

Series: 1 Corinthians
Title: Fools For Christ's Sake
Text: 1 Corinthians 4:8-17
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1 Corinthians 4: 8: Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. 9: For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. 10: We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but ye *are* wise in Christ; we *are* weak, but ye *are* strong; ye *are* honourable, but we *are* despised. 11: Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; 12: And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: 13: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, *and are* the offscouring of all things unto this day. 14: I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn *you*. 15: For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *have ye* not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 16: Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. 17: For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

If we ever think we have already attained all the blessings of redemption or if we find ourselves accepted by this present evil world then let it be a sure sign that we are living opposite to God's faithful servants.

A WRONG VIEW

We see how wrongly believers can perceive ourselves. Paul says to the church at Corinth this is how you perceive yourself and how the world perceives you—**1 Corinthians 4: 8: Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.**

After hearing Paul preach the gospel which declares that the eternal redemption of all God's elect has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ many believers at Corinth began to think they had already attained to all the blessings of redemption which shall be ours when Christ returns to redeem our bodies into final glory.

After hearing Christ declare the gospel that every born-again believer is complete in Christ by Christ—for "as he is so are we in this world"—many Corinthian believers saw themselves as already perfected as we shall be when Christ returns.

Many believers at Corinthian thought themselves as having already attained the full blessings that await us when Christ returns and resurrects us into the new heavens and new earth.

Paul declares not what they really were but how they saw themselves "Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us." They thought they did not need the apostle Paul anymore because they had grown beyond him. They thought they did not need his preaching. They thought they had grown so holy and perfect that they were in need of nothing. Paul said, "I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you."

Brethren, if we ever have such thoughts of ourselves already then we are like the church at Laodecia. Christ said to them,

Revelation 3: 14: And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; 15: I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. 16: So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. 17: Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: 18: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

Indeed, by the finished work Christ accomplished on the cross, Christ has made his people complete in him; righteousness in him. Our life is in Christ at God's right hand. But the believers flesh—the old nature of sin—is still sinful flesh. The flesh is not growing more perfect. Our flesh is dust and must be put off. Like every other aspect of our salvation, this too is the work of our Redeemer...

Philippians 3: 21: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

In the end Christ will return, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom unto God and has put down all rule and authority. But this has not happened yet because the last enemy to be destroyed is physical death and it clearly evident that physical death is not yet destroyed.

1 Corinthians 15: 22: For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 23: But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 24: Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25: For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26: The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

It is an utter insult to God's faithful pastors who constantly bear persecution from God hating rebels for any man to deny that Christ shall return and raise his people anew into the new heavens and new earth. Paul said,

1 Corinthians 15: 30: And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?

Listen to no man who teaches otherwise. The Holy Spirit of God says through Paul,

1 Corinthians 15: 48: As *is* the earthy, such *are* they also that are earthy: and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly. 49: And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. 50: Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 51: Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52: In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53: For this corruptible *must* put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54: So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

We will not be perfect until Christ returns, until we see him, until he perfectly conforms us to his image in glory. Now, we worship God through faith through the preaching of the gospel and we see and know in part. But faith and preaching are those childish things we shall put away when Christ returns for then our faith shall be sight and then we shall know as we are known.

1 Corinthians 13: 9: For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10: But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. 11: When I was a child, I spake as a child, I

understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. 12: For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.10: But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away... 12: For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Indeed, every redeemed, regenerated believer is son of God right now. And we are not like we shall be. But soon, when Christ returns again, we shall be perfectly conformed to the image of Christ.

1 John 3:2: Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

So we see how wrongly the Corinthian believers perceived themselves. This erroneous thinking led them to think this is the time to be at ease when there remains work to do in spreading the gospel throughout the world.

Brethren, let this be a warning to us. A believer can think such vain things of ourselves. It does not mean that a believer is an unbeliever. Paul did not say that of his Corinthian brethren. It merely means they were in great error. May God make us see that we are yet in this body of death. We have not yet attained. Only Christ can make us perfect. He will do so in the day he returns.

THE WORLD'S REGARD TOWARD THE FAITHFUL

Next, we see the regard this world has for faithful servants of God. We see it contrasted with the way the world regarded the Corinthians. Paul said—**1 Corinthians 4: 9: For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.**

God made the apostles to be regarded as lowest by the world. They were an open theater before the world, angels and men. They were men daily exposed to death. Worse, the world treated them like men who were condemned to die. They were disdained and hated like common death-row convicts, denied all comforts by men.

Paul contrasts some of these sufferings, with the vain opinions the Corinthians had of themselves. This is how the world regarded the apostles and how the world regarded the Corinthians—**1 Corinthians 4: 10: We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.**

What a blessing of God's grace it is to be so committed to Christ, his people and the furtherance of his gospel that this world regards us as "fools for Christ's sake", "weak" and "despised." But how sad it is if we live in such compromising ease that this present evil world regards us as "wise", "strong" and "honorable."

The apostle Paul was literally deprived of food, water, clothing and shelter as he was persecuted by the world for the gospel's sake—**1 Corinthians 4: 11: Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;**

Corinth was a wealthy city. Yet, it was the one place where, to prevent men from accusing him of preaching for personal gain, Paul worked a job to support himself—**1 Corinthians 4: 12: And labour, working with our own hands:**

By God's grace, Paul did as Christ did when he walked this earth—**1 Corinthians 4: 12...being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: 13: Being defamed, we intreat**--Christ Jesus was despised and rejected of men; he had no place to lay his head; but when Christ was reviled, he did not revile back; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself unto him that judgeth righteously.

Paul said—**1 Corinthians 4: 13...we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.**—Those who preach the gospel of Christ in truth are regarded as the filth you wash off your hands and rinse down the drain.

Brethren, which one of these most resembles us in our day? In proportion to how zealously we give ourselves to Christ and the furtherance of his gospel—so the world will regard us the way they regarded Paul. But in direct proportion to how lukewarm we are—the more this world will regard us like they did the Corinthians. I ask you and I ask myself—which of these two do we most resemble in our day?

Paul desired to suffer for Christ's sake. He said, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." (Php 3: 10) He desired first and foremost to be a partaker of the righteousness accomplished by Christ's suffering. But also to suffer for preaching Christ. Why? Paul had been taught this most precious truth by the Lord,

2 Corinthians 12: 9: And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10: Therefore I take pleasure...in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Notice, God appointed the apostle to these sufferings. He said, "God hath set forth us...as it were appointed to death." Paul encouraged the brethren, saying, "That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto." (1 Thess 3: 3)

Believer, do you know God has not only given us faith to believe on Christ but we are also to give ourselves so much to Christ and his gospel that we suffer from ungodly men for Christ's sake? "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me." (Php 1: 29-30) Why is it given to believers to suffer in this world?—"for his sake?"

One, it is because Christ said, "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me they shall persecute you." "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim 3: 12) Shall Christ suffer for me and shall not I suffer for him? If we declare God's sovereign, free grace in the divine election of those he shall save we shall suffer persecution from men. If we declare Christ's particular redemption of his sheep men will despise and reject us. If we preach the necessity of the irresistible, regenerating and calling grace of the Holy Spirit we will suffer for Christ's sake. But make sure it is for Christ's sake and not that we brought it on ourselves for our ill behavior.

Another reason we are appointed to suffer is because it teaches us, declares to this world, to angels and men that God's children have no power but Christ alone!

2 Corinthians 13:4: For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

2 Corinthians 4:10: Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 11: For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

Christ lives and by him we live. We are strengthened by Christ and delivered by Christ and kept.

FAITHFUL AND LOVING CORRECTION

Lastly, we see the faithful and loving correction of Christ's true pastor—**1 Corinthians 4: 14: I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.**

Paul wrote this with the love of a father. He wrote this to warn his own children whom he loved—"as my beloved sons I warn you." He did not write this to whip and shame them. No sinner can be shamed into repentance. Only God can grant us repentance. Imagine if we received a letter from a faithful pastor saying these things of us. It would take the grace of God to grant us a hearing ear and a repentant heart. Only God can do so.

There are many instructors but not many fathers—**1 Corinthians 4: 15: For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.**

These instructors probably included true teachers. But it appears Paul is speaking of those false prophets among them and among us.

An instructor was a schoolmaster—a guardian or pedagogue—who guided young boys. They made every step with the young lad scrutinizing their every move, supervising their lives and morals. If the boy stepped out of line the schoolmaster would give him a slap. Paul used it to show us what the law was unto us.

Galatians 3:24: Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster...[until] Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25: But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

There are preachers everywhere who think men can be shamed or moved in their feelings or whipped into submission to Christ. Such men preach law and morality, examining, criticizing, shaming, whipping professing believers into outward submission with the law.

There are ten thousand instructors, Paul says, "yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Faithful pastors preach the gospel of Christ crucified. They admonish in light of Christ. They wait on the Spirit. They do not force men into obedience.

Paul was such a faithful servant of Christ. Notice Paul's spirit of love and mercy, "as my beloved sons I warn you" "I beseech you" and Timothy will "bring you into remembrance." That is not the spirit of law but of grace.

It is because God's preacher has a special relationship to those God has born-again through their gospel. There is a tie between God's true preacher and those God has saved under their preaching—Christ and his glory is that tie. By God's grace, such preachers are fathers to those children. And true preachers really feel that way toward those born-again under their preaching. Listen to how often Paul speaks this way:

1 Corinthians 4: 17: For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son,...

1 Timothy 1: 2: Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith

Galatians 4: 19: My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.

Philemon 10: I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.

The apostle John said, 3 John 1:4: I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Those born of God under their preaching will be their crown of rejoicing in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 2: 19: For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are* not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20: For ye are our glory and joy.

So Paul gives his children this exhortation—**1 Corinthians 4: 16: Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.**—“Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.” (1 Cor 11: 1)

He loved them so much he even sent Timothy away from himself to them—**1 Corinthians 4: 17: For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.**

What were Paul’s ways? How did Paul follow Christ? What did Paul teach everywhere in every church? He believed on Christ resting in him from all his former vain confidences. And he gave himself so fully to furthering the gospel of Christ that the world counted him a fool for Christ’s sake. He suffered persecution, imprisonment and at last death.

Brethren, if we follow the Corinthians we shall be treated as the Corinthians by this present evil world. But if we follow Paul as Paul followed Christ we shall be treated as Christ was treated, despised and rejected of men. Listen to Paul’s ways.

Philippians 3: 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, 9: And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11: If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 12: Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. 13: Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14: I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 15: Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. 16: Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. 17: Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. 18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19: Whose end is destruction, whose God *is their* belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) 20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: 21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

AMEN!