

The Church of the Servant King

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“Christian Service – Stepping Into the Fray”

2 Corinthians 6.1-10

Preceding the “therefore” of 5.20 is four and a half chapters that lead to Paul’s statement that he and his companions were “ambassadors.” After opening this letter with an explanation of his delay in returning to Corinth, Paul proceeds to defend his ministry against false apostles and teachers who were slandering him and his message.

It is very evident that the Judaizers represented at least a contingent of these false teachers, e.g. Paul defends the superiority of Christ and His work over the Law (3.4-18; 4.1-6).¹ Paul then spends some time focusing upon some of the doctrines of the faith that provide his motivation via an eternal perspective (things that are not seen – 4.16-18) that transcends the temporal sufferings he has endured. For instance, Paul discusses the following:

- The resurrection as the basis for our future hope (5.1-8)
- The Judgment Seat of Christ – an evaluation of our service (5.9-11)

It is Christ’s sacrificial death (5.14-15) that motivates Paul in his ministry as an “ambassador” of the message of reconciliation. So, Paul reaches a point in his logic where a conclusion is in order. In so doing, he makes an almost unique reference to one aspect of his ministry – **ambassadorship** (see also Eph 6.20).

Exhortation

5.20 – Therefore, we are **ambassadors** for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we implore [*you*] on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [*This is a statement of Paul’s ministry as an ambassador – “be reconciled to God.” The “you” (Corinthians) is not there.*].

Statement of Fact/Doctrine

5.21 – He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. [*A justification passage. Note the conditionality – we might accept the Gospel or we might not have accepted the Gospel. God is the active agent in reconciliation.*].

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When we step into the fray as an ambassador, we must be empowered for battle.

¹ Actually, there may have been many groups that opposed Paul for Paul speaks of several different factions in the church (1 Cor 1.12, 13). It is possible that one of the groups held to a form of incipient Gnosticism – a high value was placed upon spiritual knowledge and experiences (1 Cor 8.1) that was only accessible to gifted teachers, perhaps those who were especially skilled in Greek rhetoric (11.6). Unlike Paul, these imposters collected fees for their services (11.7-9) and enjoyed comfortable lives. Their speech “tickled” the ears due to its deceitful eloquence (2 Cor 11.14-15; 2 Tim 4.3).

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**Outline of Our Passage – 2 Corinthians 6.1-10
“Stepping Into the Fray”**

- Exhortation (6.1)
- Parenthetical Note (6.2)
- Exhortation Continued (6.3)
- Illustration from Paul’s Experience (6.4-10)

Exhortation

6.1 – And working together [*with Him*], we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain [*Note the italicized “with Him.” Christians cannot be effective in ministry when they don’t “work together.” Also, how could the Corinthians have received the grace of God in vain? Can we receive the grace of God in vain?]*

How could the Corinthians have received the grace of God in vain (2 Cor 6.1)? By the time that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians (ca. Fall A.D. 56), he had been stalked and hounded by the Judaizers incessantly. These self-proclaimed, pseudo-apostles preached a different gospel – a works oriented gospel.

- Earlier, Paul argues for the superiority of Christ over the Law (2 Cor 3.7-11)
- Paul feared that the minds of the Corinthians might be corrupted with a Gospel different from the “simplicity” of Christ (2 Cor 11.3)
- Paul’s Jewish adversaries boasted in the fact that they were Jews as if they were superior to Gentiles (2 Cor 11.22)

Judaizers denied Paul’s message that the righteousness of God was obtained by faith and faith alone. This is why Paul took great pains to establish the superiority of Christ over the Mosaic system earlier in the letter (see 2 Cor 3.7-18). This is also why Paul took great pains in this letter to support his apostolic claims which were validated by his self-sacrificial behavior (see 2 Cor 11.5-33).

The word vain is the Greek word *kenon* and it means “empty,” “without content,” “without result,” “useless.” (See 1 Cor 15.14, 58; Gal 2.2; Phil 2.16; 1 Thess 3.5).

And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching [*is*] empty and your faith [*is*] also empty. (1 Cor 15.14)

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15.58)

Holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain. (Philippians 2.16)

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- For the Corinthians, to turn to Judaistic legalism was equivalent to spurning the grace of God (2 Cor 3.12-16; Gal 3.1-6).
- To once receive the grace of God for salvation, then to believe that salvation comes through a system of keeping the Law is tantamount to making one’s salvation “empty” or “without result.”
- How can the believer who comes to believe a works-oriented gospel ever be an effective witness of the grace message of salvation? His testimony is “empty” or “without grace content.”

- Believers can also make the salvation work of Christ “vain” in their lives by not becoming experientially righteous.

[Illustration: *Story of missionary who asked local pastors to name the things it took to be saved as he listed them on the chalk board.*]

Paranetical Note

6.2 – For He says,

‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.’ [Isa 49.8a]

God chose Paul, a Jew of Jews, to be the apostle to the Gentiles. **In God’s economy, the greater the spiritual responsibility for others, the greater the servant nature of one’s role relative to others.** Paul was very knowledgeable of Hebrew Scriptures where this principle was illustrated in Messianic prophecies. In our passage, we gain a glimpse into the spiritual wisdom of a man to whom the Holy Spirit had illumined a mind steeped in Scripture relative to the Person and Work of the Messiah – Jesus.

And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me. To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” [Does not quote next phrase from Isa 61.1-2 – “and the day of vengeance of our God.”]

Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, **“Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** (Lu 4:17-21)

Like Jesus, Who at the beginning of His Galilean ministry quoted only a portion of a Messianic passage that was relevant to His then present purpose on earth (Lu 4.16-21 cf. Isa 61.1-2) and did not quote that portion that dealt with His 2nd Advent, Paul repeats this pattern by quoting from Isaiah 49 only in part. Let us take a quick look at Isaiah 49 in order to gain insight into Paul’s spiritual rationale.

[Review Isa 49 here – esp. v. 4 (vanity of the Servant Messiah’s efforts potentially) & v. 8 (which Paul quotes in our passage)]

Paul’s spiritual logic: **Slide**

- Servant-Messiah’s vain efforts towards ancient Israel is similar to the vain manner in which the Corinthians were being tempted to compromise the pure grace Gospel message (*Isa 49.4*)
- God desired the Gentiles to be blessed (*Isa 49.6*) – a desire consistent with the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12
- Paul only partially quoted a Messianic passage (*Isa 49.8*) since actual fulfillment is not until the 2nd Advent
- Paul’s grasp of God’s purpose in human history – a stabilizing factor in Paul’s life
- Paul’s understanding of dispensational continuity vs. discontinuity

Paul’s quotation of Isaiah 49.8 was a rebuttal to the Judaizers – it is an example of God’s promise of salvation to the Gentiles also. This quote emphasized the fact that salvation was a gift provided by God which could not be earned or merited through human good or human systems of

righteousness. The “day of salvation” as far as the Corinthian Gentile believers were concerned was the new Age of Grace.

Exhortation Continued

6.3 – giving no cause for offense in anything so that the ministry will not be discredited [*The most important priority for the believer involved in ministry is the glorification of Christ. Everything else (politics, fleshly desires, liberties, “rights,” pleasures) is subordinated to that singular focus*].

Illustration from Paul's Personal Experience

6.4 – But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses [*“Endurance” is tantamount to Momentum. Paul begins his list of external adversities*]

6.5 – in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger

6.6 – in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love

6.7 – in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left [*Military metaphor*]

6.8 – by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report, regarded as deceivers and yet true;

6.9 – as unknown yet well known as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death

6.10 – as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.

Paul taught that the credentials and commendations the Corinthian believers should have been looking to find in their ministers was not to be based upon such factors as letters (3.1), self-recommendations (10.18) or religious credentials (11.22). The credentials and commendations that the Corinthian believers should have been seeking were the credentials that reveal a servant of God.

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In **verses 4-5**, Paul begins to itemize the hardships he has endured recognizing the principle that action speaks louder than words. (Compare to **1 Cor 4.9-13; 2 Cor 4.8-10; 11:5-33**). The list begins with nine outwardly imposed adversities that are divided into three groups and provide outward evidence of what is inside:

- **General Trials**
 - Afflictions
 - Hardships
 - Distresses
- **Inflicted by Men** – Acts 16.19-23 (Paul & Silas beaten and imprisoned for casting a demon out of a slave girl fortune teller, thus inciting her masters)
 - Beatings – 1 Cor 4.9-13, esp. v. 11.22-29
 - Imprisonments
 - Tumults (riots)
- **Self-Imposed**
 - Labors (hard work) – Acts 18.3-4 (Paul makes tents); 1 Cor 4.12; 1 Thess 2.9; 2 Thess 3.7-8
 - Sleeplessness – Acts 20.7-11 (Eutycus in Troas), 31; 2 Cor 11.27
 - Hunger – cf. 1 Cor 4.11; 2 Cor 11.27

In **verse 6**, Paul lists the inner qualities that he displayed in the face of such adversity. The display of these inner qualities should have served to validate his ambassadorship.

- Purity
- Knowledge
- Patience
- Kindness (benevolence)
- “Holiness of spirit” or “spirit that is holy”

- Genuine Love

In **verse 7**, Paul mentions two elements that serve as the foundation of these inner qualities:

- Word of Truth or “truthful Word”
- Power of God

In **verse 8**, Paul provides a military metaphor as he reflects upon the fact that he is in a spiritual war – as are all ambassadors. (Compare to earlier use of military metaphor in 1 Thess 5.8 and later use of military metaphor in Eph 6.11-17).

[Illustration here: The Charge of the Light Brigade

Lord Raglan – Commander in Chief of the British Army in the Crimea

Lord Lucan – Command of the Calvary Division

Lord Cardigan – Commander of the Light Brigade

General Scarlett – Commander of the Heavy Brigade]

In **verses 8b-10**, Paul provides a list of contrasts between eternal perspective/motivation (i.e. the divine assessment) and the temporal adversities (worldly assessment).

- Glory vs. dishonor
- Good report vs. evil report
- Truthful vs. deceivers
- Well-known vs. unknown
- Dying vs. alive
- Punished vs. not dead (e.g. a scourging prior to execution, but no execution)
- Sorrowful vs. always rejoicing
- Poor vs. enriching others
- Having nothing vs. possessing everything

Before You Step Into the Spiritual “Fray,” Check Your Power Source

Paul’s analysis of ambassadorship provides an interesting checklist of the type of spiritual power we need to engage in the conflict. I call these attributes and characteristics the “divine sphere of power” that shields and insulates us from the forces that seek to neutralize us, i.e. the “world,” the “flesh,” and “Satan.” Paul manifests the following components of that power sphere.

- Yieldedness to God (Rom 6.6, 11, 13)
- Objectivity
- Humility
- Momentum
- Personal love for Christ
- Impersonal (unconditional) love for mankind
- Momentum testing (“endurance”)
- Sharing the happiness of God

This divine power sphere is only built in the life of the believer who has allowed God to destroy the human implements of war such as fleshly defense mechanisms, “strongholds,” and belief systems built upon a lack of trust and knowledge of God’s word which are tantamount to human implements designed for temporal warfare.

We need a spiritual power sphere to protect our souls in a spiritual war. We need spiritual insulation against the darts of the world, the flesh and Satan. We need divine empowerment borne of the Holy Spirit’s seven-fold ministry in our lives – production of Christian character, empowerment for Christian service, promotion of praise and thanksgiving, witnessing with our spirits, teaching us, leading us, and making intercession for us.

Concluding Points

Ambassadorship:

- Ambassadorship is work
- Ambassadorship involves personal sacrifice
- Ambassadorship is direct involvement in a war
- Ambassadors suffer
- Ambassadors should not expect to receive approbation from those they serve
- Ambassadors can only be effective when shielded in divine power

Principles of spiritual war:

- A warrior/ambassador has a vision, a cause to which he is devoted that provides a transcendence to his life that is greater than self-preservation. [*Paul's eternal perspective & focus on spiritual realities*]
- An eternal perspective that transcends the temporal is pre-requisite to "endurance" in the spiritual "fray"
- Without an eternal perspective, the world is viewed (by default) through an anthropocentric, self-centered set of lens
- Actions speak louder than words. Corollary: Deeds are not necessary for salvation, but they are a powerful validation of one's life and message.
- The world [*cosmos*] offers man a false sense of power and a false sense of security. The delusion of the cosmos system is so effective because believers have no vision that provides them transcendence above the details of life and allows them to see through the cosmic fog.
- Examples of the false sense of power and false sense of security offered by the world –
 - whether one has a secretary at work;
 - how pretty one's wife happens to be;
 - how much money a person makes;
 - how recognized one's husband is in society;
 - how many people attend your church;
 - one's expertise in a chosen field of endeavor;
 - degrees;
 - titles;
 - a paneled office; (Paul conveys quite the opposite in our passage – hunger, punished; beatings; imprisonments; sleeplessness).

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Facts of note:

- The Church in Corinth was planted on Paul's second missionary journey in AD 50-51 after his visit in Athens (cf. Acts 15:36; 18:1-18).
- Paul stayed with Roman Jews (who were expelled in AD 49 or 50) named Aquila and Priscilla eighteen months in Corinth teaching the word of God and working as tent makers (Acts 18:1-3, 11)
- Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia and joined Paul in Corinth whereupon Paul devoted himself full time to the ministry of the word (Acts 18:5)
- When the Jews rejected Paul, he left the synagogue and began meetings in the house of Titus Justus next to the synagogue (Acts 18:7-8)
- The Jews brought Paul before Gallio (proconsul of Achaia AD 51 or 52) for breaking their law of worship, but he dismissed Paul since it was not a matter of "wrong or of viscous crime" (Acts 18:12-17)

- Paul set off for Syrian Antioch in or about A.D. 52 (Acts 18:18--22)
 - In Cenchrea he had his hair cut from his vow (18:18)
 - Aquila and Priscilla accompanied Paul on his journey to Ephesus where they remained and provided instruction to Apollos (18:18-19, 26-27 cf. 1 Cor. 1.12; 3.5-6)
 - Apollos later went to Corinth for ministry (Acts 18.18-28)
 - Paul set off from Ephesus, landed at Caeserea, greeted the church there and went down to Syrian Antioch (18:21-22)
- Paul spent some time in Antioch, and set off on his third missionary journey traveling back through Galatia, Phrygia and went to Ephesus in the Fall of A.D. 53 and stayed there for a period of 2 ½ years (18:23; 19:1ff)
 - Paul probably wrote the letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5.9 while in Ephesus – a letter misunderstood by the Corinthians (5:10-11) and later lost.
 - Paul was visited by an official delegation from Corinth with specific questions (Acts 16.17)
 - 1 Corinthians was probably written to address these matters in A.D. 54-55.
 - This didn't solve the problems.
 - Paul made a "painful" visit (2 Cor 1.15 & 2.1) because of the action of the man referred to in 2 Cor 2.5 & 7.2.
 - Paul sent a 2nd disciplinary letter carried by Titus (2 Cor 2.4 cf. 2 Cor 7.8-9)
 - After the silversmith's riot, Paul left Ephesus bound for Troas to meet Titus. Paul could not locate Titus and went forward to Macedonia concerned about Titus' safety (2 Cor 2.12-13; 7.5). Titus carried good news about the church, but bad news about the Judaizers.
 - Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia and followed it up with a 3rd visit during the winter of A.D. 56-67 (Acts 20.1-4).