

Call to Obedience # 437
 PO Box 299 Kokomo, IN 46903 USA
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If Paul Were A Pastor Today

Oh, how we love Paul! How we love him for his teachings, his spirit, his character, his devotion, his zeal and his abandonment of all to be all for God.

However, beloved of God, by today's standards of pastoral success (where numbers mean everything), Paul was an immense failure. He just could not keep people with him. Look at these lamentations found in his epistles:

This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me... (2 Tim. 1:15);

For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state (Phil. 2:20);

*For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's (Phil. 2:21);
 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge (2 Tim. 4:16).*

Because people abandoned Paul for something else, he also had to say: *I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. 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. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me (1 Cor. 4:14-16).*

But followers of him they would not be. He who had won so many souls to Christ and established so many churches ended up losing almost all of his converts and at times had to make tents to support himself (1 Thes. 2:9; 2 Thes. 3:8). I am convinced that if he lived today, he would do no better. Here are some reasons why:

1. Paul did not preach what people wanted to hear but what they needed to hear to gain and to keep the life Christ purchased for them. With that, he preached under the anointing and direction of the Holy Spirit. He was not a prisoner to church bulletins, nor to church machinery, nor to the fear of man but to God only.

2. Paul prayed so much that he was not able to meet the expectations and duties of ministry which others laid upon him. Prayer was his priority, it never took second place. Prayer was his life. Everything he did and spoke came out of prayer. He prayed with passion and he preached with passion.

3. Paul was too serious. He refused to jest or joke. Along with all other apostles, prophets and Jesus, he admonished people to be sober and to shun idle words (Eph. 5:4; Matt. 12:36). Paul spent more time weeping than laughing (Acts 20:19; 2 Cor. 2:4). He sowed with tears and reaped with joy: a joy known by only very few people. He also had the joy of obedience which needed no propping up with earthly hilarity. There is no place for comedians nor clowns in our pulpits. Preachers must stop being like *one of them*, such as the rebel crowd Aaron gave in to. It always leads to a golden calf that cannot save. They must be like Moses ascending into the Mount of God, aspiring to be like Him.

4. Paul did not believe in dividing the flock. It is obvious that he believed that God's people should worship together as one family, not as we often see it today in the United States with a contemporary service for the young and a traditional service for the old. Here, fathers are divided from their sons and mothers from their daughters in worship. Brothers are divided from brothers, sisters from sisters and grandparents from their grandchildren. Jesus prayed: *That they all may be one... that the world may believe...* (John 17:21). Paul repeatedly instructed Christians to be of one mind, one mouth, one spirit, in one accord (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 1:27 & 2:2). The Psalmist declares: *...how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!* (Ps. 133:1). Wherever the Holy Spirit works, He brings all ages together. The Holy Spirit always unites God's children. The devil always tries to divide them. The church was born in oneness. *And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse* (Mal. 4:6).

Pastors in our churches allow the division of the church by giving in to the pressures of man. They give in so that they will not lose anybody. Too many of them are more concerned about losing people than they are about losing God! Pastors do not want to lose the old because they do the praying and the sacrificing; they do not want to lose the young because they are the future and numbers mean everything to many of them. We need the old for wisdom and the young for strength. Families have worshipped together for 2,000 years and by these means children have honored their fathers and mothers. The young need to honor the old. Also, in the matter of worship decisions, the hoary head should get due respect (Prov. 16:31). It grieves the precious Holy Spirit for the older saints to be blasted out of the sanctuary by noisy music.

5. Paul meddled regarding how women should dress. That is not well received. He stated it this way: *likewise also that women should adorn*

themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire (1 Tim. 2:9 ESV). Any woman who dresses inappropriately puts men into serious temptation. She will be held accountable for this on Judgment Day.

6. Paul never pushed for church growth beyond intimacy with Christ. He advocated growth in Christ, being rooted and grounded in Him; he advocated growing up in Him. Yes, he was passionate about witnessing, he was zealous at winning souls, but look at what he put on the top of his list. What do these statements tell you about where his heart was? *That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings...* (Phil. 3:10). *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Phil. 3:14). *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain* (Phil. 1:21). *...that I may win Christ, And be found in Him...* (Phil. 3:8-9).

Paul wanted Christ, that is all. And because he had Him, he rejoiced evermore. His emphasis was not on numbers but to be *in Christ*, a phrase which he used 74 times in his letters. Whatever is the subject of our focus will control us. Is it Christ or is it numbers? If our witnessing does not come out of the *in Christ* overflow, it has no life in it.

7. Paul took a strong stand against adultery and homosexuality (Rom. 1:27-32; 1 Cor. 6:9). He rejected divorce by the law of Moses. He upheld Jesus' position on marriage as was given to us in the book of Matthew, a one flesh doctrine: *...What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder* (Matt. 19:6). He rejected the liberal marriage laws of both Jerusalem and Rome.

8. Paul preached that salvation requires repentance (Acts 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:10).

9. Paul believed that Jesus died on His cross to forgive us from our sins and that we have to die on our cross daily to follow Him (Luke 9:23). And if we do not follow Him, we are not part of His kingdom! Paul said that he died daily (1 Cor. 15:31). This is the narrow way that is rarely preached from today's pulpits. Yet it is the way of abounding rivers of life flowing from the throne of God. Any gospel that does not kill the old Adam within you, to give you the new Adam, is a counterfeit of the devil. The devil hates the cross.

10. Paul never lowered the standards of righteous living to get more people into the sanctuary. Paul preached that without holiness *...no man shall see the Lord* (Heb. 12:14). People today do not want holiness; they want happiness, not realizing that true happiness comes only through holiness.

11. Paul called “carnal Christians,” also known as backsliders, enemies of God. He declared God’s judgment upon them as Jesus also did (Rom. 8:6-9; Rev. 3:16). Paul’s most scathing commentary on this matter is in his review of Israel passing through the wilderness: all Israel experienced the saving power of the blood of the Lamb, all ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink of the Rock which is Christ, but because of their murmurings they were in the end destroyed by their Savior. Yes, the One who first saved them then destroyed them! *Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition... Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall* (1 Cor. 10:11-12). Yes, you read it right: they that stand can fall. The masses of church people will not hear this, but we need to hear it!

In summary: Paul did the right thing at the cost of pastoral fame. As we follow him in theology, let us follow him in his pastoral role. It is an ancient truism: The lower the standards, the cheaper the product, the more will come to get it. My friend, it cost Jesus everything to purchase your salvation and it costs you everything to get it and keep it. In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was murdered by the Nazis for his faith: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” It is people like this who will continue to pass on the torch of Life from generation to generation and from shore to shore.

The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen.

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