

Can we agree?

- You can tell a lot about a person's character by looking at the company they keep.
- Healthy faith communities are characterized by people who showcase moral discipline, intelligent faith, successful families, social influence, and cultural respectability.
- Jesus' positive impression on our generation is bound up in the image projected by his followers.

But does this mean:

- Jesus' critics were right in labeling him a sinner because of his social contacts?
- Paul's critics in Corinth were right in disrespecting him for not living like a "kings Kid"?
- Advocates of "church growth" are right in that the key to a growing church is giving people what they say they want or are impressed with?

Some challenging observations

1. Peter & Jesus are contrasted in Matt.26 where Peter refuses to be identified with Jesus shortly after Jesus "dramatically & unashamedly" identified with Peter.
2. Jesus comfortably identifies himself with those who were unimpressive - moral failures, outcasts, lower class, poor.
3. One of the first things that Paul did in following Christ was to repent of his image tied to cultural power and achievement.
4. Paul rebukes Peter (Gal.2) for not wanting to bear the reproach of the Gentiles in the eyes of his Jewish friends.

5. James warns the church about giving favored status to the rich and powerful. Jas.2.
6. Paul is disrespected in the Corinthian church because he refused to live "like a king's kid."
7. Jesus deliberately called those who "were not" impressive in this world to be his disciples.
8. Jesus' humble followers were transformed but not in their social status or material wealth.
9. Jesus will judge us on how we respond to the "least of these" brethren of Jesus. Matt.25:40

This is a big theme

At the core of the Gospel is

**the theme of strength
accommodating
weakness.**



Philippians 2

⁵ **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,** ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but **emptied Himself**, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He **humbled Himself** by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

1 Corinthians 1

“²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were **not many wise according to the flesh**, not many **mighty**, not many **noble**; ²⁷ but God has chosen the **foolish** things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the **weak** things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the **base** things of the world and the **despised**, God has chosen, the things that **are not**, that He might nullify the things that are, ²⁹ that no man should boast before God.”

Romans 15

“¹ Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. ³ For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, “*The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon Me.*” ⁴ For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵ Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus; ⁶ that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

“⁷ Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. ⁸ For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises {given} to the fathers, ⁹ and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “*Therefore I will give praise to Thee among the Gentiles, And I will sing to Thy name.*” ¹⁰ And again he says, “*Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.*” ¹¹ And again, “*Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him.*” ¹² And again Isaiah says, “*There shall come the root of Jesse, And He who arises to rule over the Gentiles, In Him shall the Gentiles hope.*” ¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Troubling signs in the church

- **A cultural class system in the church.**
- **The misuse of position and power.**
- **The misunderstanding of wealth and poverty.**

Social isolation

- not connected to an empathetic and supportive community.



Spiritual despair

- not empowered from within to experience personal dignity, power, and hope from a relationship with God and His people.

Material deprivation

- not able to access life's basic physical needs.

Political exclusion

- not empowered politically to effect change in one's life situation.

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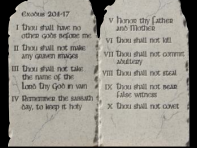
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What this passage does not say

- **We are to glorify the poor, the weak, the immature and despise the rich and powerful.**
- **We are to bury our gifts, deny our freedom, and view God's material blessings as evil.**

Every time God gifts us He takes a risk that we will value the gift more than the Giver.

The children of Israel with the gold of the Egyptians and the Law of Moses



Every time God gifts us He takes a risk that we will value the gift more than the Giver.

The Corinthian church with the power of the Spirit and the blessings of this life.



Every time God gifts us He takes a risk that we will value the gift more than the Giver.

The competitive church growth movement and the egos & envy that go with it



The Strong have real advantages.

- 1. They are free to do and enjoy things that others may not.***
- 2. They can sense their significance as they see their strengths being used.***
- 3. They can enjoy the social respect that comes with the use of their gifts.***
- 4. They can profit from their gifts materially in many cases.***

Paul challenges us in the area of our strength to do two things.

- 1. We are to see our strengths as gifts to the church not ourselves.***
- 2. We are to bear the weakness of those without strength.***

“bear” Jesus “bore our weaknesses”

We are not just to “forbear” (tolerate) but carry or share the social liabilities that come with the weakness.

The Strong are to be strong in two ways.

- 1. They have faith and courage to live liberated lives.***
- 2. They have power and patience to bear the weaknesses of others.***

We cannot claim to be strong in the first area without also stepping up in the second.

1 Corinthians 9

“1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? . . . 4 Do we not have a right to eat and drink? 5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? . . . 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? 12 If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but we endure all things, that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ.”

Our culture's challenges to us.

1. ***Our personal freedom is at the core of our human rights.***
2. ***Everyone must pull their own weight.***



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Our challenge to our culture.

1. ***True freedom is the strength to lay aside our right in love.***
2. ***We are our brother's keeper.***



Some areas where this may apply

1. ***Identifying and empathizing with ethnic minorities.***
2. ***Identifying and empathizing with poor and powerless.***
3. ***Identifying and empathizing with those less "gifted" in ministry.***

We too often want to correct, teach, and exhort, rather than sacrificially empathize & comfort.

There are many ways in which we can minister to one another.

1. ***We can help meet the needs of others materially.***
2. ***We can help people change.***
3. ***We can become one with others so that they are not alone.***
4. ***We can be careful in how we talk about others.***

Paul uses Jesus as an example.

1. ***God bears our weakness.***
2. ***God calls us to join Him in bearing the weaknesses of one another.***

When we are baptized we acknowledge God's grace toward us and we die to our old self centered life so that we might live for him.



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When we take the bread and the cup we affirm God's grace for us and our calling to be gracious with others.

