

Going Deeper with the Sermon

Tash 1 Cor 3:1-9

“the Spiritually Mature Embody the cross”

Context

The Corinthians thought themselves to be “mature” “wise” “spiritual”. So much so that they felt that they had moved on from the basic message of Paul and his gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Indeed many commentators suggest that they themselves thought of Paul's gospel as being milk and that as those who were now wiser they had moved on to more solid food. This sense of self-importance was leading to division among them – Paul addresses them in some not-so-subtle words in **1 Cor 3:1-4**.

You can't miss Paul's frustration at his Corinthian children because though they have the spirit they think that being spiritually mature is about knowledge & importance when in fact Paul knows the opposite is true—the spiritually mature person embodies the cross.

They embody the cross by:

1. Release their own agendas (1-4)

v 1-4... form a transition from his teaching on the gospel and it's revelation through the spirit to now what it means to be people with the spirit. He particularly addresses the divisive behaviour among them that he has stated earlier in chap 1:12. He begins by looking back at when he was first with them how they were babes in the faith.

Yet his following sentence portrays his frustration that since being with them they have still not grown up in their faith!! (read v 2&3) They are still worldly!! What does he mean by this? There is a notable change in his wording here for worldly. Where as Paul's previous word for worldly reflected their humanness this word in the Greek reflects their behaviour being characterized by the flesh. (Gordon Fee) *“A word with clear ethical overtones of living from the perspective of this present age out of ones sinfulness.”*

In other words Paul is saying though you think you are spiritual, adults in the faith you're behaviour suggests that you are still acting like babies. This quarrelling and envy among you points to the reality that you are not mature at all. You are actually acting more characterized by your own selfish agenda than by God's spirit. You are not spiritual; in fact you are acting incredibly unspiritual – just like those around you who do not have the spirit of God.

How can Paul accuse them like this? Their quarrelling is the key evidence that demonstrates that they are being motivated by their selfish agenda, When we read Paul referring to them saying things like “I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos” (v 4) what they are actually doing is competing with one another for status. They are aligning themselves with teachers who they think will make them more important. They are using their leaders as pawns to serve their own agendas. This spirit of one-upmanship shows them to be incredibly childish and not mature in their faith and to not have truly grasped what is both milk and solid food; the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Milk because it is the good news of salvation and solid food for it is the reality upon which the whole of the Christian life is built upon.

If the Corinthians had the mind of Christ (spiritual) then surely they ought to have acted like Christ. The way of Christ stands in direct opposition to the way of the world. The way of the world leads to self-promotion, whereas the way of Christ leads to self-denial.

The way of the world leads to competition, whereas the way of Christ leads to submission. The way of the world leads to division, whereas the way of Christ leads to unity.

Those who have the mind of Christ, those who are maturing spiritually are embodying the cross by releasing their own agendas.

1. Serving God's agenda (6-9)

Paul continues in his argument by explaining what is the right perspective to have in the Christian life. Paul's perspective on this is clearly conveyed in **verse 5**. His use of the word servant here literally conveys someone who waits upon tables. To the Corinthians who were puffing themselves up in importance by attaching themselves to certain leaders – the thought of those leaders being waiters was not glamorous at all.

But nevertheless Paul draws them back to this perspective that the Christian life is not about glamour and self-importance it is all about service to God. Where there is competition and division within the Corinthian church over who is better. Among the ministers themselves there is unity. Unity because they know that this ministry is not about them but it is all initiated and grown by God. (v5)

They see themselves as merely God's servants performing the tasks that he has asked them to do. Paul has founded the church of Corinth, Apollos has disciplined them it but ultimately it is God who has made it grow. Though they have different tasks they work together in a common purpose: to see God made known. (v8)

Their reward is not about accolades, approval, status or recognition of others – they serve for an audience of one; God – attempting to be faithful to his instruction and as Paul conveys it is upto the Master to reward them as He sees fit.

Paul ends this section by saying we are God's fellow workers and you are God's field. In other words we are workers for God and you are the field in which he has chosen to use us to work in. Paul's emphasis here is that it all belongs to God. Paul knows that he is not his own person, he is God's person, and this ministry is not his ministry it is God's ministry.

Paul lives to serve God's agenda and he longs for the Corinthians to release their own agendas and serve God's agenda for this is what it means to be a spiritual person embodying the cross. For this is the way of Christ Phil 2:6-7.....The Spiritual person embodies the cross.

Questions for Reflection

1. What do you think it means to embody the cross?
2. How do you see the spirit of “self-importance” played out in relationships?
3. How does it challenge your framework of ministry when you think of Paul's perspective that all of it is God's and he makes it grow?
4. For personal reflection, is there some strife in your relationships that you need to let go of your own agenda and serve Gods?