

The Angels of Soul Winning (Part 4) – I Corinthians 1:21-31

I. Introduction:

- A. This scripture is usually used in the context of preaching the gospel.
1. *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” – verse 18.*
 2. In **verse 26** we see that God calls sinners to Himself from all kinds of human conditions and backgrounds.
 - a. But there aren't many wise men after the flesh, nor mighty, nor privileged with nobility called by the Lord to salvation.
 - b. While Christ saves **some** of these special people, He more often takes the ordinary and less than spectacular people unto Himself – people described as *“base,”* & even people *“despised”* by the world.
 3. *“THAT, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”*
- B. While this is the gist of this scripture, this morning I'd like to take **verse 29** in a slightly different direction.
1. *“That no flesh should glory in (the Lord's) presence.”*
 2. Not only does the person saved have no grounds for boasting in God's gracious salvation, but neither does the evangelist who brought that person to the cross.
 3. Yes, Paul is speaking from the perspective of the pulpit, preaching sometimes to great crowds of people.
 4. But he was also used of the Lord in one-on-one personal evangelistic situations, like Philip and others.
 5. What Paul says about public preaching also applies to personal evangelism.
- C. And what exactly is it that he says? We move on to the next chapter.
1. *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*
 - a. *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*
 - b. *And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.*
 - c. *And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:*
 - d. *That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”*
 2. When it comes to the *“angels”* of evangelism, God delights in using the **weak** things of His Kingdom, the **base** and the **despised**, and those who are **accused of foolishness**.
 3. Whether we are preaching to thousands or talking to a coworker, the people whom the Lord delights in using must divest themselves of anything in which they might boast, *“that no flesh should glory in (the Lord's) presence”* and *“that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”*
- D. This brings us to a few more of the characteristics of the God-blessed angels of soul-winning.

II. Paul expresses here the need for **SELF-EMPTYING**.

- A. Despite being the Lord's gospel messengers, you and I are not the literal angels of Jehovah.
1. That means we were not created directly by God, and we are not sinless or innocent.
 2. Every one of us come into this *“angelic”* office as human beings with a variety of sins and weaknesses.
 3. For example, we are all vulnerable to temptation and failure.
 4. And not the least of our problems is pride in our accomplishments – even in our Christian service.
- B. I wonder if Paul's ministry in Athens humbled him and prepared him for his Corinthian ministry?
1. Perhaps, at first, he rejoiced in being invited to Mars Hill to debate with the Grecian intellectuals.
 2. Perhaps he entered the ring filled with confidence & pride, before getting the stuffing knocked out of him.
 3. He confessed to the Corinthians, *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.”*
 4. Did the events in Athens produce a little humility in the powerful apostle?
 5. Humility is important in the Christian life generally but especially for the soul-winner.
 6. *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”* – He will bless your service.

- C. What is humility? There are several definitions and plenty of imitations.
1. One definition is that it is a modest view of one's self, especially in the light of how the Lord sees us.
 2. While humility can be seen in our exterior lives, it is actually a condition of the heart, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit.
 3. Paul says in **Romans 12** – *"I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."*
 4. God has never created a proud man; every single one of them are products of the Devil.
 5. But I have met people who proudly claimed to be expert soul-winners for the Lord.
 - a. For example, they could recite the number of people they had recently brought to the cross.
 - b. They might have professed to humility.
 - c. But by bringing up their accomplishments and numbers their pride oozed out.
 6. And I have heard of pastors who encouraged this pride by asking people to recount their evangelistic statistics.
 7. We need to remember that God hates all forms of pride, and that is probably more true in religion.
 8. The Lord cannot be glorified, when we take credit for His accomplishments.
- D. While a part of humility may involve self-emptying, as we seem to see in Paul, it is not the same thing as belittling oneself.
1. Paul did not say to the Corinthians, *"I am worthless. I was a failure in Athens."* He wasn't a failure.
 2. He didn't say, *"I am of no use to God; I can't help anyone, because I have nothing to offer them."*
 3. What he **did** say was, *"I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle. Because I persecuted the church of God, **BUT** by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Corinthians 15:9-10).*
- E. Paul knew exactly who he was, and he tried hard not to forget it.
1. He was a sinner saved by grace and called into the ministry of helping other sinners see the grace of God.
 2. Ultimately, he was like every other child of God. He had something special to offer his neighbors.
- F. Are you a Christian? Have you been born again?
1. Then you obviously know enough of the gospel to have been saved, and you possess the Holy Spirit.
 2. You don't need to be an apostle to be one of the Lord's messengers.
 3. You don't need to have seen the risen Lord with your naked eye or to have walked with Him along Jordan.
 4. If you are saved, you have been given all you need to be one of the Lord's evangelistic *"angels."*
 5. Yes, there is probably room to mature in faith and expression, but you have the basics already.
- G. There are people who use the humility card in order keep from serving the Lord.
1. *"I am not as holy and sinless as I ought to be in order to be a good servant of God."*
 - a. It was true even of Paul, but it didn't silence him.
 - b. If there is sin in your life, repent of it, and with God's blessing, get rid of it. Remember Isaiah.
 2. *"I don't know what to say."* Well then spend more time in the Word of God.
 - a. And when you have the opportunity, let the Holy Spirit speak through you.
 3. *"I stutter and stammer when I speak to people about the Lord."*
 - a. You don't stammer when you are talking about your favorite sport, or about your grandchildren, or about politics. Again, let the Lord be your voice.
 4. Actually, the more lowly we picture ourselves to be, the better fit we are to glorify the Saviour.
 5. No one should enter the presence of any lost person as anything more than a simple, unexceptional, hand-made pitcher filled with the glorious gospel message.
 6. The moment we appear to think of ourselves as somehow better than the one to whom we are speaking, we will have lost the opportunity to witness to him of God's grace.

- H. Consider Peter's evangelistic contact with Cornelius.
1. Peter, the proud Jew; the one who had never eaten unclean food, had to be taught to be gracious.
 2. And then Cornelius' employees arrived seeking an audience with the great Apostle.
 3. Do I detect a little arrogance in Peter's words to them? *"What do you want?" "What do YOU want?"*
 4. **Acts 10:21** – *"Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius, and said, behold, I am he whom ye seek; what is the cause wherefore ye are come?"*
 5. But then as he had time to reflect on the Lord's vision of the unclean animals, his heart softened.
 6. And when he came to Cornelius he talked with that Gentile as an equal – just another sinner before God.
- I. What does humility accomplish?
1. It puts us into the place where the Lord can use us. *"The Lord hath chosen the weak things of the world."*
 2. Humility should help us to be at ease, because we find ourselves on a similar level with our friend.
 3. And that should make him to be at ease as well.

III. Another characteristic of a well-used evangelist is **PERSEVERANCE**.

- A. How long did it take for you learn to ride a bike?
1. I remember my first bike; it seemed huge to me. We didn't have training wheels.
 - a. I leaned it up against the fence between our house and the neighbor's.
 - b. I would get on and push away from the fence, trying to ride over the grass, before eventually falling.
 - c. Over and over again I would do it, falling onto the grass until I mastered it.
 2. Was your experience much different? What if you had quit the first time you fell?
 3. How many times were your parents or an older sibling involved? What if they had quit trying to help?
 4. Teaching a rebellious heart that it needs salvation takes a lot more perseverance than learning to ride a bike.
 - a. I **wanted** to learn to ride. I **yearned** to be like the older kids.
 - b. But the average sinner has no desire at all to become a child of God, until the Lord gives it to him.
 - c. And that desire may come through you. **We** can't afford to quit. **He** can't afford for us to quit.
- B. Think about the perseverance of the farmer.
1. How often does he seed his field only to have it destroyed before harvest time?
 - a. First, there isn't enough moisture in the ground, and then there are the drought and the grasshoppers.
 - b. But then after there is a little sign of life, and the farmer is filled with hope, a hail storm comes along to beat it down.
 - c. What does he say at that point? *"Well, maybe it will be better next year."* Is that an extreme example?
 2. Is the illustration in **Mark 4** extreme? There Jesus gives us the parable of the sower, or the soils.
 - a. *"Behold, there went out a sower to sow."*
 - b. Some of the seed fell on the **way side**, some of it on **stony ground** and other among **thorns**.
 - c. But by the grace of God *"some fell on good ground and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased..."*
 3. Isn't there a lesson about continuing to scatter the precious seed, no matter where it might fall?
 4. Be persistent. Don't give up generally, and more specifically don't give up on that one person.
- C. When Philip was told by the Holy Spirit to *"join"* himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian, the Lord used an interesting word.
1. Would I be making too much of it, if I pointed out that the word literally means *"glue yourself to that chariot?"*
 2. How far did Philip travel with that man, talking to him from the Old Testament scriptures about Jesus?
 3. How many minutes or hours did he spend with him?
 4. I'm not saying that his first efforts were rebuffed, and Philip had to plead to remain in the chariot.
 5. But he remained faithful to the commission which he had been given.
 6. How many miles would he have gone, further and further from home, in order to hear the man say, *"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?"*

- D. Turn to ***I Corinthians 15:51*** – *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that you labor is not in vain in the Lord.”*
1. Paul was not writing to Timothy or some of the elders of the church; it was to the entire membership.
 2. *“Be steadfast”* & *“unmoveable”* say the same thing but with different words – *“don’t move away; don’t quit.”*
 3. That might be applied to our faith, or our relationship to our church, or to our support of the ministry.
 4. But the next statement is clear talking about ***Christian service***: *“always abounding in the work of the Lord.”* Gill says it means, *“keep going on in it, being more and more in the practice of it.”*
 5. I realize that this could be generalized: continue serving, keep witnessing even if no one wants to listen.
 6. But might not it also mean more specifically, never give up on that childhood friend of yours, that relative.
 7. Remember that under the sovereignty of God, your work, no matter how unprofitable it appears to be on the surface is never in vain.
- E. There are several scriptures, like this one, which speak of perseverance in a general way, which we can apply specifically.
1. ***Galatians 6:9*** – *“Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”*
 2. May we not apply *“reaping”* to the evangelistic *“bringing in the sheaves?”*
 3. What is the meaning of ***Hebrews 12:1?*** *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”*
 - a. Not only is the Christian life more like running a marathon rather than a sprint, but so may be the work needed to win that particular friend of yours to Christ.
 - b. Run with patience the race which the Lord has set before you.

IV. Another characteristic of an effective soul-winner is a SANCTIFIED MIND.

- A. Logically speaking, the better prepared we are intellectually, the more effective we should be as soul-winners.
1. The other day I helped a fella install a new garbage disposal under my sink.
 2. We were able to find an exact duplicate of the disposal which had worn out.
 3. Installing it was a breeze because it all made perfect sense, including attaching the hose from the dish washer to the side of the disposal. When it was installed, I turned it on and it worked perfectly.
 4. But then later Judy used the dishwasher, and when it was finished she found it full of dirty water.
 5. Two minutes into looking at the instructions, I saw that we hadn’t removed a plug which prevented the dishwasher water to drain.
 6. Despite the obvious and logical method of installation, a few moments with the manual were needed to complete the project.
- B. Any born again Christian should be able to tell another person how he was saved.
1. It doesn’t take a theological degree and three years of practice preaching.
 2. However, a basic understanding of the installation manual can be of help.
 3. In a future lesson I’m going to share with you a few basic scriptures which will enhance your witnessing.
 4. Without those scriptures, our witness boils down nothing but our ***opinions*** about what it takes to be saved.
 5. The problem is: the person to whom we are talking probably has his opinions too.
 6. It is the Word of God which is quick and powerful, and which cuts into the dead tissue of that soul.
 7. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*
 8. Of all the good works we might perform in the Lord’s Name, leading other sinners to Christ has to be near the top of the list.

V. Another trait might be described as a WILLINGNESS to SACRIFICE.

- A. Let’s say that someone you dearly love is dying due to the lack of a certain mineral in his diet.
1. You have been told that medicine is found in a certain plant which grows at an elevation of 14,000 feet in the Colorado Rockies.

2. Wouldn't you be willing to make that arduous climb to the top of one of those mountains to save the life of your loved-one?
- B. Last week I pointed out that love is one of the characteristics of the more effective soul-winners.
1. One of the characteristics of that characteristic is a willingness to give – and even to sacrifice.
 2. The Spirit didn't tell Philip to climb to the top of Mount Hermon or even Sinai, but He did tell the man to gird up his loins and run for miles into the desert.
 3. Again, last week, we read of Paul's willingness to become accursed from Christ if it could mean the salvation of some of his Jewish brethren.
- C. Two hundred years ago, when the first missionaries were going to India, Burma and Africa, they left their homelands filled with hope and expectations.
1. Their hopes were of leading a few souls to Christ, and their expectations were of dying in the process.
 2. They had heard of the heat, disease and hardships of their intended new homes. They expected to die.
 3. And multitudes did give their lives for the opportunity to share Christ.
- D. You and I, rarely have the same expectations, but the most effective soul-winners still have the willingness to sacrifice.
1. What might the Lord ask of us? Our time? The comfort of our Lazy-boy? Our favorite television show?
 2. We may have to sacrifice a friendship, or our reputation among the lost, or our job.
 3. *“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”*

VI. One more thing: effective soul-winning requires **FAITH**.

- A. Perhaps this is the **greatest thing** that the average Christian **lacks**.
1. When Peter and John went into the temple in **Acts 3**, did they go with the intention of healing the lame man? *“Hey John, let's go and find some crippled person to heal.”* I don't think so.
 2. But they did go believing that the Lord was leading them, and I think they did go in expecting great things.
 3. When the man confronted them, asking for some money to support his addiction, I mean when he asked for alms, Peter had the audacity – the faith – to believe he could give him something better than a few coins.
 4. **Peter** had **faith** to believe the man could walk again through the grace of the Lord Jesus.
 5. Is this why we are not effective in our service: we don't really believe that God will raise the dead?
 6. When Paul preached the gospel in Corinth, he expected things to happen.
 - a. *“For the preaching (or the presentation) of the cross... is the power of God... and the wisdom of God.”*
 - b. Paul's faith let him move past Athens and on to the next city, the next sermon, the next opportunity.
- B. Remember we are talking about the characteristics of the most effective evangelism.
1. Anyone can point souls to Calvary by simply giving them our personal testimony. We all should do this.
 2. And some might be able to preach a 45 minute gospel sermon.
 3. But the key ingredient in our soul-winning, no matter what the style, has to be the blessing & power of God.
 4. And while it is **not essential** that we have faith enough to believe God **will save** the person to whom we are speaking, we need to believe that God **CAN save** the next person to whom we witness.
 5. And that faith is a part of Paul's *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”*
- C. Something we see in the life of Paul is that one day the gospel is well accepted and the next day it is not.
1. But the results and effects are not our department. They shouldn't worry us. They belong to the Lord.
 2. Our job is to make sure we are clean vessels by purging ourselves from sin, and exhibiting and implementing the characteristics of an efficient witness.
 3. Then we need simply to obey the Lord, trusting Him for the results.