

Lenten Devotional February 26, 2018

Scripture

1 Corinthians 4:8-21

⁸Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Quite apart from us you have become kings! Indeed, I wish that you had become kings, so that we might be kings with you! ⁹For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals. ¹⁰We are fools for the sake of Christ, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. ¹¹To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, ¹²and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. ¹⁴I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. ¹⁵For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. ¹⁶I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. ¹⁷For this reason I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. ¹⁸But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. ¹⁹But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. ²¹What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Devotional

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I have often wondered about the church in Corinth. Why would anyone want to minister there? The congregation is divided along class lines and is split into factions. Sexual immorality is prevalent. People are suing each other. Pretty much any conflict you can think of grows in the Corinthian soil!

Paul's frustration with the whole situation flows over into his sarcastic tone. He rightly names their arrogance. He writes, in effect, that their 'talk is cheap' (verses 20 and 21). He diagnoses their conflict.

Yet, diagnosis is not enough—not then, and not today. How does one heal from this disease? In marked contrast to the talkers of Corinth, Paul demonstrates that the gospel must be embodied and practiced. If the gospel is to mean anything, it must bear fruit as a counter-witness to the conflict of Corinth. "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly" (verses 12-13).

The raw materials that make for conflict are a given in the human condition. When we are wounded, we are tempted to lash out. When the congregation and its pastor are most stressed, we automatically look for scapegoats, exit plans, and so on. We react out of base instinct, rather than live up to our professed values. That's not a rationalization for bad behavior; it's a fact of life. Paul calls us to look to the values of Jesus Christ as examples of new ways of living and new ways of dealing with conflict.

Prayer

O God, we know too well what conflict looks like. We have witnessed it. We have contributed to it. Help us to confess our sinful attitudes and to live lives of repentance. Give us the grace to embody the gospel values that make for peace. Amen.