



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

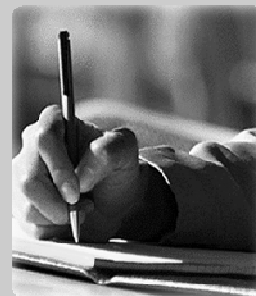


HG70: Transforming Presence (3/6)
Transforming Rule

Exodus 20:1-17 & Acts 2:1-21

Home Group Study Notes

27th May 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

Pentecost was a significant celebration in the life of the Israelites. What events in your life (Birthdays and Weddings aside) would you consider celebrating, but don't at the moment?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1: In Exodus 20:1, God reminds the people of Israel what He has done for them before giving the Ten Commandments (Joshua 24:1-28 gives a helpful outline). How does Joshua 24 underline the seriousness of the commitment the Lord expects of His people?

2: If you had to summarise your own 'rule of living' in a few sentences, what would you write? Give it a try and share your thoughts with your Home Group.

3: Read Matthew 22:37-40. What does this passage say is our main duty towards God? What might this mean practically for us? How can we keep up this standard?

Former Archbishop George Carey puts it this way: ... *it appears self-evident to me that there is not such a being as a Spirit-less Christian. There are plenty of disobedient Christians around who refuse to allow the Holy Spirit to have his sovereign way in their lives, but there cannot be Christians un-baptised in the Holy Spirit. Impoverished and stunted they may be, but not without the Spirit of God.*

Our openness to the Holy Spirit hinges, I believe, around how much we believe God loves us; how much we trust God and whether we believe that he has our interests at heart. One thing I know about Annabel/Benjamin, amongst many other things, is that they trust me implicitly. I'm their daddy, they know I love them and that I wouldn't let any harm come to them. So it is with our heavenly Father.

The Experience of the Holy Spirit is different for everyone

The presence of the Holy Spirit rarely happens unnoticeably. For some people, as we read in Acts 2, it results in being able to speak a different language. Others cry uncontrollably, others can't stop laughing – just ask Alison! Others find themselves breathing deeply as if almost physically breathing in the Spirit. For some, physical heat can sometimes accompany the filling of the Holy Spirit and people experience it some part of their bodies. Some people are blessed with a spiritual gift. And for some people, quite amazingly, the Holy Spirit brings healing: physical, emotional and spiritual.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit was given to the church to transform the lives of Christian people and enable them to follow and serve God in a way they wouldn't be able to do on their own. I'm sure all of us need more of God's power in our lives, I know I do. Being filled with the Spirit is not a one-off experience. Peter was filled with the Spirit three times in the space of chapters 2-4 in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:4; 4:8; 31). When Paul says, 'Be filled with the Spirit' (Ephesians 5:18) he uses the present continuous tense, urging us to go on being filled.

My experience over the years has been that whenever I have started to become serious with God, whenever I have started to take God up on his promises, whenever I get down on my knees and expect the power of God to show up in my life - things start to happen. God never lets anyone down who takes Him up on his promises and who are seeking a fresh experience of the Transforming Rule of the Holy Spirit in their life. And it is this daily presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives that will ensure that Bishop Stephen's vision for Transforming Presence won't be a short lived exercise but something that will see people come to faith in Jesus and our impact in the world increased.

**Living God,
Draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us
To live your love with generosity and joy, imagination and courage;
For the sake of your world and in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

The questions for discussion are among those posed in the Transforming Presence Paper and the answers will inform our on-going discussion. Discuss as many of them in your group as time permits (*It would be helpful if Home Group Leaders feed back any comments to Paul, Tom or Shirley or your churchwardens, Don and Linda*).

How does the Holy Spirit bring Transformation into our Lives?

(The Holy Spirit makes us) Sons and Daughters of God: Romans 8:14-17: *Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

- **Greatest Privilege:** I believe there is no greater privilege than to be a child of God and no status in the world even compares with being a child of God.
- **Closest Community:** As children of God we have the closest possible intimacy and relationship with Him. God is our Father. Romans 8:15: *... you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.* The use of the word 'Abba' in addressing God was distinctive of Jesus. It's almost impossible to translate the word Abba. The nearest equivalent translation we have is probably 'Daddy'. Jesus allows us to share in that intimate relationship with the Father when we receive the Holy Spirit.
- **Deepest Experience:** *The Spirit gives us the deepest possible experience of God. 'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children, vs16. He wants us to know that we are children of God. In the same way that I want my children to know and experience my love for them so God wants his children to be assured of that love and of that relationship.*
- **Greatest Security:** Paul tells us that to be a son or daughter of God is the greatest security we could know. *For if we are children of God we are also heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, vs17.*

Unfortunately, some people, because of their experiences of their earthly father, view God as a mean and demanding God who gives us nothing and delights in taking everything from us. But that isn't the God of the Bible. In God we have a heavenly father/daddy who wants the best for each of us. The Holy Spirit makes God's love known, and real, to us.

(The Holy Spirit) Develops our Relationship with the Father: It is the Holy Spirit which helps to develop our relationship with, and brings us into the presence of, the Father. The Holy Spirit also helps us to pray and enables us to understand what God is saying through the Bible. Ultimately, we will never understand Christianity without the Holy Spirit opening our eyes.

(The Holy Spirit Creates) A Family Likeness: I always find it fascinating to see how children can look like both parents at the same time, even when the parents themselves look so different. But as we spend time in the presence of God, the Holy Spirit transforms us into the moral likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Holy Spirit makes us more like Jesus purifying our character and producing those transforming characteristics/fruit that the Spirit of God develops in our lives, which Paul writes about in Galatians 5:22: *the fruit of the Spirit is: love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; gentleness; and self-control.*

(The Holy Spirit gives) Gifts For All God's Children: I'm conscious that many people, including many life-long Christians, are uncomfortable, even fearful, when talking about the gifts of the HS and that's quite understandable, because we're talking about a supernatural God who is able to do un-natural things! And some of these gifts demonstrate the unusual acts of God in the world – the gifts of speaking in tongues, or miracles. But natural talents of: music; hospitality; friendship can be transformed by the anointing of the Holy Spirit into something very special.

4: Read Romans 8:14-17. What is of the greatest encouragement to you in these 3 verses?

5: How does the way we live actually influence the people we know and meet, so as to bring the values of the Kingdom of God to earth where we are? What barriers prevent us from influencing people still more?

6: The Holy Spirit was given to those first disciples because they had been waiting for Jesus' promise to be fulfilled. Spend some time in your Home Group waiting on God for a new experience of the Transforming Rule of the Holy Spirit in your life. *Why not light some candles and play some worship music quietly in the background as you do so?* Take the opportunity to pray for, and with, each other, asking God for a fresh anointing upon each of you.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG70: Transforming Presence (3/6) *Transforming Rule*

Exodus 20:1-17 & Acts 2:1-21

Home Group Sermon Notes

27th May 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

As you've looked ahead at the titles/texts for our Transforming Presence series, you've probably wondered why it is that we're looking at the Ten Commandments on Pentecost Sunday. But there is actually a great link between these two because Pentecost was the celebration of the giving of the law to Moses at Mount Sinai (as well the middle of the three annual Harvest festivals) and this is why Jerusalem was filled, 2:5, with: *God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven*. Sometimes we forget this connection in the midst of our Pentecost celebrations.

The Ten Commandments: A Transforming Rule?

Exodus tells the story of a people on the move from slavery to freedom and in the midst of their journey, God speaks. In Exodus 20:1, God reminds the people of Israel what he has done: *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery*. These commandments were given to a people who were already committed to God. They were given to a people who knew about him and were aware of the issues involved in following him. God gave these commands because he wanted an exclusive relationship with his people. We need to understand this setting if we are to understand the basis for these Ten Commandments.

Those who dislike religion in today's world (Hitchens and Dawkins) portray faith as an unattractive series of gloomy commands, as if God had given the Ten Commandments to depress and terrify His people. But it's not that way at all. The God who acts on the world stage suddenly draws very close to each person and offers life (the Hebrew word 'you' is addressed to the individual, not to the people as a whole).

And unlike so many of the laws of the ancient world, these commandments are not conditional threats: "do this or else you're in deep trouble". They simply lay out a way of living that brings life and peace. If we are committed to transforming our community according to the values of the Kingdom of God, it doesn't have to be complicated and difficult. To follow such a rule is not to be a slave. It is to be a free partner in God's purposes. All the commandments of Exodus 20 are designed to set people free - free from a false idea of God, free from violence in thought or in action, free for justice and free for love. It's true isn't it? When we look through those Ten Commandments we see a fantastic framework for life, don't we? Which society, if they lived by those guidelines, couldn't help but to live in harmony and peace and be a blessing to others?

We have a strong Christian heritage in this country. The biblical morals and ethics of the Ten Commandments are deeply ingrained in our culture: laws and Judiciary. However, the Jews, as we know in our own lives, struggled to live by the letter of the law because what should have been a Transforming Rule for life became a millstone for them (and created a field day for the Pharisees and teachers of the law to miss the point all together of what God was wanting to say and do amongst his people).

They, as we sometimes do, forgot to put God first in everything and to trust in his call on their/our lives – as Tom reminded us a couple of weeks ago. Jesus himself made this point very clearly when someone asked him which commandment was the greatest in Matthew 22:37-40. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is this; love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.*

The Ten Commandments and the New Covenant

Through the Ten Commandments the Lord reveals himself as a loving, caring God who can be related to and he invites his people to respond to this with absolute loyalty. Yet, despite the enthusiastic acceptance by the people ('We will do everything the Lord has commanded) this Mosaic covenant was no sooner made than broken. We read at the end of Exodus 24 how God summoned Moses back up the mountain for more instruction over the course of forty days and forty nights. But even as Moses was receiving details of how the Lord was to be worshipped, the people he had left behind were making the idol of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32)!

And the history of the Jewish people in the OT shows that, despite periods when their religion was more or less pure, they continued to hanker after other gods – they wanted to hitch a lift back to Egypt where the grass was greener - despite all that God had done for them. They saw the exclusive covenant relationship that the Lord wanted with them to be a sort of spiritually open marriage into which anything could be invited. It was only by God's grace that the covenant persisted at all. Many of their prophets grieved over the failure of Israel to keep the covenant. Jeremiah's prophecy of a New Covenant that could be kept must have struck a chord with many people – we'll look at this in a few weeks on Transforming Hope.

With Jesus the promised New Covenant became a reality. It was spelt out to his disciples, not on a mountain but in the upper room on the night before his death. Here, Jesus announced that the God's dealings with his people were now changing. There was to be a New Covenant sealed in his own blood, blood that was to be shed for his followers. Here around the table some of the great covenant themes return; there is a ritual meal, there are instructions to remember John 13:34: *A new commandment I give you: Love one another*. There are symbols too, (bread and wine) and the instructions to remember the covenant (do this in remembrance of me).

Yet although the covenant has changed some of the conditions stay the same. Under the New Covenant, we are to still love God exclusively. We are to put him before not just idols, but also our ambitions, interests and even our families. In some ways the demands of the New Covenant are harder than those of the old. We must keep the commandments not just externally in what we do but also internally in what we think and say.

But in another way the demands are easier. If we have a living faith in God through Jesus Christ then God has put his Spirit in us. We have God's power within us enabling us to fulfil the demands of the law. We now no longer have to fulfil the demands of the commandments in our own strength. It's no coincidence, therefore, and very significant, that the blessing of the Holy Spirit on those early disciples came on a day that celebrated the failure of the Ten Commandments to be a Transforming Rule in the lives of the Jews.

It is through the New Covenant, the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, God promises to transform us by Spirit to live in a distinctively different way. It's a covenant not dependant on human response and participation, but a covenant of pure grace (Ephesians 2). God will fulfil what he has promised. The blessing of the Holy Spirit on those first disciples transformed their lives; their ministry; their service; their preaching ... about 3,000 were added to the church after Peter's preaching in 2:41.