

“To Infinity and Beyond??”

1 Corinthians 4:6-13

December 9, 2018

"This concludes the first major argument of the letter, which has been concerned with the character of true wisdom, true leadership, and true self-evaluation. ...God vindicates human powerlessness and humiliates merely human power. This is what Paul's counter-order wisdom of the cross is all about, and it is radical enough that if taken seriously, it will require the Corinthians to give up many of the dominant values and presuppositions of their culture about power and wisdom. ...The wisdom of the cross is a message not about strength instead of weakness, but in fact about power through weakness, through self-sacrificial behavior, through reliance on God's power to work through us." Ben Witherington, "Conflict and Community in Corinth", p. 148, 150

Chap 5 will begin a "New Section"...

BUT in 4:6 there is a Priceless Guiding Principle...

The Land of Beyond

v. 6-8 ...The Land of Beyond—a place where pride and false ideas flourish!

... "Already!!" ... "Without Us!?"

...their view of spirituality reflects an 'overrealized eschatology'. Paul's perspective is one of 'already but not yet' held in tension; theirs is one of 'already' with little room for 'not yet.' Having received the Spirit, they have already arrived; for them spirituality means to have been transported into a whole new sphere of existence where they are 'above' the earthly, and especially 'fleshly,' existence of others." Gordon Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians", p. 172

Is Your Christianity OUT OF BOUNDS? ...Is your church or your denomination or you personally accommodating modern ideas or practices that are simply out of bounds as it relates to What is Clear from Scripture???

“One thing that may have fostered their attitudes regarding eschatology was the imperial eschatology, which flourished in Roman colonies and which suggested that the emperor was already the dispenser of the blessings of the gods in this life, as was proved by his having brought the pax Romana, peace throughout most of the empire. This could easily have nurtured the idea that ‘already we reign’.” Ben Witherington, “Conflict and Community in Corinth”, p. 140

The Roman Empire shaped their times in the same way that America has a unique global influence.

- **Beware of PRAGMATISM!**

WARNING: *These Leaders Were Better Followers of ROME than They Were of the Humble Servant who Died on a Cross! ...*

- *1993 Os Guinness writes: “Dining with the Devil: The Megachurch movement Flirts with Modernity” [from back cover: Today's megachurch movement should heed this warning, because of its often uncritical use of management and marketing tools to induce growth. Os Guinness provides a perceptive, thoughtful assessment of this powerful movement and its proneness to compromise with modernity.]*

“...can the [megachurch] movement attain these goals? Will it change the landscape of American religion? Will its passion for mission and effective evangelism lead to a harvest of new Christians and reverse the secularization of the West? Will its innovations amount to a reformation in the worldwide church? Can the secrets of successful megachurches be carried over to struggling small churches? Os Guinness, from Intro to “Dining with the Devil”

- **2007—Rethinking the Seeker Sensitive Movement**

The size of the crowd rather than the depth of the heart determined success. If the crowd was large then surely God was blessing the ministry. Churches were built by demographic studies, professional strategists, marketing research, meeting “felt needs” and sermons consistent with these techniques. We were told that preaching was out, relevance was in. Doctrine didn’t matter nearly as much as innovation. If it wasn’t “cutting edge” and consumer friendly it was doomed. The mention of sin, salvation and sanctification were taboo and replaced by Starbucks, strategy and sensitivity. (from Townhall.com, Oct 2007)

- **2007 ...Bill Hybells** commenting on a study of how effective his church was making disciples—“We made a mistake” ...“Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back it wasn’t helping people that much.”
- **In 2010 David Platt** would write a book titled: **“Radical - Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream”**

From the Land of Beyond to the Pages of Scripture

v. 9-13 ...Paul responds to this, like it is ABSURD! ...he highlights that with Biting Sarcasm!! —Then... He welcomes them back to Reality in a Fallen World.

...**“like men sentenced to death”** ie... more like those who die in the spectacle of the arena, than like those sitting in the box seats 'reigning' in this age!

Heb 11:35 - 12:1 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed

with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised,⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

o **1Peter 1:3-7** ...Blessed--yet, 'Grieved'

- **1Pet 2:11** ...Strangers and exiles
- **1Pet 2:13ff** ...Be subject to gov't and even abusive masters

1Pet 2:21 "For this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

1Pet 4:12 "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings...

...This doesn't sound like "REIGNING from the Box Seats"!!

...and Paul explains this occasion and future occasions as NORMAL!

"Probably one of the great attractions of the alternative spirituality on offer in Corinth, was the avoidance of being crucified with Christ. By contrast, they wanted to be rich and to be kings. Nor can we stand back in judgment over them, because we are all very easily tempted in the same direction. ...Whether it was physical suffering or hard toil, these are the twin characteristics of Paul's discipleship, focused as it were on the cross. One suspects the Corinthians were not really interested in either of these aspects. They were not going to buy into being reviled, persecuted, and slandered. That is why they resisted the gospel of the cross and the sort of Christian life that flows from it." David Jackman, "Let's Study 1Corinthians", p. 71

From 1st Century Rome to 20th Century America ...The Rise of the Health & Wealth Gospel

- **From 'pax Romana' to Western Prosperity** ...the wealthiest nation on earth has something to say to its citizens and the world. ...This gets under our skin and becomes influential in how we develop our theology.

When "good" becomes linked to American Lifestyle (material possessions, success that creates 'recognizable favor', the power to achieve and succeed) ...and THESE criteria become the new standard by which spirituality are defined and recognized... there develops a group that "has it" and a group that "does not", a group with "superior revelation" and a "group without"—
- **The Precepts of the Health & Wealth Gospel are an "over-realized eschatology"** (expecting to see too much of the future in the right now)
 - Healing and a No-Sickness Existence ...Pace Setting Success ("the head not the tail") ...Material Prosperity (streets of gold, abundant rewards) ...Conflict-Free Expectations
 - **"The Now-and-the-Not-Yet"**... a critical theology that informs our current chapter of existence.
 - ***We live in the "First Fruits" of the Coming Kingdom...***
 - ***We live in the "breaking in" of the Heavenly Kingdom—BUT...***
 - We are called to be part of this! We bring light into darkness (but we cannot eliminate darkness), we bring the experience of healing into our broken bodies (but we do not create glorified bodies that will never be sick or broken), we bring God's favor into our endeavors and our finances (but we don't do that without facing the ongoing frictional forces of this fallen world)

"They have indeed entered the kingdom, of which the Spirit is the evidence. But they have not yet fully realized the End, of which the resurrection will be the evidence." Gordon Fee, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians", p. 173

- ***By God's Plan we live in a world that we should WANT to leave and THEN to be at Home!***

2 Cor 5:1-8 For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

THIS is a Huge Reason Why Some Christians are Disillusioned about God and Indifferent about God's Purposes—because they had some form of a "Prosperity Gospel" in their soul that made them feel like God's ways weren't working! Their faith and relationship with God wasn't producing something "good" and "positive" and "rewarding" and "right-nowish"!!

"It is good to reflect on the relevance of this paragraph to our contemporary confusion. So much energy goes into thinking about how we should 'market' the Christian faith in our generation. Often this is done by

pretending that all the blessings of the age to come are available here and now, if only we could believe firmly enough. One day, we shall have everything we want—freedom from sin, sickness, and even death itself. Perfect wisdom, holiness and fullness of joy will be ours. But that is what Heaven is for! If we promise it on earth, we shall only breed disillusioned malcontents.” David Jackman, “Lets Study 1Corinthians”, p. 75

Problems from the Land of Beyond...

- “Beyond Ideas” threaten to create a new identity for some! ...churches and individuals are prone to try and find Something That Makes Them Unique
- “Beyond Ideas” foster comparison and critique ...which fosters pride
- “Beyond Ideas” come with BLINDSPOTS!—1Cor 5:1-2
- “Beyond Ideas” diminish the weight of Scripture and increase the possibility of false teachings or problematic practices

In What Ways are YOU and I Prone to “Go Beyond”, and to Develop Our Expectations from Some Other Source?

...the Modern Assault on Marriage!!

- People aren’t marrying because marriage is UNATTRACTIVE!
- Didn’t think it would be this HARD ...we’re just TOO DIFFERENT
- “God Would Want Me Happy”

...American Marketing & Church Management!!

- Where do you get your ideas on How Churches Should be Led and Programmed?

...Doctrinal Emphasis and Life Expectations

- Is the Health & Wealth (American Dream Assisted) Emphasis Appropriate or Beyond?