we say. That is the assumption of his comment. He says, “No more corrupting speech: Your choice!” We know that that is true, though we often deny it: “I can’t help it; that is just the way I am!” I have often encountered that when I have encountered inappropriate speech. We defensively lament, justifying our peculiar habits of speech. Consider, however, this, how readily our vocabulary changes depending on our social setting. Foul tongues sweeten quickly, hardened speech softens, and those given to unrestrained expressions of rejection and disapproval become suddenly circumspect and alert to standards of civil decency when they are in the company of those who speak with restraint. If our speech is intemperate or even indecent, it is by choice, even if that choice has become habit. And if that choice is hidden, buried away somewhere from our conscious thought, the cause lies in some different and perhaps deeper level of choice. As with our perception of the relative values of getting or giving material wealth – remember last week we talked about

the transformation that comes over the thief. When the thief is converted and becomes a Christian he is transformed from an individual whose life is focused on taking and getting and keeping and having to being one instead who delights to give, for that is the expectation given to us by Paul. *“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him work, gaining not only enough to cover his needs, but to have that which to give to others.”* So there is this remarkable transformation that comes in the life of the Christian when they are saved and they change from a taker to a giver; well in the same manner, perhaps, there is this transformation that comes over us, that we learn to live by grace. Am I in my speech changed from a curser to a blessing? Is that true of me? Is that what has happened to me? We have to ask whether corrupting and deceptive desires are at work shaping our perception of the world and thereby the range and weight of choices open to us. Jesus says, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* But to actually act on that premise requires having our eyes open to and our hearts believing in the reality of God’s ability and willingness to supply, not just to supply enough, but to supply enough so that I am content and happy in what I have. Because if I am not content and happy in what I have, every time the opportunity arises for me to give to someone, I am going to feel poor; I am going to feel threatened; I am going to feel like I am being emptied out in such a way that I will not have enough. And then that joy which should be the evidence of the work of the Spirit of God will be gone, and instead I will be laboring under the burden of my sinful inner desires, my lack of faith. I need to actually trust and believe in God. How much, we need to ask ourselves, can I afford not to have of what the world admires? In the same way, I need to ask what sort of deceptive desires might be at work holding my tongue captive.

If we listen with open simplicity to what Paul says, what do we hear? Paul’s teaching on good speech, the words which I want to have come out of my mouth, he says are words which are to be good for building up. So we have to ask the question, what builds people up? I need to know that. We need to know how we can discern what is fit for a particular occasion. We need to know what will give grace to those who hear. So we ask, in relationship to the first of those three, I need to know what sort of things build up, what is fit for the occasion, and what will give grace to others. So far we have been looking in the past week and in this introduction now, at what things trouble the heart. But here we see we want to be able to look at a potential conversation, to look at a relationship, we want to ask ourselves the question; what will heal? What will bring grace into this situation? What will result so that at the end of this conversation we will walk away from each other and each one will be stronger in their faith? That is what I want to have happen; that is what I desire to see as a result of this brief time that we spend together. Paul already spoke of this in the first part of the letter which he turns to application in chapter 4:15-16. This is what he said there: *“...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”* Well, that is what I want!

First of all we ask this question: what builds up? It is the gospel. It is knowing what God has done for us in Christ and being able to share that with others. We have to ask ourselves the question, do I know the gospel well enough to share it with someone else? Do I know the gospel well enough so that it would just be a normal part of my speech, not something that I have rehearsed, memorized and rehearsed, you know, so that I say, “Ok, time to share the gospel: point I...” That is not a normal way of talking! Does grace flow through my lips because I know the gospel?

But there is more than just the specific core of teaching given to us in the Word of God. There is indeed what Paul at one point calls the whole counsel of God’s word. There is a great amount of wisdom in God’s word for living. There [are] a couple of citations there in 1Cor.10:6 and 11, this is what Paul said to the

Corinthians: *“Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved...”* Let me repeat that: *“Now these things happened as examples for us so that we would not crave...”* When is the last time you stepped back from the constant flow of public media advertizing and asked yourselves, “How many cravings, how many cravings, how many cravings?” The Word of God is given to us so that we can be armed against the seductiveness of our own culture. *“...these things happened to them as an example, and they were written...”* Paul says, *“for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages have come.”* The scriptures are a repository of wisdom for life so that in some degree we will know what sort of things will build up. I specifically recommend that you read Ecclesiastes and the book of Proverbs. And when I say that you read it, I don’t recommend that you scan it. And I don’t mean that you would read it once, put it aside and say, got that done! What I really recommend is that you read it constantly, over and over again, so that gradually it begins to sink into your soul and begins to rearrange the way you look at the world around you, because that is precisely the intention of God. It is that you and I would think after the pattern of biblical truth. It is not that He wants us to have a sort of casual acquaintance with what is written down in the Word of God. He wants us to be changed in our inner affections, our perceptions and our sense of what is real, so that then our lives become a continual demonstration of this transformed person who moves in this world, but moves in this world according to a wisdom that comes from outside of it!

That is the first. The second: how do I know what “fits”? I’m engaged in a conversation, I encounter a person, and I say to myself, “My eyes are open, I have become acquainted with the word of God, but how am I going to know what works in this situation?” The answer is obvious, and anybody that has been involved in counseling on either side of the tables knows. What is the number one problem in virtually all marriages: communications! And what is the number one problem in communications? “I can’t hear what you have to say!” My mouth is open all the time...aaah! Did you say something? Aaah! So it is a very simple matter, although it is excruciatingly difficult to live out. I must know what builds up, and I need to know how to look and listen with compassion. I need to know how to see and hear with compassion.

Once again the Word of God gives us an immense amount of instruction in knowing how to do this. God’s redeeming grace is essential for doing this. If I know that it is well between me and God, then I am free to love as I have been loved. What I observe, both through personal self-examination and in conversations with others, is that we tend when we engage in conversation with others, we have encounters, to be constantly struggling with whether or not I will be respected; whether or not anyone is going to listen to me; or I am anxious for my material well-being, with what others might do if I say things they don’t like or agree with or understand. Or I am worried about my future: will I still be loved, cared for and respected if say what is really on my mind. If we don’t trust the sufficiency of the grace of God, it is very hard to have true speech which is designed to bless the other person. Instead, we will lie. We will say it is well when it is not. We will avoid confrontation because we daren’t jeopardize the relationship. Consequently, instead of the body of Christ being built up, it lives in a kind of haze where nothing is clear or quite real. I have to know how to build up and I have know how to look and listen with compassion.

How do I give grace? Giving grace or unmerited love is only possible because I have received it. I can give grace because I receive it from God. But that is not enough. I can give grace because I treasure it! Grace, the unmerited love of God for me, the remembrance that though I am a sinner and if were I treated justly I would be cast aside, but instead God has come to me and He has said, “I want you to be My child. And in order that you would be My child, I have sent My Son, and He has given His life so you can be My child.” Knowing that, and prizing that, prizing this amazing relationship with God, means I now turn to those around me and I say, “Wouldn’t you like to be loved like that? Wouldn’t you like to have that kind of

relationship with God?” I prize, I treasure the grace that I have received. The truth of the matter, I am afraid beloved, is that many Christians have turned away from the riches of God’s grace, and instead they are spending their lives investing in worldly things. So we take God’s forgiving love and Christ for granted and we devalue it by ignoring it. It is not that we deny it; it is just that it slips away into a corner where it is only occasionally accessed, perhaps in times of pressing need. But we don’t allow the reality of His grace and the wonder of it to interrupt our pursuit of all manner of worldly goals. And so it shrinks. And if our hearts are not held in the grip of God’s affections, if our desires are not stirred up so that our immense capacity for passion, our immense capacity for delight, our immense desire to know joy, our longing, as my earlier questions indicated, our longing to connect with other people in a significant way so that we know that we are in actual dialogue with them, if we are not noticing what God has done for us in His grace, we will pursue other desires. And therefore other issues will come from our mouths than the grace of God. I am familiar enough with this that when this is the case it seems like our conversations never gets around to God and His grace and his love and his forgiveness and my need and your need and His sufficiency: you see, you never get there. I have many conversations with fellow Christians who say, “It is so hard to talk about the things of the Spirit.” That might be that such conversations are so rare, because our desires are so compromised. Like the people of God in Jesus’ day, we become both blind and deaf, and what comes from our mouths in such situations is rarely grace, and we should be thoughtful about that.

We see therefore there is a parallel, isn’t there, between verses 28 and 29 in Ephesians chapter 4. The thief is one who approaches life as if poor and thus needing to concentrate on getting. The thief is a taker. In all that he does, his or her aim is to get, to have, to maximize the material wealth to have so as to satisfy one’s own desires for the goods of the world. The Christian is one who knows the riches of grace, the unmerited love of God so miraculously demonstrated by Jesus when feeding the five and the four thousand with what began as a handful of fish and bread. Because the Christian is first of all devoted to the kingdom of God, he or she is rich and therefore is free to give. That is the transformation of the thief. The heart of the matter, as I said last week, is the heart that has received the grace of God and prizes it. The same is true in the area of speech: the tongue can only speak from the fullness of the heart. We looked at that last week. Those are the words of Jesus. If the heart is full of fear, if the heart is full of hate, if the heart is full of anxiety, or full of resentment, or full of suspicion, or full of pride, or full of lust, then that is what comes out – of course! Jesus said the mouth speaks out of the fullness of the heart. So if you and I want to know what is in our hearts, we need to examine our speech.

Notice what Paul says in the thirty first verse. He says, *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from among you, along with all malice.”* How does that happen? By filling up our heart with something else. That is how it happens. The question then is, what do our words reveal about our character and the state of our hearts, and what are willing to do about it? Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Now look at the thirtieth verse: *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”* I want to read the broader context so we catch up and get the flow:

“But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak the truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let

the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

There are two profound truths in that thirtieth verse, and I want us to look a little bit at both of them. The first is this: we are able to grieve the Holy Spirit. The second is this: we are sealed by that Spirit for the day of redemption. That is a combination worth thinking about. Paul has already mentioned the fact that we are sealed by the Spirit. In chapter 1:13-14 Paul presented the foundational doctrines of salvation by faith in the work of God through Christ on our behalf and he wrote this in those two verses: *“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge (or a “down-payment”) of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”* There is the first mention of our being sealed. Paul taught the same thing in chapter 1:13-14 and here [in chapter 4] in verse 30, that we are sealed by the Spirit. In that first passage he says we are sealed in Jesus with the Spirit and that the Spirit is a pledge or down-payment on what is coming, our inheritance. Secondly, that we were sealed by the Spirit, as he says in the thirtieth verse, for the day of redemption.

What exactly does it mean that we have been sealed? The reason I want us to think about this is that the issue of our being sealed by the Spirit lies at the heart of our joy in grace. It lies at the heart of our joy in the gospel. There are many, by the way, I am sure that you know some of them, and I am also certain that some of you are them, who do not take joy in the gospel. They don’t take joy in their salvation. They are persuaded somehow that being saved means that a lot of otherwise interesting and pleasurable things are now off limit. And so they live a life of relative deprivation, of apparent poverty that they say to themselves in the secret chambers of their heart, “I am a Christian and I believe, and I know that Jesus died for my sins; it is just really too bad that so many things are sins! If I could rewrite the list of things that are sins, I would leave a lot of things in that might be kind of cool. But, God is in charge, so, I’ll just struggle along being a Christian, and maybe I can make it to the end, with only a few good times along the way.” What idiots! What does it mean to be sealed?

Why do I say idiot? Look folks: who loves you? God! Who made you? God! Who knows what will give you joy? God! So why do we argue with Him all the time? That is enough.

Back to my tired reading: what does it mean to be sealed? Well, the first thing: in the ancient Near East seals were very important. A seal indicated ownership. Not only did it indicate ownership, but it also indicated that whatever was under the seal was under the control of the one who had sealed it; that one was in charge of the future of whatever that [sealed] thing was. What was sealed was understood, therefore, to be an expression of and a servant for the will of the one who had sealed it. That is what the [seal] was for. The seal indicated the continued personal interest of the one who made the seal in what was sealed. Whatever had been sealed had been sealed for the one who sealed it. Seals were considered to be inviolable, even sacred. All of this, then, is included in the statement that we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. So what do we realize? Because we are sealed by the Spirit, it is an indication that God has claimed us for His own: of course! So when you are sitting there – this is your present difficulty – and you are contemplating whether or not you are going to go to that pornographic site, and you feel an inward argument, a tug, let me tell you who is tugging. It is the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is saying, “You belong to God.”

And ladies, when you're cruising along in the mall, and you are allowing your desires to be excited by the continual display of things that would be charming, and you feel a strange emptiness and aloneness, let me just say that the Spirit of God is saying, "Don't go there! You belong to somebody who has already made you beautiful and wealthy!" I am good at making these things up, so I will stop.

The second thing is [that] the seal indicates that God stands as surety for the integrity of His purpose in our lives: "You are mine and I will not let you go. I own your future." The seal, you see, indicates that God continues to have a lively interest in whatever He has sealed. And that would be us.

This assurance lies at the heart of saving faith. Christians do not have faith in faith. That is, we do not have faith in the sufficiency of a person's own faith to ensure that faith itself will continue, and by continuing will ensure that God will follow through on all that He has promised. God does not love me because I have faith: I have faith because God loves me. That is grace. It is grace, His love for me, that God's [love] has broken through and announced itself to my rebellious, resisting, suspicious and angry heart. He says, "I love you, kid; and I am claiming you for Mine, and I have made every provision for your well-being, and I intend to stay with you and bring you to conclusion, perfection in My presence." So you can anticipate a hard time if you are not willing to be part of the program: of course!

We know that our faith is not constant. We are wavering and often stumble. We slip, we fall back and away. Our performance as believers simply does not fulfill our profession of faith. We are hypocrites to the last man and woman by the measure of our performance. We seem incapable of fulfilling our own desire to be faithful. We are sinners. Even after coming to saving faith in God through Christ we find the habits of sin and the relentless pressures of the world keeping us vulnerable to its deceptive desires. This is the reality which Paul is addressing from chapter 4:17 right through to the end: we need renewed minds if we are going to actually live the Christian life. The imagination of our hearts needs to be captured and given to Christ. We cannot do this on our own.

The parallel to this, by the way, in the Old Testament is the pattern of God's grace in the conquest of the Promised Land. God told the Israelites that he would drive the pagan peoples of Canaan out of the land slowly for two reasons. First, so that the land would not become empty and filled with wild animals and so overwhelm the Israelites. Second, so that the continued presence of the pagans would serve as a kind of test, both measuring and strengthening the continued resolve of the Israelites to remain faithful. The heart of the covenant is God, it is Christ. The first purpose of the covenant is to turn us away from ourselves and to God in faith, in thanks, in hope and in love. It is only as we learn to live this way that we will experience the truly liberating power of God's forgiveness, discover the power and wisdom to resist and overcome sin. We learn fullness of life in obedience exactly as Ms. J said.

But beloved, we are capable of wounding the Spirit, every time we sin. Recently, as you know – and I will conclude with this: I had the opportunity, as you know, with my wife and my son Caleb, by the way, to stop by on the way back from Rebecca's graduation and visit with the most beautiful grandson in the world! I pray for the rest of humanity as they struggle! Charlie is a beautiful child in the radiant complexion, a sweet disposition, bright eyes, a charming laugh: just talk to his grandmother. You know how it is when you have a baby? It is just awful, really. We had five adults in the living room and Charlie, the baby, was sitting there on the floor, and guess what all five adults were doing: staring at the baby! We did that for days. Every time Charlie did anything it was: did you see that? O my goodness, what a remarkable child. This is a wonderful! What progress! Really cool! Right? Adults are idiots over...what do you think the Holy Spirit is like over us? You and I don't begin to know how to love the way God does!

Consequently, if something terrible happened to that child, what do you think would have happened to the hearts of the five adults who sat around him? And what do you think happens to the heart of God when awful things happen to us? They are called sin, and He grieves. Let us pray.

Our holy Father, I am sure that all of us in this room would acknowledge that we know at one level or another the issues of daily life tend to rise up in their urgent immediacy and equally in their habitual givenness, and all the clutter of the ebb and flow of our undisciplined desires and poorly thinking minds dims our remembrance, and that the pain of life so easily hardens our hearts, rendering us insensitive to Your love for us, and we are sorry. We would that it was not so. We thank You for Your ever renewing love for us, that being sealed You won't let us go. In that we take great comfort. We just pray, Father, that you won't ever give up on us and that bit by bit, by Your grace, we will learn to prize that grace, to treasure it, and take great joy in giving grace to other and delight to the Spirit. We pray, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. What is the best memory or the most meaningful thing your father did for you?

2. Do I often regret what I have said? Do I generally say what I mean and mean what I say? What tends to make me angry, defensive, irritated, scornful, mocking, others?

3. Do I know the gospel well enough to share it with someone who doesn't know it or the Bible? Do I know the Bible's instruction/wisdom for living such that I can help others live well?

4. Am I a good listener and observer? What makes it hard for me to wait for and on others?

5. Do I cherish God's grace in my life? Do my worldly desires and pursuits overshadow my love and pursuit of God and godliness?

6. Do I enjoy and take comfort and find strength in the fact of being sealed by the Spirit? Do I live in daily awareness that I am God's and He loves me? Am I confident He will keep me?

7. Do I concentrate more on doing for God or being with and listening to God?

8. Have I found obeying God and spending time with Him to be a joyful experience?

9. Am I, perhaps, afraid of getting “too serious” in my relationship with God? Am I, perhaps, afraid of learning to love the way God does?