

Sunday, May 3, 2009

Living Hope EFC

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Paul: An example of Mature Christian living: Rom.1:1-15

ILLUS: Are You God's Wife?

While working at a shoe store in downtown Truro, Nova Scotia, Zelda Cornish noticed outside the bakery shop next door, a little boy standing on the hot air register in bare feet, trying to stay warm

"I was unsure whether or not to invite the boy into our store, or just what to do, when a lady came by. After a few words with the boy, she brought him into the shoe store. She bought him new shoes and heavy woolen socks for which he tried awkwardly to thank her.

"Are you God's wife?" – he asked her.

Taken back by the question, she took some time before replying, **"No son, I'm just one of His children."**

"Well, I knew you must be some kin to him," he said, as he thanked her again and ran out the door.

What do God's Kin look like?

Attitudes and behavior of a mature Christian.

Quite unintended, Paul gives us some lifestyle characteristics of a mature Christian, as he introduces himself to the church at Rome.

- Paul has been a Christian maybe 22 years at this point.
- μὲν: We see an example of the power of God's salvation in the life of one who describes himself formerly as "the chief of sinners."
- δε: **It is a description of the potential of God's grace in us all!** The same power of salvation that transformed Saul into Paul resides in us.

1. Paul describes himself as Christ's "servant," v.1.

- "Bond servant" was a slave, who lived in total allegiance to Master.
 - δουλος = One permanently in servitude.
- (1) There were an estimated 60 million slaves in the Empire.
 - Countries captured by Roman armies became slaves of Rome.
 - Many wore a heavy iron band welded around their necks.
- (2) Paul's slavery was different. It was servanthood by choice.
 - What a change this represents in Paul!
 - As early as 9 or 10, Saul moved to Jerusalem to study under the esteemed Rabbi-Gamaliel. He excelled as a Pharisee (Gal.1:13). *Yet unsaved!* He despised Jesus along with the elite of his day.
 - Then Jesus met him on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians.

- Paul's first words: "**Who are you Lord?**" Acts 9:5.
- From that meeting on Jesus was his Lord, Paul his servant.
- That Jesus showed him grace, when Paul was intensely persecuting Christians/ Christ – transformed the proud adversary.

APPLY: Many of us can identify the day we also – met Jesus!

- Paul's life challenges us: Is Jesus LORD in our lives today?

ILLUS: Imagine the Shaw of Iran converting to Christ!

- Or the slave trader, John Newton. *Later helped Wilberforce.*

ILLUS: Queen Elizabeth's would-be Assassin.

Dr. Harry Ironside told the story of an attempted assassination of the first Queen Elizabeth. A woman dressed as a male page and hid in the Queen's closet. She didn't realize that the queen's attendants always made a careful search of her bedroom before she retired. They found the woman hidden behind her gowns and brought her to the queen.

The woman realized her case was hopeless, and threw herself down on her knees and pleaded for the queen to show her grace.

The queen looked at her coldly and quietly said, "If I show you grace, what promise will you make for the future?"

The woman looked up at her and said, "Grace that has conditions and precautions is not grace at all."

Queen Elizabeth responded: "You are right. **I pardon you of my grace.**" And they led her away a free woman!

History tells that from that moment on Queen Elizabeth had *no more faithful & devoted servant that that woman who received her grace.*

-Green, 176

This is what happened to Saul of Tarsus, now Paul-servant: **1 Tim.1:12-16**

- Paul's slavery pictured that of the Hebrews: Deut.15:12-17.

APPLY: As a slave must do the will of his master, **our usefulness depends on the extent to which we are willing to do Christ's will. Serve Him.**

- **Those forgiven much, love much.** Perhaps we need to remind ourselves of the Amazing Grace we've received & rekindle our love.

2. Called to be an Apostle, set apart for the Gospel (v.1), V.5- to call people from among all the Gentiles to obedience of faith.

Apostle: means "a sent one." It became the special designation for those 12 commissioned representatives of Christ, and Paul –*born out of season.*

- His was beyond doubt, a *special* calling.

Set Apart—for the Gospel...Gentiles:

To be set apart has two sides – from something, and to something.

Many things can keep us from being separated "to God," to the gospel.

- It's not possible to be set apart to God, unless set apart from something: 1 John 2:15-17. 1 Pet.2:11. Gal.6:14.

Let's look at how glamorous it was for Paul to have this title: 2 Cor.11.

- Some seek the same title today, as a badge of authority & prestige.
- In 2 Cor.10-12, Paul is actually defending his Apostleship to the Corinthians. Paul had planted this church in 51AD. (Writes in 56)
- After he left, some "false" apostles had come through and attempted to discredit Paul & draw the church to follow after them.
- What was at stake was the gospel itself and the church' future **11:2-4**.
- These false apostles had fed the people a line, boasting about themselves, which Paul now counters: **11:17-29**.

(1)- **11:16-21a**. Fools boast in what they achieve by human standards. (Numbers, meetings, conversions, crowds, miracles, experiences.)

(2)- **11:21b-29**. Paul' s boast is totally different in tone.

²³Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

²⁶I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.

²⁷I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

²⁸Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

- **Scars**, not fleshly successes, authenticated Paul's service.
- What he suffered, physical torture, dangers, discomfort, anxiety.
- His **focus** is not on triumphs, but defeats, weaknesses, difficulties.

APPLY: None of us are Apostles. Most of us are married, and could not keep the schedule Paul kept. We may never be asked to endure even a fraction of what Paul endured.

Q: How many **scars** do we have from serving Christ?

- How long would our list of mistreatments and discomforts be?
- At what point would we say, "I've had enough! I quit!"

APPLY: There are few Christians who will suffer mistreatment today – without quitting.

Leaving the church altogether! Or dividing churches.

- **We are willing to serve Christ, it's people we are not willing to serve**
- **Luke 19:9-10 >> I Cor.9:19**. I'm afraid we cannot serve Christ without serving people... To quit, is to stop serving Christ!
- WE ARE CALLED to make disciples. Satan does not want this to happen. He will discourage you in any way he can. We must see through his tactics, and view people the way Christ does.
- We must expect difficulties. **Q: Whose SERVANT are we?**

POINT: When Paul writes to the Romans and says he is ready to come minister in Rome, he does so with the vivid memory of past sufferings.

THIS IS THE CHARACTERISTIC OF A MATURE CHRISTIAN LIFE!

3. Paul was grateful for other Christians, **v.8.**

He begins a number of his letters with “thanksgiving” for others.

- Imagine his perspective. He had made several trips, going from city to city, to share the gospel—and often met with resistance & abuse.
- He was vulnerable, the underdog against opposition, exposed.
- ***What would it be for him*** to know he’s heading for the capital city, and there was a church of believers already there – to meet him?

ILLUS: RGBI Family Travels.

- One trip – we used Charlie’s Bronco. Wheel came off in Oklahoma.
- Sunday afternoon. A baby. Little money. How God provided.

APPLY: How easily we take one another for granted in the U.S.

- Take a mission trip, go out of the country, China, go into prison.
- Paul gives us our proper perspective in chap.**12:10f.**
- While many Christians are critics of others, the mark of mature Christian living is gratitude.
 - Both attitudes bear fruit, they never exist alone.
 - One builds up the church, the other tears it down.
 - One requires a work of grace in our lives, the other= natural.

Q: Do we find ourselves more critics or grateful for other Christians?

4. Paul never stopped praying for others, especially Christians,**v.9-10**

- Sample prayers for other Christians: **Eph.1:14-19**, 3:14-19, 6:18.

APPLY: A characteristic of the mature Christian is to pray regularly for other Christians. How are we doing?

5. He desired to help other Christian’s grow spiritually, **v.11-12.**

Paul had much insight about this area of **gifts**: 1 Cor.12, Eph.4., Rom.12.

- His understanding of the value of each Christian & Church is a lesson for us. Every member of the body – important to all in the body!

APPLY: How do you view your value to this church, and the value of others in the church?

- Is it your desire to encourage others – by the use of your gifts?
- Do you allow others function according to their gifts?
- Are you willing to serve, and let others serve to their strengths?
- Want to know how much Paul valued others? Look at chapter 16!

6. Paul felt an obligation to share the gospel with anyone, **v.14-15**

Paul knows that the Gospel is a *stumbling block* to Jews, and *foolishness* to Gentiles, but he feels a personal obligation to tell them anyway!

- To both educated & uneducated; to the wise and the unwise.
- He is ready! He’s a servant, following orders from the Master.

- He's not a trained speaker (1 Cor.1). He doesn't use gimmicks or worldly approaches. He doesn't water-it-down. He's been rejected as often as he's been received with gratitude. He's suffered...
- Acts 28:31 tells us he boldly preached for 2 years in Rome.
- Phil.1:12-18 The whole palace guard heard. Many others joined Paul

APPLY: Do we have a sense of obligation to share the gospel with others?

If not, why not? Has our Master left us clear instructions on what to do?

HERE IS THE PICTURE OF A MATURE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE!

Servanthood. Set apart for the Gospel's sake.

Gratitude. A desire to help others grow spiritually. Praying.

A sense of personal obligation to share the gospel with others.

Connecting people with God, to one another, and to the community!

Demonstrating the love of God, leading other to follow Him.

People may not mistake us for "God's Wife," but they will know we are His "kin," His Children. And that's all we need to accomplish!

Rom. 1:16-17 says the gospel is God's power for salvation. We often associate this with when we accepted Christ, or when we die. Here is an example of SALVATION: *PRESENT TENSE*. From sin's power today!

This is what the H.S. is committed to bring about in our lives, today.