

Apostolic Character - Chapter 6

(From the book *Apostolic Foundations* by Art Katz)

Meekness

Apostolic meekness is that quality of character by which we shall be able to discern those who “*say they are apostles and are not.*” Presumptuous apostles are going to be one of the dangers in the Last Days. They will seem to have a measure of authority and knowledge that will impress the undiscerning. There is, however, one measure of authenticity that cannot be feigned or emulated, namely, *true* meekness. Meekness is not something one learns at school, but something attained by men and women under the hand of God, in union with Him. He is meekness. In other words, it can only be *given* out of a man’s proximity with God, who Himself is meek and lowly of heart; there is no other way to obtain it.



Moses on the Mount

Moses, who wrote the first five books of the Bible, could say of himself, “*Moses was the meekest man on the face of the earth.*” It sounds like arrogance of spirit, but when a man can speak that of himself, knowing he cannot take to himself any acknowledgment for that condition, then we have an ultimate humility. God’s grace had brought him to that meekness. Humility is not something that man can work up by himself on the earth, and develop as a character trait. Humility is what God is in Himself, and the only one who will display and exhibit it, is that one who has been consistently in the presence of God’s humility. It is humbling to be there, and that is why Moses could make that statement, not as a credit to himself, but to God, out of whose presence that humility was established.

The call to communion with God is never going to be convenient. There is a dying in order to find one’s way into the place of the secret council of God, and one cannot enter it with the spirit of expediency. Expediency is contrary to God’s Spirit and wisdom. God’s call to Moses was to come up *unto Him*. It was not for any benefit Moses was going to receive—even spiritual benefit, but rather a seeking of God for His own sake, and without any regard to the benefit accruing to the seeker by so doing.

It is interesting to note Moses’ disposition on coming down from the Mount with the tablets of the Law. When he saw Israel dancing round the golden calf, he burned with indignation and anger, and threw

down the tablets of the Law that were written by the finger of God Himself. He then commanded that the golden calf be granulated and ground to powder, and that the people Israel were to drink it. He made them drink their idol, and you do not hear a single complaint or whimper of opposition to that requirement. Evidently, he came with such an authority that no one in any way took issue with that stipulation.

There is a conjunction between humility and authority. The first expression of Moses' humility was an expression of authority of such a magnitude that no one questioned it. Then he asked who was going to be on the Lord's side, and the Levites came forward. They were told to put their swords on their side, and go into the camp, slaying all those who had gone whoring after false gods, including friends and relatives. What authority for the man who was the meekest in all the earth! It is only *because* he was the meekest that the authority was his, and the densest of souls recognized it. They could not, therefore, offer up a quibble of opposition. He was 'very God' in his indignation and authority, and his meekness was the statement, not of some affectation or superficial polish, but of a union with God in such a way, that God's very own character was imparted to him.

The Apostle Paul himself was unsparing in telling things the way they needed to be spoken. He rebuked, exhorted, beseeched and pleaded. However, he did not flaunt his apostolic credentials, nor did he employ his authority to coerce and manipulate. He entreated, "I entreat you as a father ... I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that you present" This is a distinctive character of the apostolic mindset and character. It does not employ its authority in any coercive way. The use of authority reveals us, and someone has said, "What we do with the weakest and the least is what we are." When a nation begins to oppress and persecute the weak and defenseless, it is revealing its true and ugly character.

Humility is Obedience

The issue of humility is paradoxical, because the apostle is so single-eyed, adamant, and utterly persuaded about the rightness of his word, that it appears as arrogance. I suspect that the false apostle is self-defacing. He will *appear* humble, something like a 'salesman's humility' that is put into effect in order to sell the product. If we are going to be a discerning church, which is to say, an apostolic church, then the issue of authentic humility needs to come into our consciousness. The quality of true meekness, which Paul had, despite his uncompromising references to himself, seems to be arrogant, and yet right *there*, is the true meekness.

The Lord Himself was absolute, using language in such a fierce way. He acted in a way that seems to suggest anything *but* humility. For example, in overthrowing the moneychanger's tables, it would appear that, for that moment at least, He laid aside His meekness, and was acting now in another character. Was He meek even while He was violent and offensive? This act set in motion the things that eventuated in His death. So how do we reconcile the act of violence that Jesus performed as opposed to what we know of the meekness of God? When we think of meek, we think of mild, quiet and deferring. This is an aggressive and violent act, and yet we are saying that it is meek.

If we see meekness as total obedience to God, and even more in an act, or a word, that would give an impression to the contrary, we will have a greater understanding of its reality. It may even make the obedient servant open to reproach for being violent, or being too zealous, or whatever it is. In other words, Jesus overthrew the moneychangers' tables as an act of humility, because He was submitted to the will of the Father to obey in the moment that it was required, even though it was contrary to His own disposition or personality. He was a meek man, obeying the will of the Father, whose moment of judgment for that Temple had come, and it was performed with a total passion in His jealousy for the glory of God. True humility is reflected in true obedience.

There are instances where God will call us to obedience that seem to contradict meekness, and it would be arrogant *not* to obey, even by employing the excuse, "It is not my personality. It is not the way that I like to be, because I want the favor and the approval of men to see me as a nice guy, and therefore, I want always to be reasonable, quiet and diplomatic." Yes, you will be applauded for that, *but not in heaven*. In heaven, it is clear rebellion, because if God wanted you to be 'violent,' and you withheld because it contradicts your personality, or anything like that, you are putting something above and before God, namely, your own self-consideration.

A true apostle will not relent or refrain when God requires him to speak. He shuns the distinctions and honors that men accord each other. He necessarily has to, or there would be a compromising of what he is in God. He is scrupulous in character, and will never use his position to obtain personal advantage. He is naturally unaffected, normal and unprepossessing in appearance and demeanor, despising what is showy, sensational or bizarre. He will not call any attention to himself by external attire. He is the thing in himself, in the very marrow of his being, because of his communion *with* God, and his history *in* God. Meekness is the characteristic sign of the authentic apostle, and the quintessential character of God. Based on this, a false apostle, or a false bearer of God's word, can be identified as one who gives the impression of being self-sufficient, always in his dignity, or

he affects something to make sure that you have noticed him for his distinctiveness.

Unselfconscious Humility

"The true character of the loveliness that tells for God is always unconscious," wrote Oswald Chambers.

Self-conscious spirituality is where you examine yourself for an ostensibly good thing, even of a spiritual kind, but the very fact that you examine yourself ruins it. True spirituality is unselfconscious; it is *mindless* about itself. It is the very quality exhibited by Jesus, and though He knew who He was, and disputed with the doctors of the Law at the age of twelve, His whole earthly ministry had a remarkable quality of unselfconsciousness about it. He is not a man who went around making known to what ministry He was called. It is just a wonderful mindlessness, not in the sense of being irresponsible, but where you are not exalted in your own calling. If we say, "Oh, I wonder, do you think God could use me? I wonder if I am of any use." Though it may sound modest and self-effacing in *our* ears, it is yet corruption. It still has our "I" at the center, and it is that very thing which taints the spiritual life. We need to come into that wonderful place of complete unselfconsciousness, where we are what we are by the grace of God. We do not ever think in terms of ourselves. We simply are, and in that condition, we are a blessing to God and others.

The Broken Alabaster Vial

There is an episode in the life of Jesus, hardly worth mentioning, you would think, and yet God includes it in three of the gospels in one form or the other.

"And while He was in Bethany at the home of Simon the leper, and reclining at the table, there came a woman with an alabaster vial and poured it over His head. But some were indignantly remarking to one another, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume might have been sold for over three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they were scolding her.

But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me. For the poor you always have with you, and whenever you wish, you can do them good; but you do not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has anointed My body beforehand for the burial. And truly I say to you, wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, that also which this woman has done shall be spoken of in memory of her."

And Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went off to the chief priests, in order to betray Him to them.

And they were glad when they heard this, and promised to give him money. And he began seeking how to betray Him at an opportune time. (Mark 14:3–11)

It is not a coincidence that there is a conjunction between this lavish outpouring, and the response to the Lord by Judas and the chief priests, whose betrayal was for the sake of convenience. Jesus said that what she had done would be spoken of in memory of her. That is rather exuberant praise and acknowledgment for what seems to men, and even to the disciples of Jesus a waste. Efficiency and utility are the spirit of our age, and says, if you invest, or give of something, you expect a payoff and recompense. But something that is given lavishly, without any thought of return, is costly. It made even the disciples to recoil in indignation and to murmur against this woman, and to say, "For what purpose was this waste. That expensive ointment could have been sold and the proceeds used to buy tracts and finance ministries, and done all those wonderfully helpful things." We need to dissuade believers away from the preeminent fascination for *ministry*. We are so ministerial-minded, and we want so to come into our ministries, and a lot of souls are made shipwreck by a premature coming into ministry when there had been no attention to the foundation of relationship with God and men.

This woman came bearing an extraordinarily exquisite, alabaster vial. The remarkable thing is that there is no way to extract the ointment unless the container is broken. There was no screw-off cap that could be neatly screwed back on for the next time. It was either to break it in order to extract the contents, or the contents remained enclosed. That is a beautiful picture of ourselves, shaped at the hand of God, vials of expensive material, but however outwardly impressive we are in that sense, it will *not* make us significant to a dying world, and especially to a Jewish people. The thing that makes us significant is rather the fragrance of the knowledge of Him made manifest by us in every place.

We all emit a particular fragrance. With some, the aroma is exquisite, but with others, it is rather ordinary. It depends very much upon what kind of history we have with God, and how deep we are identified with Him in His sufferings, His misunderstandings, His rejections, and all of the things that inhere in a true faith and a true walk. It is one thing to have that fragrance of Christ formed in us through identification with Him, and quite another to have the religion of convenience, which is also the religion of betrayal. If our Christianity costs nothing, and is convenient, we are already one with Judas. The faith is extraordinarily demanding, and that is why Jesus commended what the woman had done, and it was to be a memorial to her wherever *this* gospel is preached. The gospel is the gospel of extravagant abandonment and pouring out, or it is not the gospel.

Watchman Nee has said that the principle of waste is the principle of power, and we are powerless because we have played it 'close to the vest.' We have not given of ourselves the time, the patience, the misunderstanding, and the vulnerability of pouring ourselves out to each other that would make church the church. We are robbed, therefore, of the potential to form an apostolic body where men can be sent who can preach. We have opted for a religion of convenience, namely, no fuss, no stoop and no bother. That is why Jesus loved this woman, "*She has done a good deed to Me.*" If there is any odious phrase to God, it is a work that *man* performs. He has no respect for the works of men, but He called what this woman did a good deed or work. She came with something very precious and expensive, and she came into a room full of men bristling with indignation, but she did not let that deter her. Moreover, wherever extravagance for Christ's sake is poured out, there will be a corresponding opposition.

There is something lacking in today's church, namely, a pouring out that releases the flow of His Life to the unbelieving world. We are antiseptic and correct, but we are not fragrant. We are not lavish with each other, afraid to take the risks of that kind of intensity of relationship by which alone true apostolic formation of character takes place. We are satisfied with a religion of convenience—a Sunday service and midweek Bible study, and then retreat again to our own privacy.

There is something about brokenness in God's sight that is so dear to Him. It was also exemplified in His own body at the Cross, and He is waiting for the same thing in His church, namely, a broken and contrite people who exude the fragrance of Christ. Something more than correctness and well-meaning intention is required. The meekness of brokenness comes when we come, break, and pour. Meekness is the apostolic distinctive, the fragrance of the knowledge of Him, and every true work is an exercise in humiliation, suffering and death, and emits, therefore, the fragrance of God.

Meekness—The Key to Revelation

The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and a distinction of what is apostolic is the stewardship of the mysteries. The church itself should have this same disposition toward mystery, and the things that can only be revealed. The key to apostolic or prophetic seeing, and the receiving of the revelation of the mysteries of God is found in Ephesians 3:8,

"To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ."

In other words, all true seeing is given to men like Paul, who see themselves as the ‘very least of all saints.’ Paul is not being deferential or polite. He actually saw himself as this. He was the apostle to whom was afforded such magnitude of visions that God had to give him a thorn in his side, lest he be exalted beyond measure for the revelations that were given him. We must not, therefore, pass by apostolic character, which is to say, the deep humility, the authentic meekness and the Christ-likeness of the apostolic man.

We know that one of the deceptions of the Last Days is false apostles and false prophets. Even now, it is becoming popular where *everybody* seems to be a prophet today, or even an apostle. They are also quite clever as they have studied and know how to appropriate Paul’s counsel and advice, and know when to apply it, and mediate over church issues, etc. Is that, however, the foundational man upon whom the church is built? If the man is the thing in himself, then it is more than his knowledge of church administration, or founding a fellowship. It is his very life; it is his character; it is his knowledge of God. It is what he communicates as one who comes to us out of God’s own presence. This statement, ‘the very least of all saints’ is not Paul being self-deferring, but Paul’s actual, stricken, heartfelt consciousness of how he sees himself before God.

It is a remarkable irony that the deeper we grow in the knowledge of God, the more we see ourselves as *less*. Instead of becoming more exalted by the increase of our knowledge of God, we see how abased and pitiful we really are. It is a contradiction and a paradox, only to be found in God’s church. Authentic meekness or humility is not something that one can learn, pick up at school, or take to oneself, but the work of God out of a relationship with Him. It is the revelation of God as He is, and the depths of God, that bring a man to this kind of awareness of his own self. The revelation of what we are is altogether related to the revelation of who God is. The two things always go together.

“Then I (Isaiah) said, ‘Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.’” (Isaiah 6:5)

This is the prince of prophets, Isaiah, speaking here. The foundation of the church is the revelation of God as He in fact is. *That* is the foundation. It is not as *we* think Him to be, which is more often than not a projection of the way we would *like* Him to be, especially when we have chosen to celebrate one attribute of God, and ignore another. The *key* knowledge is the knowledge of God as He is, and the foundational men to the church are those who can communicate God in *that* knowledge. Paul had this knowledge because he saw himself as the “least of all saints.”

The Two Witnesses

"And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lamp-stands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone would desire to harm them, in this manner he must be killed.

These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire." (Revelation 11:3–6)

These men will be dressed in sackcloth, clothed in humility, clothed in the meekness of God. Meekness, as we have said, cannot be learned. Any humility that is obtained through self-conscious determination is necessarily false. The humility of God is a prerequisite for the anointing oil of God, being able to 'shut up the sky' at our will, as we see fit. God can only commit such remarkable dimensions to those who are in authentic union with Him, and the evidence of which is their meekness and humility. The sackcloth is not an external thing, although I am sure it will be worn; it was rather a statement of an inward condition that cannot be effected, and cannot be a technique that we can learn by modulating our voices, or being self-effacing and self-deferring. Either it is, or it is not, and if it is, it will be in proportion to our union with God in the fellowship of His sufferings.

This is how we obtain and maintain a condition of humility, which is the *sine qua non*, that which is absolutely and essentially necessary for the overcoming and authentically spiritual life. This is critical, because we are in a special place of jeopardy. I say 'we' especially to those of us who have a consciousness of being part of the remnant people of God. The very awareness that we are a remnant is the very same thing that can cultivate a place of pride and exclusivity.

Jesus knew He was the Son of God, and that He was sent of the Father, and yet He walked through His life in such a selflessness and mindlessness about His own calling. Paul was like that too, and could say, "Imitate me as I imitate Christ. Follow me in all my ways, and if you do not, you are likely out of the faith," and yet there is no arrogance. It is an ultimate union with God, and it is something we need to be jealous for, or we will find ourselves entrapped and ensnared, not by our defects, but by our virtues. Our virtues can, in this sense, lead us into destruction, more so than our defects.

The gospel is always a call to humility. There is a deep pharisaic root in man that wants to predicate the privileges of God based on merit or works. God goes out of His way to choose the foolish, the weak, and beggarly thing, in fact all that is opposed and contrary to what *man* would have chosen. Part of our problem is that we do not understand how much God abhors what is in man. He simply would not entrust Himself to man, for He knew what was in man.

Blameless Consistency

“For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.”
(1Thessalonians 1:5)

There is a theme struck in that one verse, which needs to penetrate our deepest consciousness. Our modern life tends to be set in compartments: the secular, the sacred, everyday life, and the religious, the private person and the public minister, and yet Paul did not know those distinctions. He was one true man through and through, the full-orbed man. The apostle is the thing in himself, the Word made flesh, and that is why Paul could continually offer *himself* as an example. He did not say, "Follow my principles!" but "Follow me!" God does not say that it is the *principles* of the apostles and prophets that are the foundation of the church, but rather the men *in* themselves, and what they are *in* themselves *in* Christ. We are to be one true thing throughout, day in and day out. Paul was instant in season and out, always ready, always appropriate, before Jews and before Greeks. God's call is for an entire church to be like that.

Paul says,

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There is an equation here: The power of the gospel in full conviction was in exact proportion to the quality, character and manner of men they proved to be among them. The authority and power that Paul exhibited was altogether in proportion to the kind of man *he* proved to be, and he says this to the church that was saved by his own witness.

There are false apostles everywhere, and you can identify them because they let you know they are apostles. They have flair and a facility, they can quote Scripture, they can interpolate and quote

Pauline things, and one could almost be impressed. They have such a manner, but it was not Paul's way. Paul could say to the Thessalonians, "*just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*" In other words, in all seasons, they knew Paul as the same, consistent thing, and this was altogether related to the word that came to them in power. There was no professional ministerial mystique in Paul by which he was something else privately.

There are only two ruling passions in an apostolic man, namely, "for your sake and for God's sake." It was never for *our* sake. Paul had no interest in himself, or for himself. These two considerations are the necessary requirements for an apostle, and therefore an apostolic church. The superstructure must be of the same kind as the foundation. In his farewell address to the elders in Ephesus, Paul said,

"You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;"
(Acts 20:18b–19)

Regardless of his outward circumstances, there was a precious consistency of character. There is no place here for human moodiness, or a complaining spirit. This is something far beyond human good intention, and there is only one way to explain this kind of consistency, as in Paul's own words: "*For to me, to live is Christ.*" This is not a fanciful expression, a kind of apostolic extravagance, but Paul being quite literal. This is the *only* answer, and everything else is an invitation to catastrophe. We cannot seek to be apostolic, or true, based on human determination by which we bite our lips, not knowing what we ought to be doing. We *will* fail, and we will fail wretchedly. We *must* find the mystery that Paul found, and it is just as available to us as it was to him, but we have not believed the Word, and we have not wanted to receive its meaning.

There is only one explanation for the phenomenon of Paul. His life was the very continuation of the crucified and resurrected Christ, who had found for Himself another body wholly yielded to His life. It was a Paul who had no life unto himself, or for himself, and who could say, "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I.*" Do you know why we have not stumbled on this stupefying requirement? It is because we have been content to live beneath the apostolic level. We have not felt this kind of requirement of character to be incumbent for us, and therefore we have been satisfied to be 'nice guys,' or our standard is a standard of 'Christian respectability,' and of being pleasant and polite. But I want to ask you a question: Is *our* gospel going forth in the power of the Spirit, and in full conviction? Paul says to these Thessalonians,

"For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come." (1 Thessalonians 1:9–10)

For all of our modern day, innocuous evangelism, flashy evangelists, and ‘decisions for Christ’ that are made, can it be said in today’s proclamation of the gospel that pagans are turned from idols to serve the true and living God?

The power, however, in Paul’s gospel and the conviction of it was sufficient to turn pagans from their idols to serve a living God. How many of us even have this as the criterion in our evangelistic work? Our standards have fallen wretchedly! We are content if men will only ‘accept’ Christ, and continue to attend Christian services, but no great requirement is made of them. Our evangelism has become a kind of ‘statistical’ game. How many have made decisions, and yet remain essentially ‘pagans’? However, Paul’s gospel had another consequence; it turned men from their idols to serve the living God, which is more than merely attending services. Our whole standard needs to be elevated again to the apostolic level, for this alone is God’s. In addition, I want to reiterate my point: it will never be so, and our gospel will not have *full conviction* and *power* until we come to the place of apostolic selflessness, where we are wholly abandoned to the purposes of God. We are mindless about our security, our condition, and our pleasure. One can abound, or one can abate; it does not matter.

Paul says in Acts 20:22–24a:

"And now, behold, bound in the spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself ... "

Here we see the divine character wrought in a man, who was originally a persecutor and a murderer. It is going to require all of eternity to reveal the kindness of His grace toward us, not only in this age, but also in the ages to come. Paul did not consider his life of any account as dear to himself, and we shall never have the power and authority to turn men from their idols so long as *we* hold our lives as dear to *ourselves*. Paul was impervious to things, and we need to come into that apostolic condition.

In 1 Corinthians 7:29–32a Paul states:

"But this I say, brethren, the time has been shortened, so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they did not weep; and those who rejoice, as though they did not rejoice; and those who buy, as though they did not possess; and those who use the world, as though they did not make full use of it; for the form of this world is passing away. But I want you to be free from concern ..."

The whole purpose of this apostolic exhortation is that we may attend upon the Lord without distraction, for the time is short! He said that almost two thousand years ago, but how many of us believe it now? They lived in the expectation of an apocalyptic conclusion, and we need to see restored an entire apostolic atmosphere, not the least of which is the sense of urgency and expectancy of an apocalyptic end. This cannot be for us an affectation, but a real urgency, to the point that there is an 'electricity' in our atmosphere. Our children need to be persuaded that what we are about is eminently real, and that we are not just 'attending services.'

This will only come about if they do not see a different set of parents come home from the church as they saw *in* the church. I am not just talking about the atmosphere in our meetings, but the atmosphere that pervades the *totality* of our life together as an apostolic community. Are we anticipating continually the things that shall shortly come to pass? For that very reason, we must be indifferent to the various fads and fashions of our generation. The world's fashions are going to pass away. Have we come to the place where we are not moved by things? Yes, we can handle them and use them, but they do not move us. We do not all of a sudden collapse when they are removed from us.

As I have said before, we will never come to this apostolic standard by ourselves. The church is God's provision for the strength, the prayer, and the support in breaking the powers of the world in the lives of believers who intend to come to this apostolic place where: "*I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself....*" We need each other to come to that emancipation, and it only comes through the *true* relationship which *true* church is. Community or life together is the provision of God, having the potential to break the powers of the world that are upon us. Do you remember how Paul said that he groaned in 'this earthly tent,' and how much he desired to be with the Lord? But for 'your sakes' he was willing to abide in this flesh. He was a heavenly man; nothing was dear unto himself, that he might finish his course with joy, and the ministry that he had received of the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:10 Paul states:

"You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers."

There is an extreme apostolic consciousness of God as *witness*, an awareness that before Him we are utterly transparent. God sees us in our public moments as well as our private moments. He sees us at all times, and our lives must be *consciously* lived in His sight. This is the only true motivation for blamelessness, and we shall never be blameless until we have it. The way we so often conduct ourselves privately and personally is a remarkable effrontery toward God. In most cases, it is really a statement to the fact that we do not believe that our lives are being lived in His sight!

It is amazing how much indulgence we allow ourselves. I am not just talking about the blatant sin. That can be sufficient to contradict our entire testimony, and to indicate to the principalities and powers of the air that we are not to be feared. I am speaking about something even yet deeper than that. Paul speaks about having a conscience without offense toward God and toward men. Indulgence can take the form of continually thinking our own thoughts when we are *free* to think our own thoughts, critical thoughts, selfish thoughts, and resentful thoughts. They are *just* as ungodly as the act of fornication or some other gross sin. The apostle is the thing in himself. Through and through, the incarnate word of Truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Even in his private and personal thoughts, he is conscious of a God in whose sight he is utterly transparent.

Paul said, "*You are witnesses, and so is God, how devotedly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers.*"

The apostolic requirement is far beyond the mere outward conduct; it requires the integrity of the total man— spirit, soul and body. Paul was truly a man who was bound in the Spirit going toward Jerusalem. This needs to be a description of us as well. I am not saying these things to bring us under any condemnation, but rather to show us how high the standard of excellence is that God calls *apostolic*. It must be so, for it is the standard that is the plumbline from heaven to earth. It is the ladder that connects heaven and earth, the standard for an unbelieving world, against which all things are to be measured. That is apostolic, and it is God's intention for the church in every place.

The incentive, therefore, for holiness and blamelessness is always set in the consciousness of God as a Judge. That is why Paul could speak with full conviction to the Athenians, "*God has appointed a day in which he will judge all nations.*" I can just see the cold chill coming up the spines of those unbelieving philosophers. They had never

before heard such a concept. But, it only requires one hearing when it comes from the lips of an apostolic man who is not just merely speaking a technicality of doctrine, but who awesomely knows the Judge. That is why Paul says, "Knowing the terror of God, I persuade men." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." How is it that Paul knows it, and we do not? He knows it by relationship, and by the intimacy of His knowledge of God, and this is the deepest of all apostolic requirements.

The Yoke of the Lord

"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am meek and lowly," said Jesus.

Are we *with* God, or are we freewheeling, independent agents who come and go as we please? Is our language, "Well, I think I'll attend this conference, or go to that college. I will see how I feel about coming to the meeting tonight"? If that is so, we have a greater regard for our lives than we think, and it will keep us from being *apostolic*.

We will never come to 'apostolic blamelessness' as long as we are self-conscious with each other. As long as we continue to live out our life in the standard that is established in our relationship with each other, rather than as a life lived unto God, then we will fall short of His intention and glory. We are going to be required to stand alone often. We are going to suffer withering blasts of reproach and criticism, and if our praise and esteem is of men, we will not stand. But if our praise is of God, and we can wait for it, then we will stand, and stand apostolically! This dependency of looking toward men for confirmation, for support, for acceptance, and for approval, needs powerfully to be broken. There is only one thing that can break it, namely, the approbation and approval that only comes from God. If we have lived habitually in the light of the response of men, needing their approval, we will collapse. There is only one who can stand under such a blast, and that is a man who lives for one satisfaction only— the praise that is not of men, but of God.

We are not going to obtain this in a day, but we will not obtain it at all if we do not consciously see it as an object to be desired above all else. We need to see the necessity of moving from our present fear of men to the restoration of the fear of God. This must be our apostolic goal and mission for which we need the participation of everyone. We are *all* in this together. Can you see how extraordinary and necessary the requirement of true church is? It must be the one place in the earth where we do not have to put on any appearance, where we can frankly acknowledge our defects and imperfections and speak to one another the truth in love, and exhort one another *daily*. Next Sunday is already too late. In fact, mere Sundays will never accomplish this. Exhorting one another daily while it is yet today means a radical alteration of our present lifestyle, and the establishing of a whole new set of

priorities—apostolic priorities—that will make a serious intrusion upon our privacy, our pleasure, and our time.

Paul talks about being found blameless at His coming. He says that others may strive for a corruptible crown, but we for an incorruptible one. For Paul, this is absolutely vivid and real. For him, there is a shameful thing that cannot be considered, namely, that he should come before the Lord and not have a crown to lay at His feet. Do we have any desire to win a crown? The crown of glory shall not exceed the crown of our suffering! If we are unwilling for the crown of thorns, the trials, the demands, the reproaches, and the sufferings for righteousness' sake to learn what it means to live a heavenly life in an earth that is inhospitable, then we shall not have a crown to lay before Him.

The Lord Himself urges us to set our affections on the things 'above' where our treasure is. Heaven is not just biblical poetry, but the most practical and real exhortation to be blameless at His appearing. The words, "*Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect,*" ring in our ears. It is an absolute and apostolic standard much like being found blameless at His appearing, and if we will not insist upon that standard, then we quickly make 'allowances' for ourselves.

Do we have a conscience that is without offense to God and to men? What a condition to be in! It is nothing less than our re-entry into the Garden of Eden, a return to innocence. It is to be without guile, a light in the earth. It is God's invitation to us, not only in our outward conduct, but also in what we are inwardly and privately, even in the thoughts that we think, when we are free to think what we will. This requires a 'community' of the saints that is conducive to all these things. It requires a community that speaks the truth in love that it might grow up unto Him in all things. It is the end of passivity in the church, and a looking up to the platform while one man more or less conducts the whole service. We need to find and make room to speak face-to-face, not to the back of each other's heads, but seeing in each other's faces the glory of God, and moving from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of God.

God's provision for the perfecting of the saints are the *saints themselves* in *true* relationship, in interaction, in confrontation, in exhortation, and in speaking the truth in love. We must return to these daily church realities if we are to grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ. This kind of matrix of living will open our lives up, and place us under review as to just what we are about in God. It is a necessary review that has the potential to pave the way for true apostolic living.

This kind of sacramental living must be brought back into the church. We must be saved from mere expediency. It is not enough if something functions, or serves, or simply fulfils the utility and

requirement of the hour. That may indeed satisfy the world's requirement, but not God's! The issue is not whether it functions. We need to see beyond utility and into the realm of glory, in things large and small. We need again to do all things as unto the Lord, being steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, and standing fast in the faith.

Conclusion

This is only a little gleaning from the vineyard of Paul – just a chance phrase here and there, as it comes to us in the most superficial examination of his epistles, but what a standard begins to emerge! It is the apostolic standard that Paul himself walked in, and exhibited. *"Follow me, be imitators of me,"* needs to be said again by 'apostolic' men and women of our own age. God calls us to something even more frightening than that, namely, to be able to say with Jesus to an unbelieving world, *"If you see me, you have seen the Father. I and the Father are one."* If you want to know what God is like, then see this humility, see this uncompromising truth, see this integrity, see this righteousness, see this godly character, for this is the foundation of the church. Our power and authority in ministry are not something unrelated to it, but altogether divinely joined.

"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."

(1 Thessalonians 1:5)

How many will subscribe to that standard from this day forth? If we are serious, we will find ourselves able to say with Paul, 'our' gospel, the gospel of His grace. It will no longer be a word of technicality, but a deeply experienced enablement for those who will be holy as He is holy, and perfect as He is perfect.

"You also became imitators of us and of the Lord." Paul is here intimating that to follow him was to follow the Lord. That is either arrogance or the simple truth in all humility. Apostolic is the Lord in all of the incarnate fullness occupying the human frame. Can you imagine a church like that, a whole church from top to bottom, in the same apostolic splendor, the same apostolic stature, the same apostolic character, the same apostolic witness, and the same apostolic power? That is what God is wanting.

Amen.