

Among the many annual awards, is one titled the "Foot-In-Mouth Award", which is conferred by the Plain English Campaign. The outspoken Mr Berlusconi was conferred this award in 2008 for his observation about Barak Obama, *He is handsome, good looking and he is suntanned!*

Donald Trump is the current front-runner for the "Foot-In-Mouth Award". His comment, "They (Mexicans) are bringing drugs, They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people", is one of several pronouncements the Plain English Campaign is struggling to sort through to decide which should receive the annual "Foot-In-Mouth Award"!

On the topic of Donald Trump, a poster appeared last week which read, *"Just Think - If Trump wins the election, it will be the first time in history, a white billionaire, moves into tax-payer-funded public housing, vacated by a black family."*

Like Donald Trump, the Apostle Paul is a controversial character. Paul may not be a candidate for the annual "Foot-in-Mouth" award, but Paul does not mince words; he got into trouble when he was alive, and continues to get into trouble, even now for his observations and his advice, and he even drags the best of us into controversy!

When reading Paul, we should remind ourselves:

*The Word of God is always true, always accurate and can always be trusted. Sometimes (not always), it is meant to be taken be literally; sometimes (not always), it is to be understood as allegorical or metaphorical, and sometimes (not always), the Word of God maybe time specific, occasion specific, or situation specific. **But the Word of God is always true, always accurate, and can always be trusted.***

Paul opens his letter to Timothy by reminding him of his call to faith in Jesus the Christ, and the prophetic words spoken by the elders of his

home church when they released him to join Paul and his ministry, to faithfully teach Truth, and be strong and have strength to stop false teachers. Paul taught Timothy a principle, which is important to us all, that God first works **in** us, to transform our thoughts and attitudes and change our ways and behaviour to reflect His character, before He works **through** us, to accomplish His plans and purposes

Having reminded Timothy of God's work **in** his life, Paul turns to matters of God working through his life, matters of the Church, starting with **WORSHIP**.

If we were to ask, **What makes a church?**, we would find the main reason for the Church's existence is **WORSHIP**. The church is not this building, nor is it the wonderful edifices we have, adorned with stained-glass windows and big oak doors and marvellous ironmongery. These wonderful works of art and rich architectural expressions, are illustrations of the majesty of God, and also timely reminders of our abundant history. God, however, has a different view of Church. He sent His Son to gather under His leadership, anyone and everyone who believes His plan to save us, we His special creation, from the coming disaster, when this corrupt world will be completely destroyed when God's perfect kingdom consumes it, and is **re**-established.

All whom Christ has gathered, the "Body of Christ", we are **THE CHURCH** God recognises and acknowledges.

King Solomon best describes the Church's singular and most important task. Having exhausted his search for the meaning of life he concluded, *Now that all has been heard about the search for the meaning of life, the end*

of the matter is this: Fear God (Worship God and revere Him) and keep His laws, for this is the whole duty of human beings.¹

Worship of God is at the heart of creation. The first human beings, when asked to "tend" God's creation and look after it, to **marvel** at, to **enjoy**, and to be **thankful** for all God made, were being invited to worship God. This is true worship.

Worship then, takes on a new dimension, when an act of disobedience upsets the perfect order. Satan separated the woman from the man and questioned what she understood God had told the man, ***Did God really say. . . ?*** Satan's clever ploy was to ask one question which sowed distrust between God and humans, and between men and women! This one question, and her later response tells us, Eve thought God did not want them to enjoy **everything** He had made - why was He holding back? Perhaps Adam misunderstood God's instruction; perhaps Adam had not told her everything and was holding back, things she should know.

The result of their disobedience was that they were now responsible to each other, for each other: the growth of their family was at great physical cost to the woman, and their daily existence was dependent on the man's hard work, because in the broken world into which they found themselves, man had now to work, cultivating the soil and harvesting its yield, and his hard work and sweaty toil, would be opposed by an equally powerful force, the strength of weeds, briars and thorny plants.

In describing the man's hard work, God gives us a glimpse into the spiritual battle in our world: we sow seeds to bless and benefit everyone, but the enemy sows weeds to stall and choke and hinder, even destroy the work we do.

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:13

Disobedience brought about a change in Worship. We would continue to **marvel** at, to **enjoy**, and to be **thankful** for what God has made, but worship now included praying for each other, that one would be protected from wrongly influencing the other, that one would not mislead the other into the error of their own ways, the error of their own thoughts and the error of their own understanding.

Worship was extended from thanking God for His creation, to praying for each other's protection from the enemy, that the enemy would not waylay one, who would mislead others!

Paul knows this very well. In his zeal to protect Jewish faith and customs, he misled them into the error of his ways, his thoughts and his misunderstanding. Having told Timothy at the start of his letter, *the goal of our instruction is love [which springs] from a pure and clean heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*², Paul wants to make it perfectly clear, the goal of all instruction to the Church (the body of believers in Christ's good news) is not to impose laws and regulations on them, to control them and their behaviour; the goal of all instruction to the Church is love, that each person would be drawn closer to God in their relationship with Him, and personally experience His love.

His opening counsel to Timothy, therefore, regarding matters of Church is, *First of all, then, I urge that petitions (specific requests), prayers, intercessions (prayers for others) and thanksgiving (to God) be offered on behalf of all people*³.

Paul is not challenging or changing Jesus' model prayer, nor is he listing all the different ways to pray. He offers us a three-pronged approach to

² 1 Timothy 1:5

³ 1 Timothy 2:1

prayer: bring your petitions to God (requests for yourselves and for situations you are aware of), intercede for others (speaking before God, what would be their intercessions, their needs), and offer God your own heartfelt thanks, for who He is and what He does for you, by His love.

This is a very powerful way to pray - for ourselves and our needs, for God to work **in** us; for others and their needs, for God to work **in** them, and to live in a spirit of thankfulness to God, without whose love, life would be extremely difficult.

Paul then makes an interesting suggestion, very appropriate as we celebrate our Queen's 90th birthday: pray for and make intercessions for kings (and Queens) and all who are in high positions, in places of power and authority. **WHY? *That we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*** This is a picture of life in God's kingdom, which Jesus taught us to pray for: *Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven!* There can be heaven on earth, if those in power and authority will rule by God's standards of justice; so Paul says, pray that they will!

To bring our petitions and intercessions for others, to praise God for His creation and His love for us, to pray for those in authority over us, all this is pleasing to God, who does not want anyone to be separated from Him, and for everyone to come to a point in their journey of life, when they have knowledge of Truth.

What then, is this **TRUTH**? It is this, explains Paul. *There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and humans, and that mediator is Christ who came into this world as Jesus.*

As a Church, as the body of Christ here in Botley, meeting on Westminster Way, we should rejoice, our worship is not different from Paul's advice to Timothy. We gather, offer our petitions, intercede for others, people we

know, and people we don't know, whose need we are aware of; we praise God for His creation and His love, **and** we pray for our nation, and our leaders and those in authority over us.

This morning is a time of encouragement. Paul's letter to his "son" in mission, reflects and confirms, our worship **is** pleasing to God; God **is** working **in** us, and He is waiting and wanting to work through us, more than he has and does, but we should aware of the danger of complacency, of being satisfied and content, what we do, is all we can (even should) do, and there is not much more to do. Lets' not allow pride and self-satisfaction, destroy God's good work in us, among us and through us.

May God always delight in each of you as we gather and participate in our worship of Him, who is Creator, Provider and Sustainer; and may you delight in God, who is Giver and Sustainer of Life, by His love and His righteousness. **AMEN**