



Cruciformed: Paul on the Seven Virtues in Spiritual Formation

**A Series of Chapel Messages at RTS/Orlando
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Part One: An Identity Shaped by Faith

1 Corinthians 7:17-24

For me, there are two stories of transformation that bookend the 20th century.

The first is Franz Kafka's short story, "Metamorphosis"; a story about a man — Gregor Samsa — who wakes up one morning to find he has been transformed into a cockroach. His life had been an exercise in going-through-the-motions, routinized tedium, a sham solicitude for his family that actually debilitated them. In his metamorphosis, a life that was internally verminous had simply become manifest. Gregor's death is less the result of injuries caused by the apple his father throws into his back and decays there — it's more a working out of a rotted out inner being always there.

The second story is Larry & Andy Wachowski's movie, the "Matrix," in which Thomas Anderson is transformed into the first new man of a new creation, "Neo" — the underground name he had rebelliously taken on in his old life — but which becomes his actual name on the far side of a sort of resurrection — "My name is Neo" — the name change takes place largely because of the faith placed in him by two other people, Morpheus ("I know he's the one") and Trinity ("You can't be dead, Neo, you can't because I love you. You hear me? I love you!").

Long before I heard of Kafka I felt I was on my way to cockroachdom — doting depression era parents had spent themselves to make my life better than theirs — and somewhere my soul had gotten the message that life was about getting, not giving. My high school accomplishments were a string of entries for college applications; my male friends were competitors for the best colleges; my girlfriends, weekend trophies.

When I became a Christian in the Fall of '69 — a lost freshman in college who, despite himself, couldn't seem to make friends with anybody but Christians — what finally pushed me from non-faith to faith was the realization that I didn't have the capacity within me to be the kind of person I was made to be. I reached out to Christ reaching

out to me from the cross because I believed he could change me. I understood he needed to cleanse me and seal my pardon, first — but more than that I was tired of being tied to a mode of existence I couldn't shake: loving myself in the image of others. I trusted Christ because I believed he could take me outside my prison of self and make me more like himself, more like what I intuited being a human *being* was supposed to be.

I was right — Christ is in the business of transforming lost souls; but I was a little naïve about the timetable. The week of my conversion I missed — and not for the first time — a deadline for an English assignment. Resolved to lose a well established pattern of procrastination, I marched confidently to my professor's office to express my remorse over another missed deadline, to testify to the grace that had entered my life, and to promise that if I would be granted one more extension, this would be the last I would ever need. He smirked — as smugly as only a professor of freshman English could, and said, "Sure, you can have the extension — and see you next time." Here we are 30 plus years later, and I'm checking my mail daily to see how gracious Baker Book House will be about having finally seen but a single chapter of a book that was due in toto a good 4 years ago!

This is the first in a 7 part series on what Paul has to say to us about what it is that the Lord Jesus is molding our lives into, and how he is doing so.

My inclination is toward struggle, toward self-criticism, toward understanding why things don't work out because of the effects of the fall. I think it has been the Lord's providence that has put it on my heart to understand the positive side of what he is doing in me — in us — to wit, building:

- identities transformed by faith
- ambitions shaped by hope
- affections determined by love
- godly sensibilities (wisdom) that respond to the God who is really there, and to his world as it really is
- cruciform lives that embody justice (what is owed) and mercy (more than what is owed, and less)
- courageous and enduring hearts, and
- passions tethered to his purity

Believing what you believe. Today I would like you to consider with me faith. Faith is not just about *what* you believe.

It's about *believing* what you believe. It's about deciding that the story of redemption really is true, staking your whole being on it, and letting it define you. Paul's phrasing is exquisite (not that he needs me to pass judgment): he writes in Romans 1:5 of the "obedience of faith." Here is one place etymology is helpful — indeed, crucial — the Greek for "obey" is either: "to come under the hearing" (*hupo + akouein*) or "really to hear," literally, to "hyper-hear" (*hyper + akouein*).

Faith is not entirely propositional. It is partly intuitional as well. For that reason, it's about reflecting on ... chewing on central truths, so that perhaps they may have their way with us. It's about either "coming under the hearing" or "hyper-hearing," "really hearing."

Central "faith" truths from Paul:

- foreknown & predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29)
- with unveiled faces, we behold the glory of the Lord and are being changed into the same likeness from one degree of glory to another (2Co 3:18)
- I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the one who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20)
- I am crucified to the world and the world is crucified to me (Gal 6:14)
- If anyone is in Christ, there is new creation — old things have passed away; behold, new things have come to be (2Co 5:17)
- Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4)
- I have been made alive and am seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:4).
- Because my body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, I am not my own. I was bought with a price (1Co 6:19:20)
- I have been bought with a price — I do not belong to myself, but to him; I am not a slave of any other person either, any other household, any other identity — I am who I am because of whose I am — and I am his. That defines me (1Co 7:17-24).

A principal text I want to unpack a bit is this last one, 1Co 7:17-24. Vastly underappreciated by students of Paul, this passage says oceans about what it is to live by faith.

In the context of chapter 7, Paul is trying to help the Corinthians understand that there is no location in the gender matrix that is an obstacle to pursuing the calling of knowing Christ. All that matters is "keeping the commandments of God," by which Paul means not a list of "do-be's" and "don't be's", but rather a living out of a redemptive mindset: knowing that one has been "bought with a price" and therefore is freed from all other valuations of personal worth. "Keeping the commandments" is — as it was intended to be with Israel in the first place — knowing what it is to be rescued from the matrix of all other measures of value, and living as God's peculiar possession — his treasure.

To illustrate what it is to be freed from having gender location define you, Paul appeals to the analogy of slavery.

Slaves understood one thing: whose you are determines who you are. Your social capital is not *your* name, but your master's name. Slaves, he says, who come to Christ, have been made freedpersons of the Lord. That is to say, even if there is no external change in their situations, they are to see themselves as *former* slaves, members by grace of a new family, whose family name trumps their own name, and replaces their old family name.

By contrast, Paul says that those who are born free become slaves of Christ — as slaves, they take on their master's family name. Now, just like slaves, they are *also* in the position of understanding: it's not *who* you are it's *whose* you are. The challenge of those who are literally socially free is that there is no external coercion — slaves have obligations to old masters thrust upon them; their faith-challenge is to transfigure those obligations into loving service to their new, real family head. Free people have a different faith-challenge: *choosing* the lower path, *choosing* the route of servitude.

Now, in a longer message, we would look at the way the altitude these new self-definitions determined by faith enable clear thinking about maneuvering in the gender-matrix — but one advantage of doing these chapel talks, is I can just say for now: sorry, no time.

For today, let me stay with this slave thing. If ever there were an illustration of Prof. Frame's dictum that "theology is application," it would be Paul's letter to Philemon (and today, by the way, won't be the last time I turn to this letter in this series on spiritual transformation). Here Paul puts feet to the teaching of 1Co 7:17-24.

Paul writes to one of his own converts, Philemon, now the head of a house church, about one of Philemon's slaves, estranged somehow, but now himself a convert, Onesimus. You need to know that the name Onesimus was relatively widely used for slaves. Behind it is the Greek verb *oniēmi*, which means "to benefit" or "to be useful." In a splendid wordplay in v. 11, Paul describes Onesimus' pre-Christian existence as having stood counter to his name: Paul says Onesimus used to be "useless" not "useful." But in calling Onesimus' previous life "without use" he actually uses a different root word, a synonym that would have sounded like the title "Christ". Formerly, says Paul, Onesimus was (and sorry, I meant to put these terms in the bulletin) *achrēstos*. If I may paraphrase, without Christ, this existence was a cockroach in the making; Onesimus had a one-way ticket punched for the Roach Hotel. Now, however, so says Paul, Onesimus — spiritual son to Paul and member of God's family — has become of tremendous benefit: Paul calls him *euchrēstos* — it may seem like a stretch, but this would have sounded like: "Well-Christ-ed". Onesimus is part of the new creation, redefined at his core by his new identity in Christ; now what was once abject coerced slavery has the potential of becoming a "ministry" on Philemon's behalf along with Paul in his own chains for the gospel.

But Paul is not done. The coup-de-grace of the letter is the way Paul turns to Philemon and says: I'm not going to tell you what to do — you know your duty here, and I trust you to do more. In his appeal to Philemon, Paul switches for one phrase to a Greek

mode normally used of prayer, and whispers in verse 20, “Yes, brother, may I receive some benefit from you in the Lord.” And for this prayer-like appeal to Philemon he uses the verb that underlies Onesimus’ name: *nai adelphē, egō sou onaimēn en kuriō* — may you now, my brother, live up to the dignity of your slave’s name. Now, you, Philemon, become an Onesimus.

One of the greatest pitchers of the 80’s and 90’s was Orel Hersheiser — a Christian, now retired & an Orlando area resident. Hersheiser credits a lot of his success to Tommy Lasorda, his longtime manager with the Los Angeles Dodgers. When he first came up to the big leagues, Hersheiser was a baby faced kid in his early 20’s — and in the early days he got knocked around a bit, like a baby faced kid in his early 20’s. Lasorda got tired of seeing Hersheiser pitch below his potential, and he felt that the young pitcher was starting to play down to others’ expectations. So, one day he challenged him. “Son, I’m giving you a new name, Bulldog. Now you start living up to it — you start pitching like a Bulldog.” Believe me — Orel Hersheiser is the last person on Planet Earth anybody would look at and say, “There’s one bad lookin’ bulldog. Watch out for him.” Anybody but the baseball genius Tommy Lasorda. Hersheiser became the Bulldog Lasorda named him.

What about you? Cockroach or Neo? Blue pill or red pill?

It’s all about trusting the one who has united you to himself in his death, burial, and resurrection — and has given you a new name: his. It’s about coming under the hearing of him calling you by his own name. It’s about hyper-hearing who he says you are in him.

And may God give us all the grace to hear that voice. Amen.

Let’s pray: Father, just as we are, we come to you. We ask you for grace upon grace. May we believe, and may you be on the other end delighting in responding to our faith. May your Son be more fully formed in us. Amen.

Cruciformed: Paul on the Seven Virtues in Spiritual Formation

Part Two: Ambitions Shaped by Hope

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

1 Corinthians 7:26-31

Let me set today's message in the context of this series. It was once remarked to me by one of the 20th century's foremost scholars of the Pastoral epistles that he had a hard time accepting Paul as the author of 1 & 2 Tim & Titus, because he could not understand how the apostle of *faith, hope, and love*, could allow *godliness* to displace *love*, as appears to this scholar to happen in the introduction to Titus. What he observed is that in Titus 1:1 Paul says his apostleship is for the sake of the *faith* of the elect, it promotes a knowledge that accords with *godliness*, and it is based on the *hope* of eternal life. Indeed, in the Pastoral epistles, the apostle of *faith, hope, and love* shows considerable boldness in giving himself to transposing his values so that they may be understood by a people who have learned to prize from a previous life things like *godliness, justice, courage, and temperance*.

In the end I think what Paul did was an act of profound *hopefulness*, an expression of his *trust* in the power of God to redeem and transform, and above all an outpouring of his *love* for people in desperate need to hear in their own heart language the message of God's grace. But I want to translate some of my musings on the critical and scholarly question to help you appreciate how profoundly the Paul of the canon articulates a vision of our being transformed to bear the image of Christ. In our union with Christ, we find:

- an identity transformed by faith (last message)
- a set of ambitions shaped by hope (today's message)
- affections determined by love
- a godly sensibility (or wisdom or prudence) that responds to the God who is really there, and to his world as it really is
- a cruciform (or cross-shaped) life that embodies justice (what is owed) and mercy (more than what is owed, and less)
- courageous and enduring hearts, and
- passions tethered to his purity

Listen to today's passages: 2Co 4:16-18; 1Co 7:26-31

When Sir Isaac Newton was king, time was one thing we thought we had figured out. Time was time ... you could set your clock by it. Then along comes Professor Einstein and tells us that not only are matter and energy relative to one another ($E=mc^2$), but that at its borders space bends, and so does time. Time is no longer so staid and inelastic.

- Since Einstein we think that the one constant is the speed of light, but that if you could travel at half the speed of light at a light-emitting object like the sun, the light from that object would get to you no faster than it would get to the place from which you had departed.
- Since Einstein we think that if you were to fall into a black hole at one second before noon, your watch would never strike 12, not because it would be obliterated, but because you would enter a zone in which gravity was so strong that time would literally get stretched out.
- Since Einstein we think that if you could travel to another star fast enough to get there and back you would be younger upon your return than if you had stayed here in the first place.

Frankly, imagination fails me. It makes my brain hurt.

But hold the phone. Isn't it possible I'm being told things I already know — that the church has known since the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Before Christianity came along, personal hopes in the Greco-Roman world were rather tame — and this, despite Maximus' slogan to his fellow warriors about awakening from death on the Elysian fields in the movie *Gladiator*. In point of fact, *Gladiator* is set in the 2nd Cent. A.D. when the Christian onslaught was well underway; the emergence of "paganism" as such, and aspirations for immortality in Elysian fields are a response to Christians' promise of resurrection. If you don't think so, read Julian the Apostate. Before Christianity comes to prominence the most popular funeral inscription is a Greek or Latin form of something like: "I was not. I am not. I care not." No pre-existence. No consciousness in the grave. No hope beyond the grave. It is not at all unlike my father-in-law's motto: "None of us gets out of here alive."

With the exception of a handful of explicit sayings (say, in Job, Ezekiel, and Daniel) OT hopes are also muted. Jesus said that the title "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" assumes that those 3 men still live and that they must of necessity one day be resurrected. Jesus implies, of course, that the subtle reader of Scripture will find hopes for resurrection in the most primeval of biblical accounts. But it must be observed that the truth was not self-evident to everyone around him; indeed it is the *subtle* reader of Scripture who will find resurrection hope in the earliest theology.

Remember that it is on this point that the disciples seem to be especially dull: Jesus has to tell them three times that his crucifixion will lead to his resurrection.

What distinguished Paul's Pharisee party from the Sadducees is that the Sadducees did not believe resurrection was clearly taught in the Pentateuch; they therefore felt directed by something like a "regulative principle" of interpretation not to teach resurrection. Paul's Pharisees believed the Pentateuch implied more than it explicitly taught, and that books like Daniel and Ezekiel were as normative as the Books of Moses. Thus Pharisees embraced resurrection as a future prospect, something for which one prepared in this life. But even for Paul and his party, it was more like a distant

theological possibility — Paul greeted claims of Jesus' resurrection with the same incredulity as his fellow Pharisees, and with a passion deeper than most, suggesting he understood something about its radical consequences. The resurrection is a completely endtime phenomenon. You may have your body buried on the Mt. of Olives so that when Messiah comes and raises the dead, you are at the center of the action for the renewal of all things. But the claim that one man had been raised and that in him the general resurrection had begun and become implicit in history for everybody else was ludicrous.

But then the unthinkable happened. Something happened in time that should only happen at the end of time. A Second Adam traveled farther than the farthest star — he traveled into and out of the black hole of death — and showing up again from the far side of death, he pronounced death itself to have been swallowed up in victory.

From that day, Paul understood that everything was different: death is plundered and now works backwards. The fortress of the "is" has fallen to the onslaught of "What shall be." We are drawn into a new gravitational field — Paul calls it being "in Christ" — in which time as we know it gets stretched into eternity. "Now" and "not yet" are coterminous.

Hope is growing forever young.

Paul says, "Even though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day (2Co 4:16). One day there will be no more niggling question about our ultimate acceptability, and belovedness. One day, the repute attributed will be so weighty and glorious we will literally light up and glow with the approval bestowed upon us. Meanwhile, this approaching weight of glory bears in upon us and makes us forever young.

Thomas Aquinas observed: "Youth is a cause of hope. For youth, the future is long and the past is short."¹ On the other hand, expands the great contemporary Thomistic philosopher Josef Pieper, "it is above all when life grows short that hope grows weary; the 'not yet' is turned into the has-been, and old age turns, not to the 'not yet,' but to memories of what is 'no more.'"²

I am old enough to have come to stare this beast in the face. I saw my father, not knowing the hope of resurrection, age badly — increasingly cocooning after a retirement not of his choosing, depressed over having to bury one of his children, angry at losing his driving privileges even after an accident nearly led to loss of life. Then I saw the power of resurrection and its ability to confer lost youth: when Alzheimers became a tool in God's hands to give my father the simplicity to receive the gift of life in faith, and receive as well the gift of a grateful heart. I've seen the discovery of malignant cancer force me to reckon with whether my remaining days will be absorbed with a weary

¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I,II,40,6.

² Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), p. 110.

remorse over what is “no more” and a vain attempt to rescue a career from being “has been.”

What the resurrection whispers to those who will hear is this: I have a “not yet” that does not depend on my failing strength. I have, in the words of Pieper, such a “long” future that my past seems “short” however long and rich my life. I can wait patiently for a “not yet” that is the more measurably distant from me the more closely I approach it (Pieper, p. 110).

Christians know that their God, so says Aquinas, “is younger than all else” (*De genesi* 8.26.48, in Pieper, p. 111). And as an anonymous 2nd century Roman Christian explained to his unbelieving contemporaries:

This one (Christ) was from the beginning —
who appeared new and was found to be old,
who is ever young, born in the hearts of the saints (Diognetus 11.4).

What is produced in us, says Pieper, is “an aspiration that is at once relaxed and disciplined, that adaptability and readiness, that strong-hearted freshness, that resilient joy, that steady perseverance in trust that so distinguish the young and make them lovable” (p. 111).

That’s why I can delight in the presence of saints who are aging so well: Simon Kistemaker, Sherry MacKenzie, Roger Nicole, Bob Auffarth — Steve Brown, I’ll graciously leave your name off.

That’s why I can let Joshua Cottongim call me “Scarface” — this scar from melanoma surgery is a badge of honor. And it’s why my wife can call me “Pete Seeger,” the octogenarian folk-song writer and singer (“If I Had a Hammer” & “Where Have All the Flowers Gone”).

Indeed, the face I see in the mirror looks a lot older than the face I saw a year ago — then again, the face I see emerging inside is much younger.

Hope is living with the “not yet” of our salvation.

In the previous message on faith, we saw that God’s naming us trumps all other identities. What faith does is choose to embrace his definition of who we are — his beloved and redeemed — and live as though it were true, enslaved to no man, free to respond wherever I am to him.

Immediately upon making that point Paul points to hope. At 1Co 7:26 Paul says that “the pressing necessity or constraint” calls upon us to re-evaluate our priorities. The NAS and other translations misconstrue this, I think, as some sort of off-stage disaster (famine, or some such) that Paul says temporarily calls for ethical adjustments. I think, rather, that Richard Hays is correct, what Paul means is that the mission of the church

here at the turning of the ages — to lean into the coming of the Kingdom — requires us all to consider everything else to be negotiable.³

The passing of the *schēma* of this world trumps all other priorities, all other ambitions, all other agendas, save what Paul calls here *ta tou kuriou*, (“the things of the Lord”) but which elsewhere he, just like his Lord, calls “the Kingdom of God” (Romans 14:17). Paul writes of the way hope enables a distancing of ourselves from what he calls in general terms *ta tou kosmou* (“the things of the world”) and in specific terms: our relationships, our emotional lives, our things.

Ironically, it is this distancing from “the things of the world” that allows our engagement with them. That is something that had been lost on the Corinthians the first time around. In fact, it looks like the questions that have prompted 1Co 7 came up among the Corinthians as they tried to figure out what Paul meant when he had earlier said, “Those who are married should be as though they were not married.” “So, Paul,” they ask, “does that mean no sex in marriage? Does it mean married couples should actually get unmarried? What about those who have been promised in marriage? Or are contemplating marriage? Or who used to be married?”

Because we live in the “now” of “the day of salvation” in the midst of “a time that is very short” we can say “No!” to placing our hopes in relationships (“justice”?) in emotional satisfaction (“temperance”?) and potential godlings (for Paul “covetousness” = “idolatry”; *pleonexia* = *eidōlatría*). And precisely because we can say “No!” to their ultimate claims on us, we can say “Yes!” to their penultimate usefulness to us. Or — and many single folks contemplating ministry really do need to consider this option — we can say “No!” to them altogether.

Marriage is a good thing, but it is not everything. I confess I had never really thought about it until I was challenged during my own pre-marital counseling, but my marriage is not given to my wife and me just for ourselves — our union is a picture of Christ’s union with the church — it’s an eschatological sign of the reconciling power of the cross (and boy do I know that after nearly 30 years of having to help my wife be united to one big sinner). And our marriage sings to the extent that it becomes a vehicle for ministering mercy to lonely and lost people — people who know only how to use, spurn or idolize relationships, And our marriage serves “the things of the Lord” when it serves as an incubator to the children God brings into his covenant through our union. There’s always a bigger picture — and hope lends perspective — depth perception to the artistry of marriage.

Hope brings adjustments to our emotional lives. I’ve presided over joy-filled funerals of Christians tragically killed. And I’ve also participated in funerals of non-Christians cut down in the prime of life — there I’ve heard mock joy, so much whistling in the dark.

³ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the NT: Community, Cross, and New Creation* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 52.

Because of hope, when I purchase I don't have to be possessed. When I use, I don't have to be used.

The message of 1 Corinthians 7:26-30: is simply this: because of hope, I don't have to suck life dry; the last bite of sirloin doesn't have to be the juiciest; the last chip doesn't have to be the saltiest. Because that perfect taste I'm always pursuing waits — we'll all enjoy it together at the great banquet, when the great Overcomer — the author of time — the Alpha & Omega, raises his cup and says, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

And like the song says, "When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun."

In fact, in closing, let's sing "Amazing Grace" ...

Amazing grace! — how sweet the sound — that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.

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Part Three: Affections Determined by Love

1 Corinthians 9:19-23; 12:3b-13:3

In the middle of the century that has just passed, the Harvard sociologist David Riesman coined the phrase *The Lonely Crowd* to talk about a process most of us would readily recognize: no longer do people grow up learning an internal gyroscope of values; rather, they develop a sophisticated radar system that enables them to read the values called for at any particular time & place. Personhood is neither conferred by genes nor learned from betters, it is constructed or negotiated one day at a time.

Riesman's answer is a dead-end: rather than old-fashioned inner-direction or new-fashioned outer-direction, he commends autonomous direction — the problem is that autonomy leads to anomie. There is no such thing as a person who is a law unto him or herself. There's no life there.

In fact, Emile Durkheim described the most characteristic form of suicide in the West as “anomic,” rooted in peoples' sense of rootlessness, lack of boundaries. Though he wrote of end of the 19th century Europe, he spoke for beginning of the 3rd millennium America as well.

The one credible psychological portrait in Frank Peretti's novels: the lead character in *Piercing the Darkness* (I forget her name, and the book's in a box somewhere) who finally realizes she's not a law unto herself ... that her killing of her newborn was *really* wrong ... from there she works back to the God whose character she had violated, and who had given himself for her forgiveness.

Here's where the biblical world shouts an answer: it's not about *who* I am — it's about *whose* I am.

It's about accepting a tethered existence.

The world most of have been raised in imposes upon us an impossible duty: figure out, or more precisely, decide who we are going to be.

We grow up with a bewildering set of roles and expectations — and in the 50+ years since Riesman wrote, it's only gotten more perplexing. He wrote when the choices for most folks were simply Chevy, Olds, Pontiac, or Ford — rich people could go Cadillac or Lincoln — those into exotica could go with a Volkswagen or a Renault-Dolphin or a Mercedes. Now, think of the choices. My goodness! I hate to be so old school, but give me a good old '65 Mustang, and I'll die happy. Back then, even though there were 12 VHF channels on your TV, only 4 worked: the 3 networks & PBS ... sure, there were a bunch of UHF slots, but none of them worked. Now, my goodness! My kids are still

discovering channels I never even knew we had (most of which I wish we didn't because they are so frivolous). Back then, on the airwaves you could find classical, big band, R&B — and rock 'n roll was just getting started. Now, my goodness! Just yesterday, we got an ad in the mail offering radio service for so many niche stations the ad filled an 8.5 x 11 sheet with small print. “Hey Dad, what's the difference between 'traditional classical' and 'popular classical'? And has rap really been around long enough that you can have a category called 'traditional rap'? and isn't that an oxymoron anyway?”

So many markets — so many potential sources of self-definition.

The responsibility to choose is crushing. I've got a 15 yr. older — and I watch him negotiate his identity — is he an extension of his parents? is he an extension of his peers?

A sad picture: people who so give themselves to others' expectations that there is no more there there. One thinks of Alice Cooper's *Lost in America*.

Frighteningly, in the midst of all the self-display going on there, the Corinthian church evidenced the same dissolution of self. Behind the pitiful emergence of the clacques — I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, I'm of Christ — actually, the presupposition of the clacques is the loss of identity. By the 7th chap. Paul names it all: “slavery to men.” Heads up. Even the waving of the banner of Christ — “I'm of Christ” — when it's merely a means of being a party booster, is “slavery to men.” That's a sobering thought.

That's why of the 82 times the NT uses the term “each,” 22 of them appear in 1 Corinthians. And there is a concentration of the language of our individuality in chap. 7 of Corinthians, in the passage we spent time with 2 messages ago, where Paul outlines faith's self-understanding. Each one of us has been given a distinctive, unique, altogether idiosyncratic place within which to work out a common calling, that calling being: “bought with a price.”

Here is where we can appreciate what was so distinctive about Israel's identity as a nation — though she was not numerous (as Moses would remind her), though she had been “cast into the open field” on the day of her birth, for she was abhorred (according to Ezekiel's imagery — 16:1-5), though in fact she was powerless and far from home during her enslavement in Egypt, God had loved her and heard her cries — he had come down with a mighty arm and an outstretched hand (Dt. 4:34), and had brought her out.

He had given her her self, and now he had a claim on her love. In an even more pointed fashion, so argues Paul, now in the fulness of time God has once again come down — this time, the full price has been paid.

This time, as Steve Brown showed us in chapel last Thursday, what was intimated in the passage in Exodus 21 about the slave's right to choose freedom on the 7th year has

come into its own. When my choice is between an autonomy that will leave me vacated of self, on the one hand, and the realization that life with the master is good, on the other — “I love my master, my wife, and my children” — what choice is there? With the Hebrew slave, I say: “I will not go free.” So, I let him take me to the doorpost and bore my ear through with an awl, so that I may be his slave in perpetuity. Now, from the text of Ex. 21, I do not know whether an earring comes with this operation to be its permanent marker and reminder — or whether, the wound is allowed to heal and the blood on the doorpost is left as the sole permanent marker and reminder. But, for today, let’s assume you get the earring — for me the earring’s got to be made of a guitar string, a symbol that all I am and all I do is his and only his.

Yes, maybe this year instead of a footwashing service, we need an ear-piercing service. Because it is only when my ear has been bored with his awl — when I’ve taken his ring — that I can I know what it is to be free, as Paul says, of “slavery to men” (1 Co 7:24). For here, just as the Hebrew slave, Paul says I “remain with God.”

Now, an extraordinary thing happens.

Suddenly, it’s not about *you* any more — it’s about them!

Notice what Israel was called to do with her freedom. If I may paraphrase a number of texts: “Remember what it felt like to be a sojourner in Egypt? Remember the sense of always being on the outside looking in? Well, look around: are there sojourners in your midst? are there outsiders who need to be brought inside? Remember how it felt to be treated like a slave ... the indignities ... the lack of respect ... the assumption that you are worthless? How could you possibly treat in the same way those among you who are unable to make a living for themselves? You be different. While you’re at it, consider the fatherless, and give thought to the widow.”

Now, watch Paul: the Corinthians are divided on whether it’s OK to eat meat. The issue is not vegetarianism as a principle; in point of fact, meat was quite expensive. It was generally only available to poor people at mass distributions when the meat had first been sacrificed to pagan gods. As I understand it, most if not all of the meat available in the marketplace had previously been sacrificed. The question was whether under any circumstances, Christians had the right to eat something that had potentially — even likely — been associated with idols.

Paul’s answer is fourfold:

- 1) meat is just meat — it’s God’s meat, therefore it can be your meat, even if somebody else has thought it was first food for some godling (1Cor 8:4-6,8; 10:25-26)
- 2) but you have no business going to a pagan temple to partake — to go there would be to “commune” with the godling, and that is to fellowship with demons (1Cor 10:19-21)

3) you are perfectly free to accept a person's hospitality, until and unless it is intimated that the meat carries for that person religious freight (1Cor 10:27-30)

4) infinitely more important than your right to eat is your responsibility to love your brother or sister — it's not a matter of whether you would offend them — provoking their anger is nothing (sometimes, parenthetically, love, while not provoked, will do its own provoking) — but whether your "enlightened" example will lead him or her to imitate you when their conscience is screaming inside them: "This is wrong, wrong, wrong!" (1Cor 8:9-13; see also Rom 14:20-23)

Paul's discussion runs from ch. 8 through ch. 10, and into the middle of it (ch. 9), he drops a personal illustration: he has rights as an apostle that he takes a pass on for the sake of the gospel, specifically the right to have a wife and to make a living at the gospel. And it's in this context that he drops the bombshell:

Catch the incredible irony: Paul gave faith's self-understanding in ch. 7: "you've been bought with a price, therefore do not become a slave to any man" ... now, in ch 9, he shows loves tethering of this freedom: "Though I am free from all I make myself a slave to all that by all means I might save some." I confess that this is a scary passage for me — Paul portrays an elasticity of soul that I cannot begin to get my head around. Maybe it's the curse of being a student of sociology — I over-analyze the social situation: I walk onto a high school campus, and I don't know whom it's OK to talk with, and whom it's not — how friendly to be, how adult to be. Here's a guy who is so centered in Christ, that it doesn't matter where he is, he can not only fit in, but have confidence that Christ is what people will see when they look at him.

Ponder the deep social divide across which he self-consciously steps (Ac 21:39; 22:25-28)...

...And the extraordinary flexibility he evidences in prosecuting his ministry to the Gentiles with the Jewish community always in view:

- Paul's constantly going to the Jewish leadership before turning to the Gentiles;
- Timothy's circumcision;
- Paul's Nazarite vow;
- his gift from the Gentiles to the Jerusalem church;
- his going the extra mile by joining in and underwriting the purification of the four in the Temple;
- his sense of the way the grafting in of the Gentiles should provoke his countrymen to jealousy;
- his recasting his theology & ethics in more Hellenistic terms in the Pastorals

I cannot tell you how to be like Paul ... which is what he asks of you: "imitate me as I imitate Christ." All I can do is ask you to think about the privileges you enjoy, the "knowledge" you've been given — and if there's one thing the Reformed heritage prides itself in (note the word choice), it is in championing the believer's *liberty* to make choices

about things that are in themselves *adiaphora* (“indifferent”) — then look around at whose taking their bearings from you ... and then look at the earring in Paul’s ear ... look at the scar the awl has left there ... and notice that he’s looking at the earring in his Master’s ear ... see him contemplating the stain of the Master’s blood on the cross. Consider the possibility that — why should Steve Brown be the only one who gets daring with Scripture — consider the possibility that this is what David saw in the Messiah who was to come, when he said:

Sacrifice & meal offering you have not despised,
My ears you have pierced;
Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.
Then I said, “Behold I come:
In the book it is written of me:
I delight to do you will, O my God;
Your will is within my heart (Ps 40:6-7)

Then, consider whether love will let you do what you want to do, or whether a grateful love that arises from your centeredness, your distinctive, dignified identity in him calls for you to demur.

And one quick (because of time) observation from Chapter 13’s hymn to love: love is more than obedience — it’s about your feelings; it’s about your caring.

In a way that precisely mirrors the flow of chs. 8-10, Paul takes up the question of spiritual gifts in ch 12 only to postpone his answer until ch 14, so he can first talk about how the love that needs to be applied in ch 14 works out in *him*. The punchline for the 1st 3 verses is: if I have not love, it profits me nothing:

- ☞ That means, it’s not about just having the most deeply spiritual of experiences (speaking in tongues of men & of angels), but about being able to build up and edify others
- ☞ It’s not just about having the most enlightened of worldviews (prophecy, having all knowledge and understanding all mysteries), it is employing that knowledge in the interest of an ethos that breathes lovingkindness
- ☞ It’s not just about seeking the most empowered of ministries (faith to move mountains), it’s about being tender toward the sick and the wayward and the broken
- ☞ And it’s not just about the most radically obedient of behaviors (giving away all possessions ... and who knows, going to the most desperately needy of places) — but behavioral obedience, no matter how radical, is nothing without something deep, deep down inside — a feeling of caring.

Love is — in part — about how you feel. And that’s why Paul offers not only instruction, argumentation, and examples — but, here in 1Co 13, a poem. He rises from prose to poetry because he has to get past our defenses, beneath the surface of our being,

down into our affect. There is truth that is open only to the artist, for as Augustine said, "Only the lover sings." He sings love into your life, and asks you to sing it out to others.

We sing, in closing this prayer of thanks:

What Wondrous Love Is This?

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,
What wondrous love is this O my soul!
What wondrous love is this
That caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul!

When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down
When I was sinking down, sinking down.
When I was sinking down,
Beneath God's righteousness frown,
Christ laid aside his crown, for my soul, for my soul,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb I will sing.
To God and to the Lamb,
Who is the great "I Am,"
While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing.
While millions join the theme, I will sing.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free,
I'll sing and joyful be,
And through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
And through eternity, I'll sing on.

Cruciformed: Paul on the Seven Virtues in Spiritual Formation

Part Four: Prudence, Wisdom Godliness — A Cruciformed Quest of Truth

Romans 1:28; 12:2; Colossians 2:2b-3
Titus 1:1-2,12; 2:12; 1 Timothy 3:15-16

Do you remember this moment from the movie *The Gladiator*?

Commodus: You wrote to me once, listing the four chief virtues — wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance. As I read the list I knew I had none of them. But I have other virtues, Father — ambition, that can be a virtue when it drives us to excel; resourcefulness; courage, perhaps not on the battlefield but there are many forms of courage; devotion, to my family, to you. But none of my virtues were on your list. Even then it was as if you didn't want me for your son.

In fact, in his *Meditations* Marcus Aurelius commends the pursuit of four things: justice, truth, temperance, and courage. This fourfold canon of virtue goes back at least to Socrates, and is much commented upon both by Greek and by Roman moral thinkers — from Plato & Aristotle to Cicero and Marcus Aurelius. The canon gave pre-Christian and then pagan ethicists a way to talk about **character** as opposed to mere **ideation**, on the one hand, and **behavior**, on the other. The fourfold canon of virtue was a vision of a unity in diversity — virtue with 4 different aspects, each a prism through which the light of the whole could shine. And the whole package was known as *kalokagathia*, the beautiful and the good life.

Normally, at the head of the list comes a virtue that deals with truth, as in Truth with a capital “T.” It may be called simply “Truth.” As likely as not the term used will be **prudence** (*prhōnēsis*). Neither prudence in the Beatles’ sense, “Dear Prudence, won’t you come out to play.” Nor prudence in George H. Bush’s sense, “Wouldn’t be prudent.” But, a right perception of Reality (capital “R”) as such and an apt response to it. Or it might simply take the title Commodus gives it in the clip, **wisdom**. And all the other virtues are thought to hinge on this one — Reality first, from which come **justice**, **courage**, and **temperance**. Of course the big question is whether reality is self-existing, or whether “reality *is*” because “the gods *are*.” Some ethicists insist a right perception of reality begins with a right approach to deity, so they begin their ethical canon with piety or godliness, the Greek for which is *eusebeia*, literally being well postured vis-à-vis deity.

Second comes **justice**, the notion that my duty is to see that every person within my range of responsibility gets what he or she deserves. Life is *quid pro quo*, a subtle web of reciprocities, potlatch, or as the Japanese would say, *suze mura*. The Greeks called it *philotimia*, love of honor, or *philodoxia*, love of glory.

Third is **courage** or **fortitude**, the resolve to do my duty regardless of cost, regardless of obstacles. Fourth is **temperance** or **self-mastery** — if my whole being is consumed with inordinate desires I cannot perceive reality aright, I will not do right by those around me, and the only bravery I will evidence will be in moving heaven and earth to feed the beast within.

In coming weeks we'll talk about Paul's relation to these last 3. Today we'll consider what he has to say about the first: truth, reality, prudence, wisdom, godliness.

But first, let me note this. It would not have been totally surprising if Christians had ignored the Greek canon of virtue. The whole thing was rife with pre-judgments about what the "good & noble" life was all about. And it consistently reinforced western humankind's quest for autonomy. Christians are persuaded that the wisdom of the cross looks like folly to Greeks and Romans. Christians are what they are because they believe the gospel is about people getting so much more than what they deserve (and less!). They are radically committed to a life beyond the demands of *quid pro quo*.

As it is, however, in the late 4th century Ambrose of Milan appeals to the fourfold canon in his treatise on *The Duties of the Clergy*. His disciple, Augustine adopts it, as do many others after him. By Aquinas' time in the 1200's, it's such common coinage that it becomes the centerpiece of Roman Catholic teaching on character ethics. Aquinas saw the fourfold canon — by then, "the cardinal virtues," as the best description of the image of God possible without the light of the gospel; then he saw "the theological virtues," "faith, hope, and love" as the extra additive that empowered them. And the concept has been picked up by countless Christian humanists in Aquinas' wake. Reformed type folks never warmed up to this two-tiered approach to things, but it is still characteristic of Thomistic thinking today — see for instance, Josef Pieper & Peter Kreeft — and Anglo-Catholic thinking — C.S. Lewis comes to mind.

So, why am I talking about it? Well, I wouldn't, except for Paul. As you may know, I've paid closer attention to the Pastoral Epistles (1Tm, 2Tm, and Titus) than to anything else in the NT. And last fall I told you about a remark one of the leading lights of Pastoral studies made in a recent meeting of students of Paul's disputed letters in response to my advocacy of the Pauline origin of the Pastoral Epistles. This scholar said he couldn't see how the apostle of faith, hope, and love would allow love to get muscled out in Titus in favor of godliness. There in the prescript to Titus (1:1-2), Paul says his apostleship is for the *faith* of the elect, for the sake of a knowledge that's in accord with *godliness*, and based on *hope*. Now, suddenly it's faith, godliness, and hope; no longer faith, hope, and love. What's that about? (Forget for the moment that at more or less at the same time, 1Timothy says the whole point is *love* — see 1Tm 1:5). Nonetheless, the linguistic world of the Pastoral Epistles is a bit different from the earlier letters, and precisely because the language is more that of the Greek moralists.

First, Titus is a study in "godliness," not a term that shows up in the earlier letters — the Christology of 1Tm 3:16 is an unpacking of the "mystery of godliness". Second, when

Paul uses the language of “justice” in the Pastorals, he assumes you understand his teaching on justification by faith (Tt 3:7), but pays more attention to living a just life (Tt 1:12; 2:12), a life he characterizes as a life of “good works” (Tt 2:14, a move he does not make in his early letters). Third, as we’ll see in a few weeks, 2Tm is a treatise on courage — the whole letter is written to counter that spirit of timidity that has Timothy cowering before those who challenge his authority, 2Tm 1:7). Fourth, the lynchpin for the ethics of Titus is self-control (throughout ch. 2). Finally, the whole ethos of the Pastorals is encapsulated in Tt 2:12 where Paul uses 3 members of the fourfold canon (and by Paul’s day, the quoting of 3 to cover the whole was quite common) to summarize what the grace of God had come to do in Christ: “to teach us to live soberly, justly, and piously.”

I think it’s time for a Reformed and evangelical grappling with what it is that Paul is up to, and what is the genuine biblical instinct that led to the Thomistic and Christian humanistic construct of the relation between “the theological virtues” and “the cardinal virtues.” All that because, as I said last fall, I want to understand how God intends to transform this sorry sinner into the saint he has declared me to be.

So, as Steve Brown would say, enough of the chit-chat, let’s look at the texts.

Main Letters: Romans & *phronēsis* (or what Greeks and Romans meant by **prudence**: living consistently with reality)

It’s helpful to remember that in Romans, Paul is writing to folks mainly from a pagan past.⁴ In the first chapter he reminds them of how their idolatry had canceled their pretense at wisdom. They had set themselves against the most real thing there is: God’s invisible nature, his eternal power and deity. Everything that had followed from that was a lie, and they had moved further and further from reality.

I cannot help but think of Iraq’s Information Minister, Muhammed Saeed al-Sahhaf (MSS), or affectionately known as Baghdad Bod, and see in his comical, sorry self a parable of what Paul says about the unreality all of us have cocooned ourselves in:⁵

- ☞ It has been rumored that we have fired scud missiles into Kuwait. I am here to tell you, we do not have any scud missiles, and I don’t know why they were fired into Kuwait.
- ☞ “There are no American infidels in Baghdad. Never!”
- ☞ They’re coming to surrender or be burned in their tanks.
- ☞ We have surrounded them in their tanks.
- ☞ They are nowhere near the airport ... they are lost in the desert ... they cannot read a compass ... they are retarded.

⁴ Roman Christianity was of Jewish origins post-Pentecost, but during the 40’s Jews had been banished from Rome, and so the church had become predominantly Gentile; now in the mid-50’s, recently returned Jewish believers (like Priscilla & Aquila) are having to be accommodated — thus the warning to Gentile believers not to be so full of themselves (11:18,22,25).

⁵ Go to www.welovetheiraqinformationminister.com.

- ☞ Yes, the American troops have advanced further. This will only make it easier for us to defeat them.
- ☞ No! We have retaken the airport. There are NO Americans there. I will take you there and show you. In one hour!"

As Luke Timothy Johnson puts it: each stage of alienation from God leads to a further corruption of our understanding: "Having not decided (*ouk edokimasan*) to hold God in recognition (*en epignēsei*), God handed them over to an untested mind (*adokimon noun*), doing what they should not (*ta mē kathēkonta*)" (essay, p. xx).

In Christ, however, lost souls have experienced renewal of the mind (12:1), a renewal that enables them finally to read their world aright and figure out or discern or test (*eis to dokimazein*) the will of God in practical circumstances.

The structure of the process Paul describes in Rom 12 would be readily recognizable to a student of Aristotle's ethics: Right thinking leads to right actions.

What's different is that Paul understands what it's taken postmodernism to figure out. Aristotle assumes that reason is its own guide — on its own it can establish the extra-rational goal or purpose of life. Then, according to the standard of moderation between extremes, or proportionality (*analogia*), prudence can figure out what to do. Paul understands that reason is not autonomous, but is always done by thinkers who think according to a certain measure or standard — a bare appeal to proportion or measure doesn't cut it. Or as G. K. Chesterton complains, all you wind up in the Aristotelian method is some bland grey between black and white, a bland stoicism that's neither misery nor joy, a life of merely playing it safe.

What Paul appeals to instead is "the *measure* of faith" (*metron pisteōs*) and "the *proportionality* of faith" (*hē analogia tēs pisteōs*). The longer I look at this the more I think Paul means we're to look at Jesus if we want to see reality and its implications for living. In ch. 14, Paul is trying to help those who are "weak in faith," and, conversely, those who are "strong in faith," that is, those who are confused about how to live by faith's measure. What does he point weak and strong alike to? In the most mundane and trivial of life questions (do I eat only vegetables?), Paul calls for a patterning of life after Jesus's life. In 13:14, he had urged believers to "put on the Lord Jesus." Now in 14:7-9, he gives feet to the concept: we live or die to the Lord, who himself died to live again as Lord of the living and the dead. For our part — we the living dead — are called "to walk in love," "not to ruin one for whom Christ died" (14:15). We are called "not to please ourselves," just as Christ did not please himself — indeed, Paul prays that the Romans will learn to think the same way toward each other (see 15:1-7). Above it all is the obedience of Christ, who replaced the disobedience and dissolution and demise into death that came with Adam. More and more I think this is what Paul means by the phrase "faith of Christ" (Ro 3:21-26; see 5:12-21). Not only does our faith in Jesus secure a relationship with God we could never build ourselves, but keeping our eyes on Jesus' own pattern of living "coram Deo" — before God — seeing his own obedience of

faith — this gives us our bearings in life. Jesus is the measure or standard of faith. Jesus is the proportionality, the *analogia* of faith.

And, of course, there's more in Romans. For we're not only given a standard by which to make judgments. We're given deep inside ourselves that insight into what Aristotle called the "first principles," which he knew were beyond rational demonstration. We're given the Holy Spirit. Thus, in Rom 8 Paul clusters over 30 references to the Holy Spirit's work within us — e.g., the Spirit enables a "walk" we're not capable of in our own strength (8:4); the "mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (Ro 8:7); in the face of our not even knowing how to pray, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, searches our hearts, and intercedes for us (8:26-27). It's the Spirit's presence in Rom 8 that invites and enables the mind's work in Rom 12.

First Captivity: Php, Col, Eph & Wisdom

In the second phase of Paul's writing ministry, it is Wisdom that comes to the fore. As Paul says in Col 2, he strives to promote ... *the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* (Col 2:2b-3).

What I find especially striking about Paul's more concentrated use of the language of wisdom and insight in the letters of the first captivity (Php, Col, and Eph), is the posture from which he writes, in prison — on an enforced retreat of reflection — from a posture of apparent failure.

In his writings on truth and wisdom, Pieper insists that our biggest problem is that we never take the leisure to sit before reality and listen for its secrets and look for it to reveal itself. We fill our ears with sound, we fill our eyes with distractions, so we can never really see, never really hear. All the media around us are so much white noise, that hinder the hearing of the real and eternal. Now, I'm certain Paul's prison was noisy — but it was an enforced sabbatical from life and ministry as usual — and in that sense, a time of silence. What's birthed in the process is some of Paul's deepest insight, most penetrating reflection on just what it is that God is up to.

From Paul's letters we know he spent a lot of energy during this 3rd journey taking up a collection from the comparatively wealthy Gentile churches of Greece and western Asia Minor for the "poor of the saints" in the church at Jerusalem. The collection was intended as a picture to the Jerusalem saints that the Gentile mission was a sign of God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel, for here is realized a great biblical vision. In the words of Psalm 72, here are "the kings of Tarshish and of the coastlands rendering tribute" and "the Kings of Sheba and Seba bringing gifts" to the Messiah King at Jerusalem. What he wanted to picture in the collection is the way the collection connects the Gentile and Jewish wings of the church,

As you know, the reception of that gift in Jerusalem was ambiguous. In the first place, from the Acts narrative you'd never know about the passion with which Paul has pursued this collection — once Luke has Paul recounting this "bringing of alms for his

country”. But at the point in the Acts narrative when Paul would have presented the gift, there’s silence about the gift — just an hearing of what God was doing among the Gentiles and a glorifying of God for it (21:20). But before the verse even ends, there is a putting of the burden of proof on Paul: show everybody here in Jerusalem that you are not teaching Jews to forsake the ways of Moses. I hope I’m not being overly imaginative, but in my knower I know Paul was hoping for a little more love here.

You know his accommodation to the Jerusalem church’s request puts him in jail. There, I cannot help but see him pouring over this Jew/Gentile thing — the reconciliation he knows the cross has effected, but which nobody else seems to see to the depth he sees it — and trying to formulate the words to help others see it.

And, frankly, just as Bach’s lack of fame relative to his contemporary Handel gave a greater depth and lastingness to his music, just as the brutal suppression of Solidarity’s initial emergence in the early 80’s gave the poignance to Henryk Gorecki’s hauntingly beautiful *Miserere*,⁶ and just as Jimi Hendrix’s frustration at being just one more Al Jolson to white people’s angst about self-expression led to a transfigured performance at Woodstock of the national anthem, so Paul’s very frustration — I think — at people’s not getting it lead him to the most magisterial, and prayerfully crafted musings over the length and breadth and height and depth of what God has done in Christ to reconcile former enemies to one another and to God himself. Read Ephesians 2 through this lens sometime when you can. For what he does in the second half of this chapter is finally to give definitive words to what his collection had sought to embody: he creates an elegant tone poem to the reconciling power of the gospel to tear down the middle wall of partition, to make of Jew and Gentile what Paul calls “one new man,” to put on display for men and angels the incredible wisdom of God, to give shape to a house for God’s own dwelling.

Next time, before taking up the theme of **justice** in Paul, I’ll turn to the Pastorals’ particular spin on Truth, that is **godliness**.

But let me leave you today with this picture: God wants us read reality through the lens of God. He’s given us new minds, he’s given his Spirit within, and he places us in circumstances in which he is working beyond circumstances. There’s a huge God-centeredness to life. There’s nothing outside his line of sight or beyond his caring — and he calls me to an expansiveness of consciousness that is like (though not identical to) his.

I was working with one of my Little League catchers the other day. I was trying to teach him how to throw to 2B when a runner is stealing — he’s supposed spin his feet to a throwing position as soon as he catches the ball and let it fly. Well, as part of the exercise I would put a runner at 1B and give him a signal (straight steal, no steal, walk off steal, delayed steal). After instructing this catcher, I gave the runner the no-steal signal, and the catcher came up throwing, just like I’d taught, except for the fact that the

⁶ Henryk Gorecki, *Miserere* (Elektra 79348-2), a 32 minute choral meditation on the words, “Domine Deus noster, Miserere nobis” — “Lord our God, have mercy on us.”

runner wasn't running. It was a new idea to him that his throwing depended on whether the runner was actually running or not, and that he'd have to use his peripheral vision to discern whether that was the case. A new thought: I'm supposed to do more than just try to catch the ball! And more than just plan to throw the ball to a preset target. What a parable for all of us. Because we have this dual dynamic of being: a) finite, and b) fallen, we have an amazing capacity for reducing reality to what's right in front of us, and we don't even necessarily see that very well.

When in fact, there is a rich reality all around the periphery of our vision, which is as much God's reality as that over which we obsess, and for much of which we need to take ownership. We take ownership when we ponder the wonder of our redemption, learn to be quiet, to listen and to observe — to take all of life and put it before him and ask him to interpret it to us. And to that end, may God help us, and I know he will.

Let's pray: Father, it is our prayer that you would take our lives and let them be consecrated to you. We ask you to take our minds, and to mold them more and more after the image and pattern of your Son's own thinking. May we drink more deeply and more satisfyingly from the well of salvation. May we have eyes to see our lives through your lens. And Father give us more of Jesus as the measure of faith. Give us our proportionality of faith. Guide us by your Son Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. You may go in peace.

Cruciformed: Paul on the Seven Virtues in Spiritual Formation

Part Five: Cross-Shaped Lives Embodying Justice & Mercy

Romans 3:21-26
Philemon 18-19

Today we're supposed to talk about Paul and Justice — and we will. But before we do, we've got to close the loop on Paul's approach to truth.

Two weeks ago we saw that Paul believes the gospel reorients us to reality. In the letter to the Romans he reminds how we tried to become wise in ourselves, but became foolish instead — losing a grip on reality and losing out on life itself. But we also saw how in Christ that gets reversed: “unproven minds” become renewed and we are given the capacity to “prove the will of God”. We are given a new measure for truth: Christ. And we are given a new power to live in truth: the Holy Spirit.

Then we saw how in Ephesians, Paul reveals a wisdom, or depth of insight, into reality that is born often in perceived failure, and almost always in the silence of listening prayer.

Now, thirdly, we see that in the final leg of Paul's writing career — after his first imprisonment in Rome — Paul rather dramatically shows believers how to posture themselves before a world that knows a lot about religion (*eusebeia*) but not much about God.

Paul tells Titus that in the midst of a culture that has a lie at the heart of its theology, the church is to speak of and live under a God who does not lie. Behind this is an ancient claim of Cretans to be the birthplace of the original Zeus, a *man* who ascended to deity through heroic and beneficent acts. The island supported a tourist industry for those who wanted to see his tomb. Paul agrees with one of their ancient sages who admitted the fabrication, and in so doing, Paul says to us: at the base of every indigenous people's religious self-understanding, right alongside the itch for God that bespeaks the *imago Dei*, you'll find the most laughable notions.

Because of the Cretan twist on things Paul speaks of the incarnation with elegant abstract nouns: the “grace” of God appeared (Tt 2:11), the “kindness” and “philanthropia” of our Savior God appeared (Tt 3:4). In a word, Christ's coming is not one of yet another human's elevation to deity, but rather is a grand condescension of deity to come among us, truly and genuinely and finally to save us.

If the Cretan approach seems far fetched, consider the protrait of Christ by the 20th cent. Cretan, Nikos Kazantsakis, whose *Last Temptation of Christ* presents just such a portrait: a man who heroically transcends all earthly desires and rises to deity.

If the Cretan approach seems removed from our shores, consider the truly indigenous “American religion”: Mormonism, which promises that you too can become a god just as Jesus did, and just as his Father (that is, the Lord Jehovah) did before him.

If it seems that such an upside down theology would be confined to cults, consider the deification in so-called moderate baptist theology of “soul competency” as trumping the claims of any outside authority to broker one’s relation with divinity, whether Pope, or church, or Scripture. I believe that Harold Bloom is right when he contends that there is an “American religion” and that that religion is about as far from orthodox, historic Christianity as you could imagine: “The God of the American Religion is an experiential God, so radically *within* our own being as to become a virtual identity with what is most authentic (oldest and best) in the self. ... The issue is not self-worship; it is an acquaintance within the self.⁷ Seems to me the “American religion” looks a lot like the Cretan lie.

By asserting, as he does at the beginning of Titus, that he promotes a knowledge of truth that is in accordance with godliness, Paul invites the church of every generation to update the Proverbs teaching that: the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And, well, I’m going to have to develop these thoughts at another time.

We’ve got to move on to Paul and justice.

Justice is all about one question: who owes what to whom. What do I owe you? And what do you owe me?

Paul speaks the gospel into a world that was held together by an infinite web of reciprocities — some legal, but most extra-legal — between givers and receivers, between gift-givers and gift-returners. It was a world of potlatch, of returning favors, of keeping one’s slate clear of debts. It was the world of the Godfather. It was the world of “what have you done for me lately?”

Paul shows himself to be keenly aware of contemporary Greek and Roman concerns for the *quid pro quo* of matching honor for honor. In fact, he baldly exhorts the Romans to “outdo one another in bestowing honor” (12:10b). He says he has made it a point of honor not to preach the gospel where anyone else has preached it (15:20). It is precisely over a point of honor that he refuses to accept the Corinthians’ financial support.

⁷ Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of Post-Christian Nation* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p. 259; see Part 2, “American Original: The Mormons” (pp. 77-128); and Part 4: “The Southern Baptist Convention” (pp. 189-233)

He understands entirely that life is full of reciprocities, of exchanges, of obligations, of “squaring things”. When he calls upon Gentiles to be financially generous toward Jerusalem Jews, he stresses his intent is not to create an inequity (by which he means allowing Gentiles a superiority in giving) — Jewish Christians will even things by exchanging the “abundance” of their prayers and thanksgivings for the Gentiles’ financial generosity (2Co 8:13-14; 9:12-14). In the Pastorals, Paul says that caring for your parents and grandparents is a “religious duty” (*eusebein*): it’s a matter of “making a return to one’s forebears” (1Tm 5:4). Even in the bedroom, he tells the Corinthians, there are reciprocities (and note whom he puts on notice first): husbands are under obligation to their wives, and wives to their husbands (1Co 7:3-5).

And yet there’s something different about the way Paul goes about this. This sense of social balance, of equilibrium between persons could be easily matched by lines from Musonius Rufus, Dio Chrysostom, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius — all good Stoics, each scrupulous to a fault in being upright with their fellows.

To see what’s different I think you have to begin with an observation made first by H. Bolkestein⁸ and then by A.R. Hands⁹ in separate works on charities and social aid in Greece and Rome: for societies like Greece and Rome the way you account for differences between people is this: when the cosmos, or Fate, or the gods deal the cards, everybody gets what they deserve. Life itself is a matter of accommodating this reality. And justice is about maintaining the equilibrium, not upsetting the balance.

Bolkestein & Hands observe that Judaism and Christianity, by contrast, posit both the need for and prospect of **redemption**. That is, Judaism and Christianity start from the premise that something’s wrong — that something’s gone amuck, and that regardless of how well things started, as things are, the deck is stacked, life’s not fair, and that’s not right. Judaism and Christianity operate out of the assumption that there is a God who has set about making things right.

When Paul got knocked off his horse on the way to Damascus (if I may speak metaphorically) he came to see that in Christ God had shown up definitively to right-wise his cosmos. And the precise way in which God had set about to do this forced Paul to go back and look afresh at how mucked up things were.

Case in point is the way he begins the biblical litany that crowns his indictment of the human race in Romans 3:10-18. By way of keynote at 3:10, he quotes Eccl 7:20 to this effect: “None is just (*dikaios*), not even one.” You think Solomon really knew how deeply this cut? that beyond the near-jaded musings of an old man about the foibles of life, there was a profound self-indictment? that there was something fundamentally flawed about his having 3,000 wives? that the way he was treating his sons and lieutenants was setting the stage for the division of the kingdom in the next generation? I don’t think so.

⁸ Hendrik Bolkestein, *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum* (NY: Arno Press, 1979; a reprint of the 1939 Utrecht edition, published by A. Oosthoek).

⁹ A. R. Hands, *Charities and Social Aid in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968).

Regardless, for Paul standing on this side of the cross, Solomon's quip — "None is just, not even one" — completely undresses us. And, ironically, or so argues Gerd Theissen, really for the first time in the intellectual and spiritual history of the human race, it's an undressing that can be penetratingly articulated — and it can be articulated precisely because Paul's seen the antidote, the covering of the nakedness: the setting forth of Christ as covering for sin (*hilastērion*), the place where God's demand for justice is satisfied (Rom 3:21-26). Paul realizes, perhaps in a way that he never could pre-Christ, that all the sacrifices offered from Moses to Christ — all the blood spilled out, all the whole burnt offerings lit up, all the scapegoats sent out — all these had simply amounted to a "passing over of former sins," had never really satisfied God's demand for justice against our sins. Knocked off his horse, Paul realizes this: now that the penalty for sin has been paid in full, God can "square" us without merely shrugging his shoulders: "boys will be boys" ... "to err is human, to forgive divine". No, that Christ is *hilastērion* means a just God can declare sinners, and still look himself in the mirror.

In light of the coming of Christ, Paul believes that justice should have required his obliteration, but it has instead provided him life itself — Justice has spoken on his behalf. Someone else's "rightness" has been put on his ledger. The justice he has deserved has been trumped by a merciful gift — and at the same time, in such a way that mercy has not negated justice. And this world looks so much different because of the way that at the cross justice and mercy have kissed (Ps. 85:10).

Back to Hands and Bolkestein on the difference between Greece and Rome, on the one hand, and Judaism and Christianity, on the other, when it comes to poor relief. Greek and Roman literature is quite concerned to show how important it is not to allow oneself to fall into beggarliness, but it shows scant pity for those who have so fallen. It offers little incentive to redress poverty and lowliness of estate — to the contrary, classical sources betray more of a concern not to reward poverty. What Hands calls a "republican" (small R) sensibility greets poverty with suspicion, and would far rather disincentive poverty than risk giving poor people more to squander.

By contrast, Judaism remembers that her whole relation with God is premised on his "remembering" her when she was in the throes of abject poverty. Her entire social life is a response to the Exodus — it's a life predicated on the assumption that one who has known redemption from dire straights should be both affectively touched by and behaviorally engaged with people in like situations.

This affects everything — from how long debts are to be contracted for to how long indentured service is to be reckoned — and from making sure that even servants are allowed Sabbath rest to refusing to reap to the corners or to glean one's field: "leave the corners and the gleanings for the poor and the needy". Why? Very simply: because you know what it is to be poor and needy, and you remember how God took pity on you and rescued you. Now, do to others as you've been done unto.

It's a logic of redemption. And when it shows up in the NT, it does so in a dramatic way. It begins, of course, with Jesus himself who pictures in the footwashing the grand parabola of his coming to establish a New Covenant: he was on high and will return there; he has nonetheless come low and stooped to conquer. At the footwashing he announces a new stipulation for a new covenant: a new commandment, to love one another not only with Exodus-love, but now with extravagant self-crucifixion love: love one another the way I have loved you. "Greater love has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends." Now, he implies, what will "friends" do for one another?

The place where Paul most poignantly applies that logic to himself, and in so doing opens up vistas onto how we can *be* with respect to one another is the letter to Philemon.

While we simply do not know the specifics of what has transpired between Onesimus and his estranged master, we know that there is obligation all around: Paul has some legal obligation to respect this master's right of ownership; Philemon is under a non-legal but no less socially prescribed obligation to consider the plea of his own benefactor (Paul) on behalf of the slave, and, of course, Paul patently admits that there has been some wrongdoing on the part of Onesimus.

The whole thing calls for extra-Solomonic wisdom — and Paul raises the stakes by not addressing the letter to Philemon in private, but to his house church as a whole, and by confronting Philemon with Onesimus in the flesh, not keeping him at his side until his own apostolic presence could be a buffer.

Paul cuts through the whole web of reciprocities, first of all suggesting that Philemon consider the mystery of a providence that could provide just such a painful temporary separation precisely to effect a joyous eternal reconciliation (v. 15): before, Onesimus was one lost, sorry soul. Now, he'll live in joy forever, and that, as brother to Philemon. Not unlike Joseph to his brothers: God turned evil to good. Not unlike the church of Acts 4 giving thanks for the deliverance of Peter & John: all the Gentiles' raging and the peoples' imagining could accomplish when they arrayed themselves against the Lord's Anointed was precisely God's preordained will. So, first of all, Paul asks for a "proving" of the will of God, a discerning of the deeper design — a listening ear for reality's song.

Then, he takes up the question of who owes what to whom. And here we find him, as NT Wright elegantly says, showing forth a cross-shaped life: holding to God's own life with one hand, and reaching out to his brothers with the other hand, all the while his own body serving as the bridge between the two.¹⁰

Look at the way Paul expresses himself. "If he has done you any injustice (*adik-*) or owes you anything, put it on my tab. I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I will repay it..." No small hint from one who has confessed to being at odds with the justice of God to another who has made the same confession. No trivial reminder from one who's had

¹⁰ See N. T. Wright's sermon, "The Face of Love," in his *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 51-59.

Another's righteousness attributed to him to a fellow who has received the same benefit. No cheap manipulative ploy, but a heartfelt offer to cover the cost — how could one whose own cost has been covered *not* make such an offer? But then the reminder: doesn't your debt to Mercy extend to me, the vessel of God's mercy to you?

The subtlety, the tact, the mix of pastoral humility and apostolic bravado in this little letter — and beyond it, the whole redemptive logic it opens out onto — are worth *days and days* of contemplation. The potential points of application are just too numerous to pursue this morning — they could run from considering calls to ministry in harder, less glamorous places — to simply rounding down to the nearest dollar in your check ledger when you make a deposit and rounding up when you write a check, so you have a pad to distribute at the end of the year.

What's important, though, is the logic: of 2Co 5:21's reminder that Christ became sin "that we might become the righteousness of God," Richard Hays has rightly said, "where the church embodies in its life together the world-reconciling love of Jesus Christ, the new creation is manifest. The church incarnates the righteousness of God" (Hays, *MVNT*, p. 24)

Paul says that beyond *knowing about*, beyond *believing in*, beyond *receiving* — we might *become* the righteousness of God. And, praise be, that's what He is all about in our lives.

Let's give him thanks, and then I'll dismiss you: Praise be, Lord Jesus. Your life has become ours. And we are not left as our sorry, sad, lost selves. But we have taken on your Name, by your grace. And we have had a justice counted to us that is not ours. But as you take deeper and deeper hold of our souls, that life becomes more and more who we are. And we give you thanks. And we ask you to give us pause, and sabbath rest, to sit before your Word, and let you speak to us about the way it would shape us from here. In Jesus' name, Father, we pray. Amen.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Cruciformed: Paul on the Seven Virtues in Spiritual Formation

Part Six: Courageous — Not Cowardly — Hearts

2 Timothy 1:6-7

Spartan mothers would send their sons off to war with a pithy saying. Pointing to their sons' tall shields, they'd intone: "Either carrying it, or on it." Let me give you the Kidd Amplified Version: "Son, I'll know you fought bravely if you come home carrying your shield. I'll know you fought bravely if you come home dead, with your comrades carrying you on your shield. But if you come home alive without your shield, I'll have to assume you turned and ran from battle, dropping that heavy, clumsy thing so it wouldn't slow you down. Don't come home without your shield. Don't come home a coward. Don't shame your mother. Either carrying it, or on it."

At the end of his life — from yet another prison cell, aware that he may be about to take the blade, and abandoned by all but Luke, probably here his secretary — Paul writes what we have come to call 2 Timothy to his young protégé of some 15 years, back at Ephesus. Despite Timothy's youth (and, alas, we simply don't know how young he was), he's been put in charge of what is surely one of the largest of the churches Paul had planted, certainly the church he had invested the most time in. Of late, Timothy's authority in Ephesus has been challenged by strong local voices. Several years earlier Paul had warned the elders of Ephesus that not only would they be set upon by fierce wolves from outside that church, but that from among their own selves there would arise men speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30). Indeed, that appears to be what has happened — strong & disruptive voices are maintaining that the resurrection has already taken place (2Tm 2:18) and that (oddly) marriage is forbidden as well as are certain foods (1Tm 4:3). Gordon Fee suggests, and rightly so, I think, that the reason Paul casts 1 Timothy in terms of qualifications for leadership is that these are voices indigenous to the church — this is why Paul warns against setting up "neophytes" (that's Greek for "spiritual rookies") as "overseers" (1Tm 3:6). What's explicit is that Timothy's youth is being held against him by the opposition (1Tm 4:12). What is implicit is that his locus of power lies outside the community, in Paul's "laying on of hands" (and remember Timothy is from Lystra — he's an outsider to Ephesus); thus, this new rival core of leadership has enough local social clout to intimidate Timothy. In 2 Timothy, Paul writes to a younger ministry protégé who's been knocked off his game, and is playing back on his heels (2Tm 1:6). And no matter the sport — you start playing on your heels, you're done.

Paul's message is precisely that of a Spartan mother to a son she is sending off to battle: "Either carrying it, or on it."

But let me back up for a second, and place Paul's message to Timothy on courage into the context of our series on spiritual formation.

Over the course of their 15 years together, Timothy has heard Paul teach on and model the 5 aspects of spiritual formation we've already talked about over the course of the academic year. You've got to figure Timothy pretty well knows how faith, hope, and love are supposed to work together. **Faith** believes the gospel story in such a way that it transforms our identities. **Hope** recognizes that we participate in "new creation" — that everything is getting newer, and that we are getting younger; that all other values have been relativized, and that we can hold more loosely to the things of this passing age. And **love** so determines our affections that we surrender rights that the weak may become strong and that the lost may be found.

And now in both 1 & 2 Tim, Timothy — assuming the *prima facie* reading of them is correct (i.e., assuming the real Paul is writing to the real Timothy), Timothy finds himself on the receiving end of the most spectacular exercise in contextualizing the gospel in the NT, as Paul shows how the Christian story will get legs in the West. Timothy is being schooled in how the gospel speaks to the four classical virtues: Prudence or Godliness, Justice, Temperance, and Courage.

In 1Tm 3:16, the gospel story — the narrative of Christ's incarnation, resurrection, ascension — is cast in terms of the "mystery of godliness". To place the emphasis better: Timothy is being told that contemporary secularists' quest for Truth (the classical virtue of **prudence**) or the contemporary religionists' quest for the divine (Prudence's classical rival virtue: **eusebeia**, or **godliness**) is answered in and only in the narrative and proclamation of Christ's incarnation, resurrection, and ascension: "Great is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1Tm 3:16).

Further, the church is called to *embody* that story, to create what sociologists of knowledge considerably later would call "a climate of plausibility" — Paul's term for that is the church's being "pillar and foundation for the truth" (1Tm 3:15). And the primary way the church does that, in 1 Tim, is by establishing **right** relationships — those who ought to oversee should oversee, those who ought to deacon ought to deacon, widows who are entitled should receive support (note the Grk term is "honor"), elders who "eld" well should receive "double honor", no elder should have a charge brought against him unjustly. There is a social pattern — a web of reciprocities — that accords with godliness (1Tm 5:1-2), i.e., there's a way our living together buttresses the message. And here, the church models **justice**, because justice is about who owes what to whom.

Moreover, Paul has much to say in 1 Tim about the way Tim is to order his inner life — thus, next week's final message on **temperance** or **self-control**.

But for this week, we note Paul's singular focus in 2Tim on the fourth of the virtues: **courage**.

Our text is 2Tim 1:6-7:

*Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands;
for God did not give us a spirit of timidity (pneuma deilias),
but a spirit of power (dunameōs)
and love (agapēs)
and self-control (sōphronismou, 2 Timothy 1:6-7).*

Notice how Paul approaches the subject by way of negation. He tells Timothy not to play the coward — God has not given a spirit of timidity (*deilia*). As positive counterpoint, he holds before him the picture of a “noble soldier of Christ Jesus” (2:3), in doing so, recalling a theme he introduced in 1 Tim: “wage the noble warfare” (1:18).

I have no doubt that Paul gets the military motif and the notion of promoting courage by discouraging its opposite from Joshua 1:9:

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous (andrizou). Do not be cowardly (mē deiliasēs); do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

It seems to me it’s worth considering briefly:

Courage: What It’s Not:

- Courage is not — being ashamed of the gospel (see 2Tm 1:8, with Romans 1:16-17 as backdrop)
- Courage is not: being surprised at the opposition (3:1-5)
- Courage is not — whining: “I’m too young” (1Tm 4:12)— or, “I’m fill-in-the-blank.” Excuse making and wiggling out:— not returning phone calls you know will be difficult, taking naps, other avoidance strategies — for me, the biggest is procrastination ... I’d far rather you think my stuff wasn’t any good because I knew I didn’t give it enough time, than to take the risk that you still wouldn’t like it even if I knew it was my best stuff.
- At the same time, courage is not — getting dragged into taking a stand on stupid stuff (2:22-26). Isn’t it interesting what Paul talks about when he warns Timothy about fleeing youthful lusts (v. 22)? Young ministers, especially, need to learn to major on the majors and minor on the minors. Or as Scott Krippayne sings: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”
- Nor, according to this same passage, is courage — over-reacting when you do take a stand. Notice: Paul tells his young lieutenant: not to be quarrelsome, but to be kindly and forbearing, to correct opponents with gentleness, to give space for God to grant repentance. Courage is not about pushing your opponent further into a corner so that the only thing he can do is keep fighting because you’re such a pugnacious jerk. If *you* become the issue, you get in God’s way. It’s never about you — it’s always about what God is up to in people’s lives.

Courage: What It Is: Power, Love, and Self-control

Note the elegant way Paul unpacks cowardice's opposite in 2Tm 1:7. Courage is not an innate attribute — it's a gift that comes from the Holy Spirit — He comes with Power, with Love, and with Self-control.

- **Power:** Trust in God' Power

- ☞ Where is that power? In Romans, Paul says he's not ashamed of the gospel, and in 2Tim he says he's not ashamed of the fact that he's a prisoner of the gospel because he believes in its power. Our weapons are different.
 - *Against* the might of the Roman Empire, a culture obsessed with power,
 - *to* an emperor more obsessed with his own power than any before or after,
 - Paul, a man in chains, mounts a frontal assault, armed with nothing more than his words (he's missing even his cloak and his books and parchments, for crying out loud!). And today, we name our sons Paul, and our dogs Nero.
- ☞ Paul can take courage because he knows the Lord is coming back! [4:1] = "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his Kingdom..." — It's intriguing that the one place where Paul tells a church: "Courage" is Corinth, the church that had stopped scanning the horizon because they thought they had arrived. Here in Ephesus too, a teaching was circulating that had no place for a future resurrection — "holding that the resurrection is past already" (2:18). Hope puts feet under courage.
- ☞ Paul can take courage in God's power because he knows who grants repentance? [2:25-26] Who has the power to turn the human heart? Not I. Not you.

- **Love:** A Focus on Others, Not Self

- ☞ I gain courage to face ministry challenges comes because love drives me to preparation — "Study (do your best)," Paul says in 2Tm 2:15, "to present yourself to God approved, a workman who doesn't have to be ashamed." Workman for what? for whom? It's all about the people God gives you to help. Now, the great thing about the ministry is that you usually get the chance to preach "in season" (2Tm 4:2) — "Can I get back to you on that? Good, thanks." But sometimes, you've got to be ready "out of season" — "Can't wait? OK, for what it's worth, here's what I think..." It's immersion in the Word, immersion in the reality of the story, a life on your face before God, daily improving your baptism, daily feeding on Jesus, that leaves you prepared whether you *feel* prepared or not — whether you're called upon "in season" or "out of season." And it's love for those who need what you're learning that keeps you in training.
- ☞ Part of love is forbearance. Recall 2Tm 2:25-26: why *not* a pugnacious spirit? I want to remove myself as the issue just because I really do want God to snatch foolish folks out of Satan's snare.

- **Self-control:** A measured response — in “fill-in-the-blank” issue, I don’t need to vindicate myself — all I need to do is listen well, and speak the truth — God can take care of this. I can’t tell you how many times my bacon’s been saved by virtue of the fact that I couldn’t think of the brilliant repartee until it was too late to deliver it (I don’t guess that’s really *self-control*, though, is it? More like: *God control*. Praise be.). And I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been grateful I let the e-mail sit unsent in my outbox — alas, because I remember too well the hurt I caused when I hit the send button too quickly. Courage speaks the truth in love, not in haste, not in defensiveness. Courage measures its response.

Courage: How You Get It:

- Understand the normativity of persecution and opposition. 2Tim 3:12 says, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted.” Whether it’s in terms of dispensational premillennialism’s promise that we’re going to get raptured out before the shooting starts, or in terms of postmillennial reconstructionism’s expectation that the gospel’s enemies are simply going to be swept away by a torrent of revival and reformation before Christ returns, it seems to me that the church around us is far too prone to missing how basic suffering is to the period between Christ’s first and second comings — it is how the Father conforms us to the image of his son. I will say it as guardedly as I can, but I have to say it: suffering is a wonderful, grace-bearing thing, for it is a way of knowing Jesus. That is part of the reason the song can refer to a “beautiful, scandalous night.”
- Look to Jesus as exemplar — ponder his suffering and glorification. 2Tim 2:8: “Remember Christ Jesus, raised from the dead.”
- Look to other believers as exemplars (Paul [3:10-11]), Lois [g-mo], Eunice [mo], Onesiphorus [1:17-18])
 - ☞ Crabb when I thought about going to grad school; Crabb when I thought about taking this job — listen to your passions, and then do that which is sure to fall flat on its face unless God is in it
 - ☞ My circle of accountability when I thought about taking up worship at Orangewood PCA — yeah, maybe that looks a little crazy, but maybe that’s why it’s from him
 - ☞ Bob Slater’s retirement
 - ☞ Know that you are somebody’s exemplar — when you stand tall, others will stand tall too
- Look at counter-exemplars: Phygelus & Hermogenes (1:15); and Hymenaeus & Philetus (2:18) and consider their end
- Look to Scripture — a host of passages to fortify your spirit

Being a Coach Is a Lot Like Being God

Coaching Little League brings lots of insights. Occasionally, you feel like you get a little glimpse into what it’s like to be God. The other night, we just needed three outs to get a win; we had been up by a truckload of runs; but one of our stronger pitchers had run out of gas, and the other team had pulled closer, and were within two batters of bringing the

tying runner to the plate. The other coaches and I turned to one of our smallest kids, Patrick, to all appearances the least likely of closers — but a kid we knew could throw strikes — and we knew our kids would make plays behind him. As soon as we put him on the mound his mother came running to the dugout: “What do you think you’re doing!?” We said, “He’s just who we need with the ball right now.” Sure enough, he made good enough pitches and the other kids made good enough plays — one nearly disastrous one, and a couple of really nice ones, actually. Against the last batter Patrick was breathing so hard, it looked like his lungs were swelling to the size of a blimp. Afterwards, one of the other coaches asked him, “So, Patrick, how were you feeling out there?” “Coach, I felt like I was going to die.”

Courage: Here I am, and I’m going to do my best, even if it feels like I’m going to die. I sure hope my coach knows what he’s doing — anyway, here goes.

Know what? Your coach does know what he’s doing when he gives you the ball. So you just throw it.

Please stand for this benediction: Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be cowardly! Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. So, go in peace. Amen.

Cruciformed: Paul on the Seven Virtues in Spiritual Formation

Part Seven: Temperance or Sobriety: Passions Tethered

**Titus 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5;
Romans 8:1-4; Galatians 5:22-24;
Philippians 4:11-12**

The last of the virtues to which we see Paul speak is that of self-mastery. According to Titus 2:11-12, when “Grace” came (an elegant circumlocution for “when Jesus came”), Grace came explicitly to help us master the anarchy of desire — “worldly passions” (*hai kosmikai epithumiai*). Note to self: Grace’s first lesson is “sobriety” (*sōprosunē* — and, regrettably, the term is virtually untranslatable).

The word looks like it has at its root — and Aristotle had sought to make this carry some interpretive freight — a combination of *sōs*, that is, “sound, whole, safe” (from which we get the verb *sōzein*, “to make sound, whole, safe — i.e., “to save”), plus *phrēn*, that is “the mind” or “the heart as seat of thought.”¹¹ To have *sōphrosunē* is to have your mind restored to wholeness; it’s to be, literally, of sound mind.

It’s easy to confuse it with the neutering of passion. The words of the psychiatrist at the end of Peter Shaffer’ play *Equus* have haunted me for years. Finally, he has discovered the source of the passion and pain inside his young patient, what makes him shrivel in fear before his horse-god, Equus. But the psychiatrist realizes that to kill the pain he will have to kill the young man’s ability to feel anything inside:

When Equus leaves — if he leaves at all — it will be with your intestines in his teeth. And I don’t stock replacements. ... Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created.¹²

However, “sobriety” is really the bridling of anarchic, self-destroying passions, and it’s the releasing of a whole person to respond wholly to his Creator and Redeemer. Sobriety is not the destruction of passion and the neutering of personhood, but the reclamation of passion and the freeing of personhood.

People of Paul’s world understood that as long as their minds were under the thrall of out-of-control passions, they could not perceive reality aright (prudence was beyond them — all that was left was shrewdness in the gaining of what fed their passions), they could not determine what the right thing was (justice was beyond them — when selfish

¹¹ See Spicq, *TLNT* 3.359.

¹² Peter Shaffer, *Equus* (London: Penguin Books, 1973), pp. 107-108.

passion reigns the only justice is what's good for *me*) — and the only kind of bravery such folks could muster is the resoluteness to feed unbridled appetites at whatever cost.

The instinct among Greeks and Romans to make self-mastery the final and in a sense the most fundamental of the virtues is a profound imprint of God's common grace. If he had thought to do so, I'm sure Paul would have expressed it as a manifestation of what he calls in Rom 2 "the law's requirements written on their hearts, with their consciences bearing witness" (v. 15). For it is precisely what the 10 Commandments do by putting in final position a tethering of the heart, a binding of the inner person: "you shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17).

Now, Greeks understood the need to be delivered from compulsive desires. As Dio Chrysostom said: either have severe philosophers & lenient kings, or lenient philosophers and severe kings (*Oration* 32.18b-19). Accordingly, Greek & Roman ethicists had developed a vocabulary for the ideal, and it included terms like:

- *egkrateia*, "control over the inside" or "self control" — and it was a term more often than not applied to sexual ethics
- *autarkeia*, "self sufficiency," i.e., (roughly rendered) freedom from the need for anything that could lead me to want it so much that I could get stupid about it

And Jews like Philo had accommodated their theology to the Greek desire for self-mastery. In fact, Philo developed a theology of self-salvation through sobriety: "the antidote to license is *sōphrosunē*, which delivers from evil" (*Creation* 73; *Change of Names* 197).¹³

But it took a Paul to see for the first time in history, really, that there are secrets of the heart that cannot simply be disciplined away. It was one thing for the prophet to say "The heart is desperately wicked" — it was another for someone finally to say, "Sin found opportunity in the commandment, and it deceived me and killed me" (Rom 7:11). It was one thing for Solomon to opine, "No one understands, no one seeks for God" (Ecc. 7:11) — quite another for someone to bring himself so personally under the indictment: "I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions ... I've been made captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members" (Rom 7:14b,15,23b). It took a Paul to own this radically in the first person — that there are secrets of the heart (as he calls them in 1Co 4:5) that are quite beyond his grasp, altogether beyond his control, entirely beyond his power to fix.

And it is no accident that he can own this unknowable — and frankly, horribly scary dimension — precisely because he knows he doesn't have to grasp it, control it, or fix it. He can acknowledge that the uncontrollable lurks there because it's been taken care of — it's been defanged:

¹³ In Spicq *TLNT* 3.360-361.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4).

As a result of Christ's work outside him — on the cross — and the Spirit's work inside him, where God presses that work home to Paul's inner being, the apostle can take over terms that Greek ethicists liked — but by which he means something entirely different.

So, in Galatians 5:23 he lists *egkrateia* or “self control” as a fruit not of the proud autonomous self, but of the Holy Spirit.

And in Philippians 4:11, he speaks of an *autarkeia*, a “self sufficiency.” But there's no small irony in the way Paul uses this so Greek of terms, for he means not self-sufficiency at all, but rather Christ-sufficiency. It is, after all, his declared intention (Php 3:8) of counting all that makes him “something” just a bunch of *skubala* — a Greek word for the same kind of refuse we also express with a word that also starts with “s” ... the only difference being their word, *skubala* has 7 letters, while ours has 4. All that counts for Paul is being found in Christ — Christ is enough, so that all that Paul has — or doesn't have — is enough, as well.

I struggle to explain to you how I've seen this work in me.

Maybe the thing to do is to point you to the best illustration Scripture offers of deliverance from debilitating passion, the account of the Geresene demoniac: once rescued from his Legion of demons, he is found “clothed and sobered up” (participial form of *sōphronein*) — Kidd paraphrase, the RSV renders, “in his right mind” (Mk 5:15; Lk 8:35). Delivered from a life that was an anticipation of hell itself — a self violently deconstructing and increasingly dismantling itself, resolutely making itself into devil's food — now, in “soundness of mind,” the former demoniac wants one thing: “to be with Jesus” — and when Jesus says, “No, instead I want you to go tell others your story,” he is happy to oblige: “He went away, proclaiming throughout the whole city how much Jesus had done for him” (Lk 8:39).

Now, I've never been delivered of demonic oppression (that I know of). So, I can't say I know exactly what this felt like. But I've had its likeness:

Sneezing fits — (ad lib...) you know that feeling when the congestion breaks and you can breathe again!

Nail-biting (ad lib...)

Overwhelming lust — for years my relationships with sisters in Christ was colored by the duplicity of a private fantasy world I nurtured as an escape valve for fear of rejection (ad lib...)

Anger management — from childhood; baseball 2 seasons ago (ad lib...)

Where I still struggle: **acquisitiveness** (OK, and anger a little bit ... ad lib...)

Our passions are a two-edged sword. They can lead us to heaven, or they can consign us to hell. It all depends on whether they spin out into nothingness, and eventually dissolve us into nothingness ourselves by ultimately evacuating our souls — or whether our desires converge on the goal of their existence, whether they take on their sacramental cast, prompting us, prodding us home. Our job is — as grace is given us — is to offer our desires to the tethering of grace: to look to the Spirit to work the fruit of “inner control” (*egkrateia*), to ask for a self-sufficiency (an *autarkeia*) that’s really about Christ-sufficiency, to ask for an altitude over the things that would master us, so we can bring all that we are into the final freedom of beloved sons and daughters.

Beth was the sharpest kid in the high school group youth group I worked with during my first couple of years in college. Boldly embraced Christ. Valedictorian of her class. Off to a name university. Then, junior year abroad. Suddenly, we started getting letters about her loneliness and her doubts. The arguments didn’t make sense — way beneath her ability to think through. Was she finding fellowship to help her sort out issues? Just didn’t seem to connect. Turns out that in her loneliness she had started living with a guy — all the arguments against the faith were his. Finally, she reconciled the tensions in her life by giving up the faith. My wake up call to a reality Van Til has been trying to tell us about, but which soap opera fans have known all along: people don’t think things through with detached brains that search out autonomous truth. People think with brains attached to affections, and they invariably look for ideas that make sense of that mysterious world of desires within.

On the other side of the ledger, though making a congruent point, C.S. Lewis writes autobiographically when in *Pilgrim’s Regress* it is the vision of the island that prompts him to leave home and head West ... it’s the vision of the island that gets him back on the road when it looks like he’s going to get lost either in the frigid Northern climes of Rationalism or the torpid Southern climes of Romanticism ... and it’s the vision of the island that finally emboldens him to respond to Mother Kirk’s demand that he take the plunge with her into the waters of final passage to the island.

Hold to the vision. Lose the loser thoughts, the desires that will take you out. Hold to the vision.

Let’s pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we want hearts tethered to yours. Thank you, Father, for your declared intention to remake us after the fashion of your Son. Thank you for the way you worked that into Paul’s being. Thank you for the words you gave him to articulate that so well. Thank you for a Holy Spirit who lives now to intercede for us, and

to make the mind of Christ ours, that you, Lord Jesus, may be more perfectly formed in us. Amen.