

George Washington, the greatest General in the history of the most powerful nation on earth, was a man among men. He is memorialized as the "American Moses", the one who led the American cause out of oppression, seemingly on loan from God. Of all the heroics and memorials of Washington's greatness, one stands out as peculiarly noble and demonstrably transformative for the entire world. When Cornwallis surrendered the British Armies to the Continental Army, Washington surrendered, too. He voluntarily gave up the right, and calling by the American people, to become King. He had been given vast power to fight the Revolutionary War, more power than any other person in our nation's history, and he surrendered it back because he knew that he was not the master of this American Experiment, but its servant. This type of humility, this servanthood, not merely in name but in essence, is the same kind of which Paul and Apollos and the others consider for themselves in the building and establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ. They, like Washington (who had major flaws, too, of course), did not consider that the building of their great endeavors belonged to them, but they to it. They knew that they were but stewards. Paul viewed himself not as a leader of men, a position from which to wield power, but as a servant of the Great King, Jesus, and an underling who was tasked with a responsibility to which he must be faithful. This is the calling of all Christians: faithfulness. It is not success or glory or reputation or honor, but faithfulness which bids us labor and fight and serve and die. It is faithfulness that fills our hearts with joy and delight at the knowledge that Christ Jesus is honored and revered and known through our labors. It is faithfulness to His command for which we strive and to which we are to be held accountable to him. And it is as servants that we are to be known to one another, so that no man may boast before the Lord, and all men would know that Christ alone is worthy of allegiance, adoration, and acknowledgment as Lord.

#### 1. We are to be Accounted as Servants

- a. a man should reckon (account, λογίζομαι) us
  - i. This is about *accounting* – valuation and identity
    1. It is the same word used of Abraham's faith being "credited" as righteousness (Romans 4)
    - ii. Paul is saying that people should value and identify him as *truly* this way:
- b. as **servants** of Christ
  - i. "υπηρετης" - used of servants, who carry out their Master's desires
    1. "officers" - Matt 5:25; Mark 14:54
    2. "synagogue attendant" - Luke 4:20
    3. "servant" - Acts 15:3; 26:16
- c. as **house-stewards** of the mysteries of God
  - i. οικονομος – οikos (house)+ nomos (law); one given *authority to administrate* over the household - in old English homes, the butler, who organized and ruled the servants
    1. used of the city treasurer in Rom 16:23
      - a. "οικονομος of the city"
    2. where we get the word "economy"
      - a. many processes working in relationship to one another to result in "household" flourishing or degradation
      - b. Thus, how one manages each of the processes within an economy (production, labor, distribution, trade, capital, etc.) results in variant household conditions.
  - ii. Parallelism: Servants = House-Stewards, and Christ = Mysteries of God
- d. We struggle to *define ourselves* in this way
  - i. We may say that we serve, as an action, but we are hesitant to *define* ourselves as *servants*, underlings.
  - ii. This is because we think too highly of ourselves, even as redeemed, as to define ourselves in such a way

1. We think that such a definition is beneath us, belittles us, but we fail to see that God defines Himself as a servant
  2. Even though He is the only, the unique, eternal One, He humbles Himself, by free and uncompelled choice, to take the form of humanity, even to death, even to death as a condemned criminal (Phil 2:5-11)
  3. God honors this in Christ Jesus, and He honors it in each of those who belong to Christ, when they define themselves as suffering servants.
  - iii. This doctrine of our *essential servanthood* is what builds unity: there is no more important individual than another in the Body of Christ – grace precludes it
  - e. Paul sees himself and Apollos as household managers, servants, not masters, but servants with specific responsibility in the household and who answer to the Master
    - i. This responsibility involves the faithful handling of the mysteries of God
      1. The goal is to be a FAITHFUL steward (Luke 12:42)
      2. v2 - "Furthermore, it is sought in the stewardship that this one might be found *faithful*."
    - ii. The goal of the servant is not wisdom, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or success, but *faithfulness* to the One who owns the house.
      1. Faithfulness, a trustworthy administration of the gospel (mysteries of God), in the true sense of the word: "worthy of the trust that has been placed in their care."
      2. So much of our worry and anxiety comes from the pressure that we have erroneously placed on ourselves to be "successful"
        - a. When "success" is your goal, we assume that whatever means might bring said "success" is good and right
        - b. When "faithfulness" is your goal, then our labor becomes hearing and knowing the Master's orders (Word) and remaining true to it
          - i. This is much more freeing
          - ii. This is approved by God
    - iii. This administration involves the authoritative handling of the mysteries of God
      1. Though Paul and Apollos and Peter belonged to the Corinthians, it is also true that they didn't answer to the Corinthians, but to the House Owner: God.
      2. They were to administrate according to His Word, His pattern, His design, and His instruction.
        - a. We, too, whether in our instruction or proclamation, in our discernment or appreciation, must hear the Master's desire and design.
2. What are the "mysteries of God"?
  - a. A "mystery" in the NT is something which fullness was hidden but has now been revealed by God – the "mystery of godliness" (1 Tim 3:16) "mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27) "the mystery of the union of Christ with the Church" (Eph 5:32), etc.
    - i. That is, the revelation of the mysteries of God, the proclamation of God's works in Christ and their subsequent interpretation and meaning as given by Christ through His Spirit, i.e. THE GOSPEL (Eph 6:19), which is Christ (Col 2:2; 4:3)
      1. "the Kingdom of God" (Mark 4:11, same word)
      2. "union of Jew and Gentile into one people" (Rom 11:25-26; Eph 3:4-6)
      3. "mystery of resurrection" (1 Cor 15:51)
      4. "God's plan to sum up all things under Christ" (Eph 1:9-10)
  - b. Paul is the servant of this gospel, it is his master
    - i. Note that Paul is placing himself and Apollos in a lower position than the Corinthians had them

- ii. The Corinthians had them as heads of parties, battalion captains, and leaders of men, but they had themselves as butlers, servants of the household, subservient and less significant than the gospel itself
  - 1. The message precedes the messenger in important, significance, and rank.
  - 2. This is how Paul can rejoice in the proclamation of the gospel by ill-intentioned men in Philippians 1:15-18
  - 3. As long as Christ is preached accurately (Gal 1:8, “if any man or messenger preached a gospel contrary to the gospel that I preached, let him be cut off!”), then Paul rejoices for the Master is being served
- c. The announcement of Christ Jesus’ reign, *accurately proclaimed and interpreted*, was the goal of all of the apostles’ efforts, labors, sufferings, provisions, and graces
  - i. They didn’t do it primarily for the response which they received from people (though they desired a good reception!)
  - ii. They did it for the sake of being faithful to the One to whom their greatest love and affection was set: Christ Jesus their Master

### 3. We Strive to Impress...Someone

- a. We live in a culture of *impression* (people-pleasing)
  - i. We manage how we appear to people so that we are perceived to be strong.
  - ii. We want to be seen as capable, not incapable; attractive, not unattractive; wise, not foolish; smart, not ignorant; important, not insignificant; needed, not unnecessary
- b. We want to leave an impression on those whom we desire or respect, and we strive to be perceived as *great* in various spheres of our lives
  - i. Family: Impressive Father, Husband, Lover, Provider,
  - ii. Career: Impressive Intellect, Impressive Artist, Impressive Creator, Impressive Work-Ethic, etc.
  - iii. Community: Impressive Citizen, Impressive Participant, Impressive Political Rhetoric, Impressive Benefactor, Impressive Caretaker, etc.
  - iv. Friendship: Impressive Loyalty, Impressive Beauty, Impressive Strength, Impressive Entertainer, etc.
    - 1. As one person said, “We spend money we don’t have to buy things we don’t need to impress people we don’t like.”
- c. Every day we live our lives in a relational courtroom, presenting evidence intended to impress those around us
  - i. Sometimes we have good evidence, and we feel confident that the verdict people will place on us is “impressive”, meaningful, significant, important...accepted
  - ii. Sometimes we lack good evidence, we failed to be impressive and instead presented evidence that can reveals that we are not great, and we fear the verdict that people will place on us is “unimpressive”, foolish, worthless, insignificant, hopeless...unacceptable.
- d. Our anger, irritability, and disdain for those who contradict us, question and point out our weaknesses, etc. reveal how much we really care about impressing even strangers.
- e. Our fear, anxiety, and cowardice reveals how greatly we care what others think about us.
  - i. We crave recognition for our good work (Galatians 6:1, 14-15).
    - 1. Test: Gossip, Boasting, Demeaning Talk, Harshly Critical spirit, talking about your success in the midst of another’s success
  - ii. We fear recognition for our bad work.

1. Test: Irritability, Complaining, Gossip, Bitterness, Shouting, Expecting people to make retribution for their sin against you (unforgiveness), etc.
  2. We're still trying to present evidence to everyone (including ourselves) to defend the impression that we are adequate in ourselves, good enough, acceptable, honorable *because we are successful*. We are operating out of the sinful assumption that we must be in control, like the Master, not the Servant.
- f. Some of this comparison is also trying to prove *to ourselves* that we are OK, that we are lovely and impressive
- i. Some people try to fight people-pleasing with self-pleasing: "It's only what I think of me that matters."
  - ii. However, it is clear from Scripture and from experiential observation that people who don't care at all what others think and only care about what they think are, frankly, dangerous
    1. The self-centered, self-pleasing person is unteachable, violent, destructive, explosively responding to well-intended criticism, and has no room to grow in the grace and knowledge of God
    2. In fact, people with high self-esteem are a much greater threat to those around them than people with low self-esteem.

#### 4. It is the Lord's Opinion That Matters

- a. Look at how Paul describes this courtroom scene:
  - i. It's not how they might judge him
    1. He is not seeking man's approval
    2. He doesn't care what they think of him
  - ii. It's not even how he might judge himself
    1. He is not seeking higher self-esteem
    2. He also doesn't care what he thinks of himself
  - iii. It is only what Christ judges that matters
    1. It is what Christ Jesus judges concerning his faithfulness to his calling
    2. "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal 6:14)
- b. Apart from the gospel, we respond in one of two ways:
  - i. Put too much stock into what others think of us:
    1. Ruled by the anxiety of whether or not people are happy with us.
  - ii. Put too much stock into what I think of myself:
    1. Ruled by the arrogance which isolates me from ever truly loving or changing.
  - iii. So, you either have a person who can never accept criticism (thinks too highly of himself) or a person who is devastated by criticism (thinks too highly of others)
- c. The Gospel of Jesus Christ changes everything
  - i. Because Jesus went into the courtroom for us, taking our blame and granting us His evidence, we KNOW that we are made lovely to God, so you can be defined "Servant"
  - ii. He impressed the Father with His obedient faith, even to the point of death, and so God raised Him, and us with Him by faith, to beautiful glory
  - iii. Now, we can accept criticism without being devastated by it or rejecting it outright
    1. We can be humbly confident, for the Lord will judge rightly
      - a. Humble: "My sins are so great and unimpressive that Jesus had to die for me."
        - i. I cannot boast to God, myself, or to others of my greatness *at all*.
        - ii. I am a servant of a Master.
      - b. Confident: "Jesus loves me so much that He DID die for me."

- i. I can only boast in Jesus Christ, crucified for sinners like me.
    - ii. I am a *beloved* servant of a *sacrificially loving* Master.
  2. We can weigh people's judgments without fear, as "small things", in the light of God's grace towards us in Jesus.
  3. We can be perceived and judged as "underlings" without fear or shame, for Jesus Christ loves us and has made us complete
- d. Now we strive to be faithful to the Word of the Gospel
  - i. We are to be judged, but not by ourselves or by men, but by Jesus
  - ii. This judgment is about our faithfulness to His Word, to the "mysteries of God"
  - iii. The question is: Am I being faithful, no matter what my heart says or what other people may say?

#### Conclusion:

Every day we are living our lives in a courtroom, trying to win a verdict, with everything that we think, feel, or do either being admitted for the prosecution or the defense. Some days you feel like you're winning the trial and some days you feel like you're losing the trial and are buffeted by fears and tossed about with the anxious awaiting of the verdict. Paul has found the secret: The trial is over for him. He is out of the courtroom, the ultimate verdict is in: innocent in Christ. Only the opinion of the Lord counts. How is this possible? We are out of the courtroom because Jesus Christ went into the courtroom. He became the Lamb, the sacrifice, the substitute in our place and accepted the verdict of guilty and gave us His evidence for innocence. He bore the verdict that we deserved and gave us His. So now, for the believer in Jesus Christ, we perform knowing the verdict is in already. We can now work without fear and with humility. You see, it is only the Gospel of sheer grace that brings true humility, the ability to see ourselves *essentially* as servants and stewards, for God's love is set upon us as sons and daughters. When we are boasting in the Cross as our only hope, we can love others for their sakes and not ours. We can be faithful, even when people may mock or hate or insult us. For now when God looks at you he sees one who is infinitely valuable and lovely, for you are in Jesus. How can you worry about being snubbed now? How can you worry about how you're treated now? Where is the power of fear? It is gone. It has been cast out by perfect love, His perfect love. Jesus makes us confidently subservient and humbly bold.