

THE GLORIOUS MINISTRATION OF THE SPIRIT

by Carter Conlon

Paul wrote two letters to the Corinthian church. Corinth, an ancient city of Greece, was the New York City of its day, very prosperous, sensual, and affluent. This society was a place where people sought fame and fortune. It was also a significant man-focused city, not unlike cities of the days we are living in. Go to any grocery store, and you will see this man-focus in magazines at the checkout counter.

■ A PROBLEMATIC CHURCH

The church at Corinth was undoubtedly the most problematic of all the churches Paul had founded. Although established on the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, it was always in danger of straying from these roots. Paul's theology was unarguably Jesus Christ, our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and redemption; truly our All in all! Moreover, the gospel he preached was not in the wisdom of man, but in demonstration of the power of God. He was able to say to the Corinthian church, "Follow me, as I follow Christ." He could say this because he knew Christ was transforming his own life day by day, which gave him the authority to say, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." He did not consider himself to be anyone great. He stood before the Corinthians in fear and trembling, because he knew his own frailty, his own weaknesses, and his background. He knew he was capable of great evil apart from God. Yet through grace, God had freely given him a new life and he was growing in that grace and in the knowledge of Christ.

■ WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR ONE, HE'S DONE FOR ALL

1 Corinthians 3:5: *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?*

Paul emphasized taking the focus off man. Whether himself or Apollos, they were just people like the Corinthians—saved by grace. God in his mercy had planted something of himself within them. He had set them in the body, and it was not for Paul or Apollos to lead the Corinthians to themselves, but to Christ. It was equal access for everyone to the throne of God. Paul let them know that what God had done for him, he would do for them, and so they should not look to Paul or Apollos. Now the same applies to us today. You see, it is not about man. It is about God, who in his mercy has chosen to redeem and inhabit the lives of men, and who makes us a thousand times more than we could ever hope to be in ourselves. If God were not here, it would not matter what was preached, you would never be changed.

■ PAUL WARNS THE CHURCH – "TAKE YOUR EYES OFF MAN"

1 Corinthians 4:14-16: *I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.*

Paul was warning the church about becoming a man-focused society.

They did not realize it then, but it was leading them astray. There was no shortage of teachers trying to get into the church and Paul was warning them, "You have instructor upon instructor coming your way, but remember, you are founded on a solid foundation. No matter who else may come to you or how they try to preach the gospel to you, and even if they profess to be Christ himself—you have been placed on a solid foundation, Jesus Christ being the very Cornerstone."

1 Corinthians 1:10-13: *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas (which is Peter); and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?*

"PAUL IS MY MAN, AID IF I CAN FIGURE OUT WHEN HE IS PREACHING, I WILL BE THERE EVERY TIME."

Paul began by addressing this root problem. The people did not immediately perceive this focus on man as a problem because at that time it was centered on godly men. This man-focus was already

other on the back, and were constantly commending each other. They looked for references and recommendations everywhere they went; they borrowed each other's messages, repeating the same errors by adding another twist of deception. Paul asked if he also needed letters of recommendation in order to visit them. Did he need to ask the other churches to write out certain things so that he could send them glossy brochures telling them what a wonderful man of God he was?

LISTENING TO PREACHERS WHO DID NOT HAVE A TRUE FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST.

No! Paul did not need men's validation; they knew he was a man of God! He said, *Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men* (verse 2). Paul stood before them in weakness and trembling, but the power of God radiated from every word planted in his mouth by the Almighty God, and they were being changed!

The Lord with his own finger began to write the story of his life in their hearts, and this was the evidence that Paul was a man of God. It was the supernatural infusion of God's life into them, which had given them a new heart, a new mind, and a new spirit. By the power of the Spirit, they were lifted out of their hopelessness, despair and confusion, into the life of Christ!

THE TRUTH OF CHRIST IS HIDDEN

In verses 7-13: we read, *But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away; How shall not the ministration of*

the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished.

Paul's message was about a ministry that leads to Christ and not to men. Yet here was a ministry that sounded like God; it had a sense of glory, but it did not lead to lasting or permanent change in the life of the hearers.

In verses 14-15 *But their minds were blinded: for until this day there remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.*

Paul used this Old Testament example as a type of people who, like the Corinthians, were listening to preachers who did not have a true face-to-face encounter with Christ. Because of this, the Corinthian believers' minds were blinded, since those Christ pretenders whose faces were hidden behind a veil also hid the truth of Christ. They talked about God, but their ministry was that of death. Their whispers and peeps from heaven were as if God had some great master puzzle and they were the only ones with the key.

Paul was trying to convey this error to the Corinthian church. These preachers had some measure of an encounter with God, but Christ could not be manifestly seen in them because they themselves were hidden behind a mask. They were not honest

men. You could not see the end of what they were professing as truth. Those who listened to them became partakers of a form of godliness that was without power.

People would travel the circuit, hearing those superstars day in and day out, year in and year out, yet their lives never changed. There was no power or authority in the message, and the result left people saying, "God, you've spoken to me, but all this so-called revelation, this so-called glory, is behind a veil. I do not see it! How do I get to the end of it?"

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul challenged the powerlessness of the message; therefore, he used great plainness of speech, never trying to draw people to himself. He made it clear that he was not there to dazzle or puzzle them; he was not there to stand and appear theologically brilliant so that they left speaking his name all over the city. He had found the supply that God says is for them as well as for him! He said, "We have seen beyond the veil!"

WHEN THE VEIL IS REMOVED, CHRIST IS REVEALED

2 Corinthians 3:16: *Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.*

The longer a person focuses on people, the more they are unable to see Christ. However, when the believer turns and seeks Christ, the veil, or the mistiness, concerning God is removed. God promises to reveal himself to the believer and show him what he thinks, and what he

YOU ARE SEEING SOMETHING BEYOND THE VEIL RIGHT NOW—SEEING AN INCREDIBLE SUPPLY CALLED JESUS CHRIST.

very much part of their society and people were saying, “Paul is my man, and if I can figure out when he is preaching, I will be there every time.” Another one said, “No, Apollos is my man. Apollos is articulate and incredibly intelligent. He can take the Scriptures, dissect, and divide them in a way that is like an artist painting a picture.” Yet another said, “No, Peter is my man. He is a ‘meat and potatoes’ kind of guy. He is the prime exhorter. I am a Peter kind of a person.” Finally, you had those who said, “I am of Christ.” All of this man-focus was causing divisions in the Corinthian church.

■ A FOCUS ON MAN LEADS TO ANOTHER GOSPEL

1 Corinthians 3:6-9: *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.*

Paul knew the danger, should the focus on personalities continue; it would open their hearts to greed, and to self-appointed and ambitious preachers who would come into their city. These preachers would then draw people to themselves and lead the people of God into error. These preachers coming to the Corinthian church were good speakers, and extremely charismatic people. They would challenge the authority of Paul and say, “Listen, you’ve heard us speak. We are polished; we are articulate; we are entertaining; we speak about life; and we speak about God. Look at Paul in contrast to us, how weak his words are, and his bodily presence is even worse than his speaking. Why would you want to listen to him?” They would come and overtly challenge the apostolic

authority in Paul’s life, through which the church in Corinth had been established.

Exactly what happened in Paul’s day is happening in our day. You can be sure there is going to be an influx of ambitious men and women coming to New York City. They have their own agenda, they are self-appointed, and greedy, and they will be going after your wallets. They will not present Christ to you and their message will challenge the apostolic authority of the Word of God. You are God’s building, and he only uses men as instruments in his hand to open up your hearts to faith.

■ THE IMPRINT OF THE MAN-FOCUSED THEOLOGY

1 Corinthians 4:6-8: *And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us...*

Here then is the essence of the theology of these men who draw others to themselves. They talk about riches, when in reality they bring deep, inbred spiritual poverty and nakedness. Their message is all about money and not about the work and passion of God for fallen humanity. When Paul came to the Corinthian church, everybody was supposedly reigning. They were all living as opulent kings. In contrast, Paul had been beaten, was bruised, and probably limped into town; he was suffering as an apostle of Jesus Christ. In trying to reach them Paul said with sarcasm, “I wish you really were reigning. It would be delightful to finally reign with you.”

A closer inspection of their reigning revealed that instead of being drawn together as a body, the Corinthian Christians were in secular courts suing one another. In chapters 6 and 10, they were offending the conscience of the weak because of their supposed Christian liberty. They considered themselves free now. Free to drink and carouse; free to do as they pleased, since this was a new era of Christian liberty. It meant nothing to them that they were offending a brother or causing others to stumble through their conduct. Under this man-centered ministry, they were disconnected from the body of Christ. All men were drawn to what they wanted to hear from the pulpit, desiring to be individual superstars.

In chapter 11, the Christians were pushing aside and marginalizing the poor, gravitating around social status, wealth, and power. They were seeking to associate with people in the church who could enhance their position, and make them feel better about themselves. Had they been drawn to Christ, they would have had an inner understanding of the true body of Christ, a body where the hand cannot say to the foot, “I have no need of you.” It would have caused them to bear with one another, and to rejoice or weep with one another. As a church, they should have been drawn together as a whole body, moving through a godless world as a living testimony, and with a love that only comes from God.

■ WAS THERE A NEED FOR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION?

2 Corinthians 3:1: *Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?*

Here again in a second epistle Paul is dealing with man-pleasing preachers who traveled in packs; they quoted from one another, patted each

can do. God will show him Christ in his glory, and suddenly the preacher is gone, and Jesus Christ is in plain view.

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (verse 17). The word “liberty” in its original text also has the meaning of generosity. The Lord is that Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, this incredible generosity of God comes into view. The power of God that is given can make you into a man of love, or can transform you into a woman of faith. This power of the Holy Spirit can change you into the father you have never been. God in his generosity takes away a gloomy song and gives you a song of joy. God says all you have to do is ask, seek, and knock, and everything you need for life and godliness will be given to you. Thank God, you can now see his generosity and you can see the calling he has placed on your life. *We all... are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord* (verse 18). From image to image, and from weakness to strength, from powerlessness to Christ’s life in us, we are changed from our own image into the image and character of Christ. A transformation that causes Christ in us to be recognized by the world for who he is.

■ NOT LIMITED IN CHRIST

There is a constant advance for the believer into the life of Christ. Even though the enemy brings condemnation as to who you are and what you have been, you do not need to listen to his accusations. Resist him, and he must flee. You are seeing something beyond the veil right now—seeing an incredible supply called Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has come and unfolds

those things that will be in your life by showing you Christ, and what is yours because of Christ. So you are no longer limited by the devil’s accusations or what anyone else has told you. Never again will you be limited by education, language, culture, background, or country. Never again will you be limited by evil words that have been spoken over your life. No! Now you see beyond the veil. You see the supply of Christ that has been opened to you in simplicity. It is not complicated. Jesus died for you, and rose from the dead, and he now sits at the right hand of all authority and power. Everything he inherited in that victory is now yours. The veil is open and you can see the end result. You see yourself coming out of despair and weakness, walking out of powerlessness into a life that is intertwined with the life of God.

Ephesians 1:17-23: That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe...

Carter Conlon
December 12, 2005
©2006 Times Square Church

This message is an edited version of a sermon given in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in New York City. Other sermons are available by visiting our website www.tscnyc.org or calling 1-800-488-0854. You can also write to: Times Square Church, Tape Ministry, 1657 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. You are welcome to make additional copies of this sermon for free distribution to friends. However, all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission existing copyright laws apply. This sermon cannot be posted on any website or webpage. However, you are free to provide a hyperlink from a website to the Times Square Church website by notifying Times Square Church in writing.

REV. CARTER CONLON

Carter Conlon is senior pastor at Times Square Church, where he has been on the pastoral staff since 1994.

TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.” It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

Founding Pastor

Rev. David Wilkerson

Senior Pastor

Rev. Carter Conlon

Tel:

212-541-6300

Fax:

212-541-6415

Church Location:

237 West 51st Street,
Between Broadway & Eighth Avenue

Mailing Address:

1657 Broadway, 4th Flr.
New York, NY 10019

e-mail:

info@timesquarechurch.org

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Church Service	
Thursday	7:00PM	Intercessory Prayer	
Friday	7:00PM	Church Service	

www.tscnyc.org