

## Article of the Month – April 2011

### Missiological Observations in the NT (2) – 1 Corinthians

By Steef van 't Slot, Ph.D.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> article in the new series on New Testament mission perspectives deals with First Corinthians. I want to share fifteen observations with you:

Paul appeals to unity among believers<sup>1</sup> and Jesus mentioned it as a necessity for them to be His witnesses. World Missions would benefit if its executives would eliminate their divisions.

Paul was glad he had baptized only few people, so that none had reason to build their faith on him instead of on Christ.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, missionaries should not engage in church ministry or administration, but rather leave it to local leaders.

The message of the cross and preaching Christ crucified contains two elements. The *first* preaches His life and selfless sacrifice; the *second* how His disciples should follow Him in it: 'deny yourself ... take up your cross ... follow Me'. The latter is often neglected in preaching today. Yet, if we don't preach Christ *and* show His sacrificial attitude in our lives, our message will not draw many people into the Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

Paul's remark to 'think of what you were when you were called' tells those, privileged to serve Christ full-time, not to boast because they are not superior to other believers. Where would we have been without Christ's salvation? Paul even realized that concerning himself.<sup>4</sup>

Paul says that an unmarried person can be fully devoted to the Lord and His affairs, not having to please a spouse. His reasoning is often ignored. Brierly mentions some reasons why married missionaries leave their fields prematurely. Yet, the decision to marry or not has to do with people's capability of self-control or having a gift, possibly of celibacy.<sup>5</sup>

The principle of becoming all things to all men<sup>6</sup> speaks about the cultural adjustments missionaries need to learn before they can present the Gospel in a culturally relevant way.

Read Paul's words about hair, dress and covering<sup>7</sup> in the context of restoring unity in the church, and do not explain them as cultural absolutes for all times and places. The issue is to stay within the boundaries of generally accepted cultural norms of decency and modesty. Paul

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 1:10 & John 13:34,35; 17:11b,21-23

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 1:14-16; 2:4,5

<sup>3</sup> 1:18,23; Luke 9:23; 1 Cor. 2:2

<sup>4</sup> 1:26-28; 2:1,3

<sup>5</sup> 7:32-34; Brierly, in Taylor *Too valuable to lose* ... 1997:92-94. Reasons include e.g. children, marriage

outside the missions agency, marriage/family conflict; 1 Cor. 7:7,9

<sup>6</sup> 9:19-22

<sup>7</sup> 11:1-16

brought them up to re-unite the church. In our time it can only divide the church when such issues are *not* felt needs but are brought up anyway, with a desire to create uniformity, according to cultural habits and practices of times and places, other than ours. Therefore, cross-cultural workers must be careful and knowledgeable of their host-people, before they address cultural issues, differing from their own.

Paul mentions three tools to repair unity: there is no division in the Trinity, neither in the workings of the Spirit, nor in the Body of Christ. The fact that God gives everyone a place and function in the Body should bring the Corinthians to relaxation and contentment. Differences should be celebrated, not be fought over. Divisions eliminate love; disciples will not be recognized and their mission remains undone.<sup>8</sup>

Love moved the Father to send the Son to save the world; it motivated the Son to lay down His life for it<sup>9</sup> and a missionary to leave his comforts to preach the Gospel to the unsaved. Quality and character of such love is described in chapter 13, between the Holy Spirit chapters of Principles (12) and Practice (14).

In addition to what is taught about clear communication of the gospel *in church* so that believers are edified and unbelievers come to repentance,<sup>10</sup> the chapter teaches on cross-cultural communication of the Gospel *on foreign mission fields*.<sup>11</sup>

The question of the ‘silent woman’ has been blown out of proportion. The context suggests that women should refrain from asking disruptive questions during church services, but rather ask their husbands at home. Had Paul insisted on total silence from women, he would neither have allowed them to pray or prophecy, nor worked with them as his co-laborers.<sup>12</sup>

Belief in Christ’s bodily resurrection, then of His people, and finally of all others is a non-negotiable. Denying Christ’s resurrection is not smart: it is a historic fact, witnessed by too many to be fake. Denying a resurrection for all who expect salvation from Christ, takes away the core of the gospel and makes faith futile.<sup>13</sup> Either one has the gospel including the resurrection, or one has nothing. The resurrection must have a prominent place in preaching, in local evangelism and in cross-cultural missions, just like in Acts and the Epistles.

While ministering in Ephesus, a great door was opened for Paul but he also faced opposition. These are normal occurrences for who plants the gospel where it has not yet been preached.<sup>14</sup> In 2 Corinthians we will look at what Paul suffered for the sake of his ministry.

Look at Paul’s ‘member-care’: Corinth is exhorted to treat Timothy well. Paul had had hard times with them, and did not want Timothy to suffer similarly. When Corinthian leaders visited Paul we see member-care again:<sup>15</sup> they blessed him materially and spiritually. Missionaries need friendship and attention, especially from whom they serve.

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<sup>8</sup> 12:4-6, 7-11 & 12-27 respectively; 3:5b; 12:18,28; 1:10; 11:17,18; 13:1-13; 14:24,25

<sup>9</sup> John 3:16 & 10:15b respectively

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor. 14:1-25

<sup>11</sup> 14:4b,5,12b,19 & 24,25 respectively, and e.g. 14:9-11,19,21a

<sup>12</sup> 14:34,35 & 11:5 respectively; see also Rom. 16:3-12

<sup>13</sup> Well proven by the Gospels and Acts; see e.g. 1 Thess. 4:16,17; Rev. 20:11-15; 1 Cor. 15:3-7,51,52,12-

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<sup>14</sup> 16:9; Acts 19; Rom. 15:20

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 16:10,11,16,17

The curse over whoever does not love the Lord<sup>16</sup> reinforces the Gospel's seriousness. There is only One Way of salvation. The church must prioritize her Mission more than it does now.