

## **Spiritual growth: Beyond dualism.**

1 Corinthians 3: 1-9

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### **Introduction: Confession of a woman wounded by Paul...?**

I have a confession to make. As a woman who was raised in a patriarchal context of a Baptist South African home, The Apostle Paul and I were in constant debate.

For it was because of the unfortunate interpretation of Paul's letters that I was:

Not in my younger years given the option to consider the vocation of a Pastor or Priest or Preacher for after all:

- 1 Cor 14:34-36 we find the statement: "Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only ones it has reached?"
- Yet in Galatians 3:28 we read that there is no longer male or female...
- And we read a long list of women's names who served as leaders in the early churches that Paul was instrumental in starting: *Prisca, Nympha, Mary, Lydia, Phoebe, Euodia and Syntyche*

And then I realized that Paul, like me, was a man in process.

A Jewish man trying to make sense of his life – a way of thinking, a legacy of hatred and killing, in light of a new way of being, once he had encountered the Risen Christ.

And then I realised that Paul, like me, was a man in process.

A man culturally endowed with a dualistic way of thinking, in or out, all or nothing, wrong or right, and was moving toward surrender to another way, the way of wisdom, where there is unity in the name of Christ.

And then I realized that Paul, was a mirror, lovingly held up by God, to me, to grow my own awareness of my blind spots and me need for transformation.

**Perhaps today, Paul and the Church in Corinth, can be gentle mirrors for you also.**

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### **The Church in Corinth as part of his process.**

Corinth was originally a Greek City – that resisted Roman expansion and was leveled and salted in 146 BC.

100 years later it was re-founded by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony of freedman (shipped freed slaves off to Corinth).

It was the third largest city in the Roman empire when Paul visits in CE 51.

It was characterized by new money, it was cosmopolitan, it had religious diversity (similar to Vancouver).

The church reflected the make up of the city:

- Jews: Aquilla, Priscilla, Crispus
- Romans: Fortunatus, Quartus, Gaius, Titius, Justus
- Greeks: Stephanus, Archaicus, Erastus
- Slaves and free
- Largely Gentile

After a time (6 months) Paul, Aquilla and Priscilla leave the church

Then Apollos, having met Aquilla and Priscilla in Ephesus, arrives in Corinth and Apollos ministry goes brilliantly.

And then a group in the church of Corinth take exception to Paul's instruction and challenge his Apostleship.

Paul writes a letter to the church, a letter we do not have, and they respond with a letter back to Paul challenging him on the one hand and respecting tradition on the other.

And then a Chloe's people pay a visit to Paul and tell him the inside scoop of what is going on in the church.

With all this in the background, Paul writes what we have as the Epistle of 1 Corinthians.

We think it is the second letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth.

The first four chapters are about division.

On the one hand Paul is deeply challenged by their rejection of him.

And on the other hand, Paul is aware that when there are deep internal divisions in a group of people, blaming one person (a leader) is the easiest thing to do, but doesn't get at the root of the issue. For even if that leader leaves, the divisions will continue to exist.

**The Apostle Paul is part of their process also, a mirror of their dualistic mind, their infantile spirituality.**

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### **Human spiritual development - Ken Wilber, Thomas Keating and Richard Rohr**

"Human development depends on freeing ourselves from emotional fixation on instinctual levels of living in order to grow to full reflective self consciousness. The gospel calls for the full development of the human person and invites us to the further growth that God has in store for us – that is the intuitive and unitive levels of consciousness to which mature faith and love gradually rise" (Thomas Keating: An invitation to Love)

We have in our brains the potential for 7 evolutionary ways or stages of functioning.

We are capable of moving between them. And we are invited into full maturity as we seek to follow Christ and develop as spiritual people (in the language of Paul).

**(1) Reptilian** (reactive: flight or fight) – focused on survival, undifferentiated from the environment.

**(2) Typhonic:** Dream like state – we recognise that we are different from things around us but aware of our mortality and then afraid. And separate from God. Started our search for God.

**(3) Mythic Membership** (group overidentification): where most of us get stuck: as we became aware of our separateness from the earth and from God, we became aware of the need to provide for the future, needed to plan for life and push death away from our conscious mind.

So began to work and began to amass surplus, gather in circles of people who gave each other a sense of security and a sense of belonging and a sense of protection.

These groups became aware of threats, aware of traitors, afraid of change, and war these off so that they can survive.

When stuck in this way organisation look like authoritarianism – where there are not channels for people to express what they think, or it might look like people who are fixed on one way and unwilling to hear or reason with others to find a third way. Often driven by a need to be seen, to be needed, to be loved, to belong – we remain in this place, unable to separate out and think beyond the group we are in.

And here is precisely where the Church in Corinth was stuck – in a dualistic way of thinking: The binary mind – where we limit reality to two alternatives and then we need to choose one. Group mindedness (in or out, this or that), all in or all out, totally right or totally wrong, with me or against me, Christian or pagan.

Not really any room for a third way – which is the way of wisdom.

Paul was calling them to higher consciousness:

**(4) Mental Egoic** (full reflective self – consciousness) The emergence of reason, consider not only your needs but the needs of others around you.

Notice how Paul says when you are of the flesh – there is jealousy and quarrelling; but when we mature spiritually we begin to think about family, community, neighbourhood, country and world.

Once we are able to move off of a non dualistic way, we move beyond reason and we are on a quest not to be right, but to understand, we are living into the intuitive consciousness..

**(5) Intuitive – Non dualistic way of knowing, A quest to understand and not to be right.**

Here we:

- consent that we are loved just as we are,
- consent that we have something wonderful to offer this world (just by showing up we are enough),
- consent to our non-being, that we will die and that we are not the centre of the universe, and lastly
- consent that we need to be transformed (that all experience can teach us something if we surrender to it and to God's working in us through it – that our old programs of happiness are not useful).

**And as we experience more of the God of our understanding, we experience the unitive (oneness with humanity) and Oneness with God – Unity – stages 6 and 7.**

**(6) Unitive – We experience ourselves as one with all humanity**

**(7) Unity – We experience a oneness with God.**

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**Paul invites the Corinthians into another way:**

A way of wisdom – not to be dualistic

To seek understanding, to listen, to be together inspite of difference, to accept what we have in the present (no matter how un-ideal – as the eternal now – the place of the I AM) where God is at work – planting and building and surprising us.

“For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.”

**Introduction to Marc Keiser.**

Marc Keiser – Grateful for his insight and awareness of the gifts others can be in our lives.

When those around us aware of themselves, live consciously in God's light and offer gifts for the greater good. This is when we see Christ in others.

Marc come and share about your experience.