

Vision – Radical Connections

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

Galatians 6:1-2

VISION SERIES ONE

August 28–29, 2004

“Failure Connects With Grace”

Introduction

In the book *Rebuilding Your Broken World*, Vernon Grounds begins with the question:

“If the whole structure of your existence is shattered - like a vase dropped on a hardwood floor - Can those shards be gathered up and made into something beautiful, useful - again?”

To put it another way -

- Once Humpty Dumpty had his great fall, are all the king's horses and all the king's men incapable of doing anything except lamenting as they consign his fragments into the rubble?

God's word tells us God is capable - more than capable of - in fact, passionate about, putting broken people back together again

- That's the main message of the gospel, the reason for the Cross

Most of us know this

- What we often ignore or overlook is that His most important INSTRUMENT for piecing back together brokenness is the church
- It's the main work of the body
- It is the radical ministry of God's community

Unfortunately, we're not warm to the word “radical” today

- Hear radical - and we think of anarchy, terror, protest
- But by radical - we mean “going back to the root - to what is inherent in the thing”

And what is at the root, the *radic* of the church is a community of restorative grace

- That moves into spiritual formation - all with the ultimate aim of Christ-likeness

Judging by the behavior of most churches

- We have lost our way, missed what is primary
- We're no longer radical
 - A) We tend to be more a crowd than a community
 - B) We tend to come in our self absorption, missing completely how desperate the person we sit next to might be
 - C) In our discomfort with going deep, we keep our conversations at the safe, superficial level
 - Missing the profound connection God intended between Spirit and Spirit
 - D) In our fear of being hurt, we keep to ourselves
 - Illustration* - I understand
 - Carl
 - I could never meet expectations
 - I shared my deepest longing to them only to be met with coldness
 - It took a long time
 - If I keep the walls up you can't hurt me
 - Problem: We thrive in community - wither in isolation
 - E) In our gracelessness, we can bind disciples into lockstep patterns of expectations that shame people who do not act like us

This, at least, is one of the primary reasons unchurched people reject an invitation to come to church

- The image of church is people who are better at dis-gracing than ex-tending grace

When we set out to envision the Village of tomorrow

- We started here
- Out of our own failures of a few years ago
- We said: Village must be a place of restoration - grace connecting with failure

After all - it is our mandate - I Cor 2:7; Eph 4:32; Js 5:20; Gal 6:1-2

It is here - in Galatians 6 - I want to focus

- Given the tenor of this book - focused upon a church known for its conservative, legalistic ways
- Known more for what it opposed than what it was for
- With barriers for those who did not keep their laws - who shunned outsiders
- Paul's words had to be radical, drastic, far reaching

1 - Brothers...sisters...

- The words are a reminder that he is writing to community
- His language underscores that the spiritual journey is a family experience, a group expedition
- Not some solo endeavor
- We were designed for community - have been baptized into one body, called into one body

2 - If anyone is caught...

- The spiritual journey includes pitfalls, snags
- Failure is a real possibility in the spiritual community
- And being "caught" pictures one who did not set out so much to sin – but failed to be on guard
- A conversation that goes beyond the boundaries
- An overeating tendency that lapses into a midnight binge
- A propensity to pornography that is met by a sudden temptation
- A seed of worry that grows into full blown fear, mistrust, doubt
- An angry moment that leads to abusive behavior

That we sin so frequently is a puzzle -

- Christ provides all that we need to be victorious
- And sin always leaves us diminished, dehumanized, dulled
- But we do - in part because we are people in a spiritual war
 - Facing a triad of enemies: world, flesh, devil
 - 3 terrorist groups who gang up on us everyday
 - And where there is war, there will be casualties
 - Where there is a deceptive enemy, people will be deceived, entrapped

That's why - on any given weekend - if we saw ourselves for who we really are

- We would see people at various stages of recovery
- Some are here with self-inflicted wounds - mistakes, bad choices
- Some premeditated in the dark
- Others an impulsive act in the heat of the moment
- Some are undergoing radical surgery - some will be in ICU
- Others are taking their first steps after a long time bed-ridden
 - (I know-I read your cards, hear your hurts)

This was the church in Galatia

- The church everywhere - A FELLOWSHIP OF WALKING WOUNDED
- That may wonder "can my world ever be rebuilt?"
 - Do I have any present value, future usefulness?
 - Is there life after foolish choices?
 - Can failure find grace?

God's answer is – YES - if the church is the church

Body

What will it take? TWO THINGS

1) WE WILL HAVE TO POSITION OURSELVES TO RECEIVE THE SPIRIT'S FULLNESS

- If failure is to find grace - it will depend upon "you who are spiritual"
- You who are living by the Spirit (Gal 5:16)
- You who are keeping in step with the Spirit
- Positioning to receive the Spirit's fullness

Illustration

- Sailing is a lot like this--constantly tacking, positioning the boat to take full advantage of the wind
- This is what the spiritual life is about
- Shifting, positioning ourselves to receive the full force of the wind of the Spirit
- Entering into community - engaging in one another's worlds - listening to each other's stories
- End then - just maybe - the Spirit will show up

2) WE WILL HAVE TO SUBMIT OURSELVES TO RELEASE THE SPIRIT'S FORGIVENESS - Grace

- Let's never forget - the Spirit fills us
- Not to be stored up
- But to be released

- In this passage, Paul calls this work *katartizo*—the work of restoring, mending
- It is used of mending broken nets, setting broken bones
- Piecing together, setting in order, restoring to a former condition
- What does the context suggest here?

A) EXTENDING HOPE

- Imagine a community more fixed upon envisioning a future - rather than consigning to the rubble
- Asking, "What did the Spirit plan long ago for this person's life?"
- Imagine a room full of people asking this question of one another: "What could this person be when Christ has the reign, when life has been cleansed, when the Spirit fills the heart?"
- This is part of making room for God to work - as opposed to confining, marginalizing
- Our tendency is to write off people who disappoint, treat as damaged goods

- Like Job's friends - we spend much of our time rebuking people whose worlds have broken apart
- We desert the wounded
- Were Jonah our prophet, we'd be tempted to say "Have a nice vacation in Tarshish"
- But then we remember - God has made room for us
- Unless we make the same room - broken worlds do not get rebuilt

B) MINISTERING GRACE

- Jesus modeled restoration better than anyone
- His natural reaction to the shamed was to invite Himself to dinner
- He invited Himself to Zacchaeus' home - and then restored his life
- Invited Himself into the arena of the adulteress – then commanded her to go and sin no more
- His theory was only the sick need a physician
- So He made house calls
- His first priority was to raise the dead - that must be our priority

- In each of these, Jesus did what we too often do not
 - He first bound up their wounds, restored confidence, offered hope that cracks the gloom

- "Estranged, banished people are huddling in caves all around us - it is our duty to take the risk of guiding them gently back into the sunshine" -Dean Merrill

- Katartizo involves:

C) CONFRONTING SIN

- This is a necessary part of healing grace
- The situation may call for firm words, stern rebuke - pointing out broken places that can become strongholds
- Restorative grace cannot work if people do not come to grips with reality
- But realize the situation has its own fragility - sin always wounds - calls for gentleness
 - A secure context, a time limit, a supportive spirit
 - A combination of candor and love

D) ACKNOWLEDGING WEAKNESS

- Vulnerability
- We do all of this knowing we too are objects of grace
- If we do not keep a careful eye on ourselves - we will find ourselves shattered
- I Cor 10:12 – “so if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall”
- The potential is always in us

E) HOLDING UP

- Broken people need to be help up—it is easy to fall again
- Bearing up is the work of prayer—of saying—
- I will keep praying—I am here if things get too heavy
- I’m willing to hold you accountable

Conclusion

Nashville - What if MacDonald’s church wrote him off?