

PREFACE

What we are learning from this passage (vv11-13) is how to live as a servant—or perhaps more accurately, how we *may be called upon* to live when we are a servant. For not every true servant in Christ is called upon to live this way.

From my youth, when considering the life of a servant of Christ, I have thought about R. G. LeTourneau. My dad was fascinated by earth-moving machines; he could happily spend hours watching the work at a construction site as the huge machines moved earth from one place to another, as long-armed cranes hoisted beams skyward. And as a logical extension, my dad learned of and became fascinated with the life and witness of R. G. LeTourneau, the man who invented or improved many of those massive earth-moving machines. From the web site *Giants for God* (<http://www.giantsforgod.com/rg-letourneau/>) I quote:

RG LeTourneau is perhaps the most inspiring Christian inventor, businessman and entrepreneur the world has ever seen. A sixth grade dropout, Robert Gilmore “RG” LeTourneau went on to become the leading earth moving machinery manufacturer of his day with plants on 4 continents, more than 300 patents to his name and major contributions to road construction and heavy equipment that forever changed the world. Most importantly, his contribution to the advancement of the Gospel ranks him among the greatest of Christian Businessmen of all time. Famous for living on 10% of his income and giving 90% to the spread of the Gospel, LeTourneau exemplified what a Christian businessman should be.

So far, in just the first half of our passage, we have already been given a substantive picture of a true, sacrificial servant, one who

- suffered hunger and thirst,
- went without proper or sufficient clothing,
- was roughly and sometimes brutally tortured for the name of Christ,
- had no personal home-base to which to retreat, and
- did manual labor to earn his keep even while serving as an evangelist.

But we must not imagine that one must live the life of a miserable tramp, ill-fed and ill-clothed, to be a servant of Christ. God calls individuals from all walks of life to serve Him and His kingdom in myriad ways. The apostle Paul was called, in his time and place, to serve Christ in this way. We may be called to be His servant in *this* time and place in far different ways—or even, like Paul, as “a miserable tramp, ill-fed and ill-clothed.”

Read 1 Corinthians 4:11-13.

Let's pick up our study in the middle of v12.

when we are reviled, we bless;

Jesus, of course, taught His disciples to “...love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28). But Paul was not the only one to teach this. Peter confirms for us, in his treatise on suffering righteously, Christ’s response to being reviled.

Read 1 Peter 2:21-23.

Later, in the next chapter, Peter summarizes what our response should be to persecution, insults, and attacks.

Read 1 Peter 3:8-9.

Perhaps both Paul and Peter—at the time, on opposite sides of the persecution—were influenced by the righteous behavior of the martyr Stephen.

Read Acts 7:58-60.

When we are reviled—that is, verbally abused—we are called to respond with the precise opposite.

bless = *eulogeo* = from a compound of <G2095> (eu) and <G3056> (logos); **to speak well of**, i.e. (religiously) to bless (thank or invoke a benediction upon, prosper) :- bless, **praise**. We have the word “eulogy,” transliterated from this; at a funeral someone rises “to speak well of” the deceased.

It goes without saying that this is an unnatural response for mere flesh.

when we are persecuted, we endure;

There is an interesting word-play going on here. The literal meaning of the Greek *diokomenoi*, translated “we are persecuted” is to flee because one is being pursued, chased. Hence the word came to mean the *reason for* having to flee; if one is being hounded to the extent that one has to flee for one’s life, well, this means one is being *persecuted*. But, again, the original, literal meaning is “to flee.”

Paul says that the apostles’ response to being persecuted is they “endure.” The Greek is *anechometha*, which means “to hold oneself up against,” or “to put up with.” So understand the word-picture: In contrast to the Corinthians, who are *avoiding* persecution by going along with the contemporary culture, Paul is saying that he and the other apostles, when being persecuted—pursued, chased—are *not* fleeing, but standing their ground and taking—putting up with—the persecution!

Isn't this pretty much what Jesus meant in His Sermon on the Mount when he said for us to turn the other cheek?

Read Matthew 5:38-40.

v13

when we are slandered, we try to conciliate;

Here, in my opinion, Paul opens a door onto his aching heart. Earlier when he mentioned being "reviled," he unlocked the door, but now, I imagine with profound sorrow, he swings wide the door to reveal how he has been affected by some of the things the Corinthians are saying about him. One can read between the lines throughout the two letters he wrote to the church to learn that these people were not just following an errant path, but were doing so purposely, arrogantly, as they criticized Paul—in letters to him and, probably, publicly ("slandered").

And even though he accepts the abuse, it had to bruise his heart. But still, faithful to the example of his Master, Paul tries to conciliate.

conciliate, entreat, answer kindly = *parakaleo* = from <G3844> (para) and <G2564> (kaleo); to call near, i.e. invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation or consolation) :- beseech, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) exhort (-ation), entreat, pray; **Heinrich Meyer**: "give beseeching words."

Webster's says to conciliate is to "win over; soothe the anger of; make friendly; placate; to gain by friendly acts."

Sidebar: Out of all our common translations, only the NASB adds "try to." I could find no discussion on this. My guess is that this version just states the obvious, that when one conciliates, consoles, entreats, etc., the result is ultimately up to the individual being conciliated, consoled, or entreated. Thus it is an effort without guaranteed results—an attempt only.

Frankly, this is nothing less than astonishing. Add all these up:

- Their condition, the situation in which they serve Christ: hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, and homeless (v11).
- They answer curses with blessings.
- They answer persecution with acceptance and endurance.
- They answer slander with earnest conciliation.

What a contrast to the Corinthians! But even more, what a contrast to *us*! We need not waste time dissecting the contrasting behavior of those in Corinth; we need only turn the light of this witness around and shine it on our own behavior, the contents of our own heart.

we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

We are now back to where I began this passage with the pizza leavings that must be laboriously scraped off the edges of the pan then discarded. This is precisely how Paul describes himself and the other apostles.

Albert Barnes: It would not be possible to employ stronger expressions to denote the contempt and scorn with which they were everywhere regarded. The word “filth,” *perikatharmata* occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. It properly denotes filth, or that which is collected by sweeping a house, or that which is collected and cast away by purifying or cleansing anything; hence, any vile, worthless, and contemptible object. Among the Greeks the word was used to denote the victims which were offered to expiate crimes, and particularly men of ignoble rank, and of a worthless and wicked character, who were kept to be offered to the gods in a time of pestilence, to appease their anger, and to purify the nation. ([Bretschneider and Schleusner](#)). Hence, it was applied by them to people of the most vile, abject, and worthless character. But it is not certain that Paul had any reference to that sense of the word. The whole force of the expression may be met by the supposition that he uses it in the sense of that filth or dirt which is collected by the process of cleansing or scouring anything, as being vile, contemptible, worthless. So the apostles were regarded. And by the use of the word “world” here, he meant to say that they were regarded as the most vile and worthless men which the whole world could furnish; not only the refuse of Judea, but of all the nations of the earth. As if he had said “more vile and worthless people could not be found on the face of the earth.”

Note that he is *not* saying that that is what they truly are in their own estimation or, far more important, in the eyes of God. No, he is saying that to the rest of the world—and, sadly, in the estimation of many in the Corinth church—they are *considered* “as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things.”

We have to ask, then: How could Paul live this way? How could this situation not beat him down into irretrievable depression? I suggest two reasons. First, he knew that his Savior had suffered the same—and worse. Isaiah had prophesied some seven hundred years earlier what had eventually come to pass.

Read Isaiah 53:2-9.

Paul knew that his suffering was as nothing in comparison to what his Lord had suffered for him. Second, he also knew that this was no permanent condition; Paul could see over the horizon to a day in which he had hope—a day when, just like Christ Jesus, he too would be glorified.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.