

The Church of the Servant King

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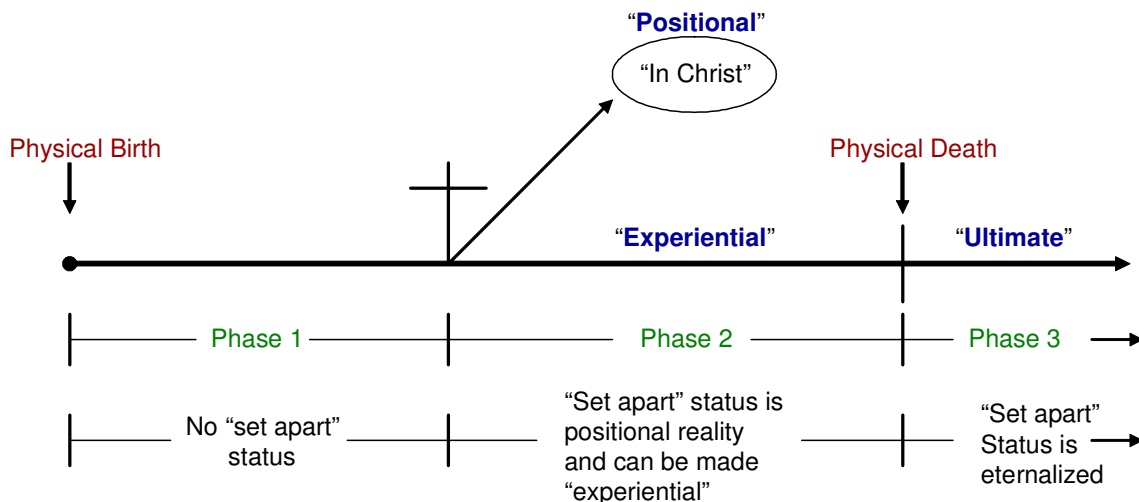
Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

(SB_1Cor_Introduction)

1 Corinthians 4

As we have observed in prior sessions, Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians with almost the entirety of four chapters devoted to addressing factionalism or sectarianism which Paul immediately recognized as a threat to the unity that these believers had in Christ. Their unity in Christ was a spiritual reality that needed to be internalized individually so that it might be realized into their observable behavior as a body or unit. Another way of saying it – these believers needed to begin realizing experientially that which was true positionally.

Three Types of Christian Sanctification



The majority (if not all) of Paul’s written ministry is directed to the believer and is focused upon the importance of the believer making “experiential” that which is true “positionally” for him or her. Paul had laid a foundation by evangelizing the Corinthians (as well as every other local body to whom he writes) while they were unbelievers. During his initial ministry in every city, Paul addressed their alienated status from God as people in phase 1. They had not been “set apart” or “sanctified” in position. Before Paul departed each city, he strengthened the foundation that he had laid with additional “phase 2” truth – truth applicable to believers and truth which was designed to sustain them and motivate them to service for others with evangelization of unbelievers and edification of fellow believers.

After Paul had laid a foundation, others would build upon that foundation. In Corinth, the “others” who had evidently built upon Paul’s foundation included Apollos and Peter (1 Cor 1:12). Paul warned both those who had built upon that foundation and the Corinthians themselves against shoddy workmanship (i.e. “phase 2”) in building upon the foundation laid by Paul. Paul’s teaching promoted unity – unity in Christ among believers; unity in faith among believers; unity in purpose and motivation among believers; unity in desire to see Jesus Christ exalted. The sectarianism that was manifesting itself in Corinth was not only counter to anything Paul had taught, but it was destructive – destructive of the unity that believers needed to be demonstrating

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in their daily “experience.” Where this type of unity amongst believers exists, it is manifest evidence that they have internalized that which is true of them positionally and it is being manifested in their lives through observable, outward experience. The emerging sectarianism provided contra-indications that “positional” realities had not been internalized by these believers.

*What do I mean by the term “internalized?”*¹ When a person “internalizes” something that they have learned, it means that it is no longer viewed as mere theory. It is no longer just “knowledge” (Gr. *gnosis*) or that which the human mind understands and even comprehends. It has permeated the soul’s conscience (i.e. norms and standards), frame of reference, self-consciousness (in the Christian – who we are relative to Christ and God), and emotions (i.e. that which we appreciate) – all because the believer has made volitional decisions to “reckon” or “consider” (Rom 6:11) Truth to be more than just theory. It is recognized as reality.

In the context of spiritual Truth for the phase 2 existence of the believer, “*internalization*” encapsulates Paul’s teaching in such passages as Romans 6:1-14 & 12:1-2 where he explains the mechanics of being a “spiritual” believer in practice – not just status.

Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. (Rom 6:6) [*Here, Paul highlights the fact that we must first know certain truths – truths related to our position in Christ*].

Even so **consider** [**reckon** in the KJV] yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6:11) [*After knowing, we must accept these truths to be reality, not just theory. “Knowing” plus “reckoning” equals “internalization”*].

And do not go on presenting [**yielding** in the KJV] the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present [**yield** in KJV] yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (Rom 6:13) [*Yielding occurs when that which is true positionally of the believer is actualized or realized into the believer’s daily experience. Positional reality is demonstrated experientially in the life of the yielded believer. “Internalization” of the truth is demonstrated when the believer yields to the Truth in his or her daily walk*].

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present** your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:1-2) [*In verse 1, Paul encourages actions that are consistent with a believer having internalized Truth. In verse 2, Paul indicates that the alternative to “knowing” and “reckoning” Truth to be reality versus theory is conformity to the world – thinking that is no different than the world and which will result in actions that are no different than the natural man. However, if Truth is internalized by the believer, transformation in thinking will lead to acceptable actions in God’s sight*].

Instead of having “*internalized*” what was true of them positionally and “working out their salvation” (Phil 2:12) – their “positional” status in Christ – these Corinthian believers had not set themselves apart “experientially.” They had made decisions consistent with “old man” thinking and had not “put on the new man” (Eph 4:17-24). As such, through the emergence of

¹ “Internalization” is defined as follows – “to make internal, personal, or subjective...to take in and make an integral part of one’s beliefs.” *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Retrieved July 20, 2008, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/internalize>

sectarianism, they were displaying a desire for self-exaltation. They had failed to set aside the cosmic models that they had adopted by humbly yielding to a Christ-like model of behavior (Phil 2:1-11).

In chapter 4, Paul continues to attempt to get these believers to see things from an eternal perspective and from the perspective of their responsibility in the world to be proper “servants” and “stewards” of the Truth – in particular, the “mystery” truths that God was now communicating through the Apostle to the Gentiles – Paul.

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD (4:1-5)

1 Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. 3 But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. 4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. 5 Therefore, do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes Who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

In this pericope, Paul makes an application of the servant model and proceeds to demonstrate how the servant model relates to their treatment of him. Paul's point – he is God's servant first and before he is their servant. Therefore, they are not allowed to judge the servant of another. As Paul mentions the concept of “judgment,” it causes him to remind them of the future judgment that awaits us all.

Paul uses a different word in verse 1 for “servant” than we typically find in the New Testament. Here, Paul uses *huperetas* (Gr. ὑπηρέτας). This word means an under rower and alludes to the slave rowers on a galley ship of the time. The rowers were all under the authority of the row master or row instructor who was responsible to insure that they rowed in unison so the ship did not go off course or around in circles. Paul is comparing himself and his fellow-workers to rowers under the authority of the same row master – Christ. The Corinthians were not to view Paul, Apollos and Peter as men teaching independent truth – much as the philosophers of Greece were viewed. The latter was a model derived from their culture and it had shaped their pre-Christian thinking and had been affecting their Phase 2 thinking because they had not humbly yielded to the truth Paul had taught.

Paul also indicates that they were “stewards.” The Greek word *oikonomos* (Gr. οἰκονομος) is used here in verse 1 and means “administrator.” After translation into Latin (Lat. *dispensatio*), it is the word from which “dispensation” is derived.

The “mysteries of God” are those truths for which Paul had been made an Apostle to the Gentiles and which were truths not previously revealed. The “mystery” truths of the present, Gentile-centric “dispensation” of the church age body of Christ had been committed to the Apostle Paul. Paul was responsible for faithfully executing God's charge to him as God's agent. Paul was responsible to be found trustworthy as God's agent or administrator (1 Cor 15:1-11). Note that Paul is not evaluated on the basis of how eloquent, “successful,” or “wise” he happened to be.

In verses 3-5, Paul highlights that it is not the believer's responsibility to judge Christian leaders' stewardship of God's will for their lives and ministries using standards of this world, i.e. popularity, “success,” charisma, etc. Such evaluations were of no consequence to Paul – they simply did not matter. Paul even indicates that his own personal evaluations did not matter to him since he realizes that his own personal evaluations of how effectively he had exercised his stewardship could be tainted by false measures. Rather, Paul indicates only a

desire to have a conscience that was consistent with divine norms and standards – to see things the way God sees them. Ultimately, Paul reminds his readers, we are all subject to God’s perfect (vs. our imperfect) judgment at the bema judgment seat of Christ.

Paul’s frequent references to the judgment seat of Christ and God’s judgment of believers must have been a constant motivation for him as he executed God’s calling. Paul mentions the judgment of believers in many passages (e.g. 2 Cor 1:14; 5:10; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 2:19-20; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8 and many others).

FOOL’S FOR CHRIST’S SAKE (4:6-13)

6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. 7 For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? 8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. 9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. 11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; 12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; 13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

Wow! Could Paul have provided a more stark contrast between his “experiential” sanctification and the thinking and lives of these Corinthian believers – believers who were acting in a way to exalt themselves to positions of greater importance in their sectarianism and abuse of spiritual gifts (to be addressed later)? I’m not sure, but one thing is certain. Paul is definitely taking these believers to task for their “fleshly” or “carnally” influenced thinking.

These believers were “exceeding what was written” because they had stepped outside the bounds of Paul’s instruction and Scripture by an experiential life in Phase 2 that accepted as truth things from their culture – namely, the idea that Paul, Peter and Apollos were teaching truth that was independent from the other. This was a Corinthian version of relativism.

These attitudes were displays of arrogance because they manifest a desire, shaped in a unique manner by Corinthian culture, for self-exaltation vs. a humility leading to Christ-exaltation.

Paul reminds these believers that they were not superior to anyone else. Such an attitude is derived from a sense of self-superiority born of self-sufficiency and a failure to recognize the ultimate source behind one’s blessings.

In a sense, these Gentile believers had committed the same error as had the Jews who rejected Jesus as the promised Messiah. Both groups considered themselves as having already attained to a satisfactory standing or status before God. The difference was that the Corinthians de-valued their phase 2 existence due to the confidence they had regarding their status as believers, whereas the Jewish unbelievers thought their phase 1 salvation was a foregone conclusion because of their heritage, racial status and status as children of the promise.

Paul proceeded to detail the dishonor that befalls those who bear the message of the cross. The Greeks despised people who did manual labor, as Paul had done in Corinth (cf. 9:4-18; Acts 18:3, 5; 2 Cor. 11:9; 12:13-

17); they regarded it as the work of slaves. To the world it is foolish to bless those who curse us, but that is what Paul did following the teaching and example of Jesus (cf. Luke 6:28; 23:34). All of these descriptions of the apostles emphasize the depths to which they were willing to stoop to proclaim the gospel (cf. Phil. 2). They did so even though people who viewed things naturally called them fools.²

PAUL'S FATHERLY CARE (4:14-21)

14 I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. 18 Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. 21 What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

Paul referenced an image that was familiar to these Corinthian believers – the “tutor” or *paidagogos* (Gr. παιδαγωγος). Young boys of families that could afford it frequently were provided a tutor who attended to the boy, escorted him, taught him manners and insured that lessons were completed. The “tutor” was entitled to respect. However, a “tutor” is not the “father” of the boy. Apollos and Peter and any others were the tutors of the Corinthians; whereas, Paul was the spiritual father.

In this pericope, Paul contrasts the human viewpoint and old-man based thinking of the Corinthians with that of the apostles. The viewpoint of the Corinthians was virtually identical to that of “natural” or unsaved people (1 Cor 2:14). The viewpoint of the apostles whom his readers professed to venerate and follow was quite different. The apostles were executing their Christian lives according to divine viewpoint – i.e. new-man thinking. They were imitating Christ in His submission to the Father’s will. This behavior on the part of the apostles was viewed as foolish, lacking power and not consistent with one possessing wisdom. However, Paul highlights the fact that not only were the Corinthians unwise, but they were also arrogant.

² Thomas Constable, “Notes on 1 Corinthians” at www.soniclight.com