

Lesson 14: “The Scum of the Earth” 1 Corinthians 4:6-13 Craig Crawshaw**REVIEW**

A brief review of where we have come in 1 Corinthians thus far would be helpful, as we approach today’s message.

Chapter One emphasized God’s wisdom, as opposed to worldly foolishness when it comes to evaluating the cross of Christ (v.18). And Paul clearly states: *“we preach Christ crucified.”* (v. 23)

In Chapter Two, Paul continues by reinforcing *“I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”* (v. 2) The wisdom he encouraged in Chapter One is now called a *“mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined.”* (v. 7) By the end of the chapter he reveals that this wisdom we can access is truly “the mind of Christ” (v. 16).

In Chapter Three, Paul develops further by three metaphors that speak of building up both the individual and the church: (1) The metaphor of feeding on the milk, then the solid food of the Word (v. 2-4); (2) The metaphor of planting seeds of truth and watering them, God causing the growth (v. 7); (3) The metaphor of building on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ with quality hard work of study and fruitful ministry. (v. 12-14). He finishes the chapter with the amazing statement *that “all things belong to you”* (v. 22), with the qualifying and encouraging follow-up: *“and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.”* (v. 23).

Summary of the summary: GOD’S WISDOM = MIND OF CHRIST = ALL THINGS BELONG TO YOU as you build on the foundation of Jesus.

Now this could (and did in the case of the Corinthians) lead to arrogance (4:6). So in Chapter 4 Paul urges them to consider themselves, as did the apostles, as *“servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God”* (v. 1). In this there is no room for boasting (v. 7).

Now, in our passage today, Paul calls them out on arrogance, and boasting, and demonstrates the life of an apostle as a supreme example of servanthood and stewardship. He is trying to encourage them, and us by extension, to give ourselves away even more fully to acquire the wisdom of God found in the mind of Christ.

OUR TEXT OF THE DAY

1 Corinthians 4:6-13 *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. 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?*

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. 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.

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. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are

persecuted, we endure; 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.

WARNING #1 – ARROGANCE (v. 6)

Arrogance is akin to pride – thinking of oneself more highly than one ought to think.

Romans 12:3 *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think ...”*

This is the sin that ultimately cast Satan out of heaven.

Ezekiel 28:16 *You were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore, I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub.*

And it is the sin that causes each of us to fall away from God.

Proverbs 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.*

Remember that the Corinthians were divided into thinking that they were more sophisticated in their communication, like Apollos; or more fervent in their faith, like Paul; or more law-abiding in their obedience, like Peter. All became arrogant and boasted of their superior spiritual position. Paul knew that this was far from the wisdom of God that gloried in the cross of Christ, and far from exhibiting the mind of Christ, and far from building on the foundation of Jesus Christ with precious works of righteousness. This was arrogance and pride, pure and simple.

And when we talk about ourselves and our accomplishments and our opinions more than about our concerns for the needs of others, we are far from the servants and stewards God wants us to be.

WARNING #2 - BOASTING (v. 7)

This is a close cousin to arrogance. It is arrogance expressed in words. In verse 7 Paul asks three questions for the boaster to ponder:

#1: *“Who regards you as superior?”* Do you really think it’s a long list, or is it just your bloated perception? Do you really think that others admire one who is always boasting about himself?

#2: *“What do you have that you did not receive?”* Do you not know that everything you have is a good gift from God – your talents, your strengths, your personality? Do you really think that you achieved what you are? If so – think again.

#3: *“And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”* And if you know that God is the giver, why do you steal the glory from Him by boasting as if you had anything to do with it? Boasting deflects the glory from God that is His due.

It is one thing to be grateful and “proud” of what God has given you and acknowledging it in that way is acceptable. But trying to gain praise and applause and recognition by subtle or not so subtle means is (1) boasting, and (2) stealing the glory from God who deserves the praise.

GOD’S SARCASM (v. 8)

Yes, even God knows how to use sarcasm to make a point, and He does so through Paul in verse 8.

“You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us ...” This is Paul’s way of sarcastically pointing out their self-sufficiency and self-exaltation. Let us never think that we are self-made individuals. Yes, our hard work and life experiences have helped mold us into who we are. But we are each a product of dozens, even hundreds of others who have caused us to think and act and react the way we do – hopefully mostly for the good. And the architect of all we are is God. A wise and Christ-minded person knows this and give the credit to whom it is due.

REFERENCING THE ROMAN COLOSEUM (v. 9)

The Romans loved their spectacle of men against wild beasts. In places like the famous Roman Coliseum, brave warriors would first be sent in to battle the lions, and some would be victorious because of their superior strength. And the crowds would love to watch and root. Then would be sent in less experienced warriors, and then those condemned to die, each with less and less chance of victory over the ravenous lions. And lastly, for a sure show of beastly prowess, would be sent in the sick and lame, who would surely be devoured by the lions. This is what Paul is referring to when he says, *“God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death.”* He is likening his lot to the sick and lame, apostles who have become as *“a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.”*

Paul is saying that the Corinthians, rather than appreciating the significant role that he and the other apostles have had in their spiritual birth and growth, are as it were “casting them to the lions” as those now to be discarded. Wow – may we appreciate our spiritual mentors and examples as more than that!

SARCASM CONTINUES – NOW WITH COMPARISONS (v. 10)

Paul now sarcastically compares the apostles with the Corinthians’ view of them.

The Corinthians viewed themselves as prudent in Christ, strong and distinguished. In contrast, they viewed the apostles as fools for Christ’s sake, weak and without honor. Paul would be glad to be a fool for Christ’s sake, and be weak and without honor – but it is not appropriate that the Corinthians treat them this way. And they did.

A PICTURE OF THE “EMPTIED” DISCIPLES FOR SERVICE (v. 11-12a)

Only occasionally does Paul allow others to see the depth of devotion that he and the other apostles went through to be servants and stewards to others. But here, he does so in some detail to make the point of unconditional love and the depth of “emptying” to which they went for the sake of others.

Hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, toiling with their own hands goes the description. Now Paul is not complaining but trying to show the depth of love they had for the Corinthians. Paul is here teaching the all-important concept of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE which he continues in the next phrase.

A TRIPLE EXHORTATION (12b-13a)

Don't miss this next triple exhortation of what a Christian servant must be. These are SO practical and SO dependent upon God to accomplish. But they are a wonderful 3-fold practical description of how a true servant of God will act and react.

1. BLESS when reviled
2. ENDURE when persecuted
3. CONCILIATE when wronged (slandered)

#1 teaches the critical principle of UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.

When we are put down, dismissed or ignored, what does a servant of God do? He blesses – giving love when love is not deserved and will undoubtedly be unrequited. This is mirroring the unconditional love of God shown to us, when we were in the midst of dismissing and ignoring Him.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

#2 teaches the critical principle of ENDURING LOVE

When we try to show Christian love and it is rejected or ignored, we ENDURE in love. We not only show love once, but time and time again and season after season. God's love does not fade, and neither should ours. This is the way of a servant-Christian. We persevere in prayer, in kindness and in LOVE.

#3 teaches the critical principle of RECONCILING LOVE

Not only do we love without conditions, and love continually, but we must also love in the hopes of RECONCILING. I appreciate the wording that when we are slandered we TRY to conciliate. It doesn't always work, but we give it our best effort. It always takes both parties to reconcile differences, but we will give our best effort of LOVE to make it happen. This will take forgiveness, patience and compromise of some sort, but we will try hard to RECONCILE in LOVE.

Do you have them down?

- (1) LOVE that is UNCONDITIONAL (that means without conditions!)
- (2) LOVE that is ENDURING (that means without a time limit!)
- (3) LOVE that is RECONCILING (that means "going the extra mile" to resolve differences)

Practicing these will help you to be the WISE, CHRIST-MINDED, FOUNDATION DEVELOPING Christian who is a humble servant of God.

THE SCUM OF THE EARTH (v. 13b)

Paul is prone to some exaggeration at times to make a point. And this appears to be one of those times. He says that he and the apostles have become both "the scum of the earth" and "the dregs of all things" in order to be servants and stewards.

Now certainly Paul had endured far more than most to "turn the world upside down" and allow the entire known civilized world to hear the gospel of Christ. No question he gave his

all. And he was never given his due in his lifetime, as is true of so many martyrs and faithful servants of God.

But I would suggest that these phrases exaggerate to make a point. The point being, that God wants his followers to give their all – even to the degree of feeling as though they are despised and rejected, as was Jesus.

May we as Christ-followers and servants of the most High, be willing to “take one” for our Master. May we be willing to share in “the fellowship of His sufferings” and “being conformed to His death” if need be (Philippians 3:10).

This might be in enduring with love through domestic struggles. Or it might be in being faithful through church squabbles. Or it might be in holding our tongue through uncalled-for tongue-lashings by others.

We might just feel like “scum of the earth” and “dregs of all things,” but if it is suffering as a faithful follower of Christ, He will give the strength to love UNCONDITIONALLY, ENDURINGLY and RECONCILINGLY.

It may not be what you “signed up” for – but it is in the “small print.” And remember that through enduring being treated like a servant, you are being conformed to the image of Christ. Now that’s worth any “boot camp” experience – emerging as a Child of God in His image!