



PART 2

PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

Chapter Eight

A LEADER MADE OF CLAY

Most of the Twelve whom Christ appointed were crude fishermen. On the night of Christ's betrayal, they all "forsook Him and fled" ([Matthew 26:56](#)).

[Matthew 26:56 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵⁶ "But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets." Then all the disciples left Him and fled."

Peter, their leader and spokesman, had repeatedly embarrassed himself by saying and doing impetuous things. Then on that terrible night, he verbally denied Christ with cursing and oaths ([Matthew 26:69-74](#)).

[Matthew 26:69-74 \(NASB\)](#)

⁶⁹ "Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a servant-girl came to him and said, "You too were with Jesus the Galilean."

⁷⁰ But he denied *it* before them all, saying, "I do not know what you are talking about."

⁷¹ When he had gone out to the gateway, another *servant-girl* saw him and said to those who were there, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."

⁷² And again he denied *it* with an oath, "I do not know the man."

⁷³ A little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Surely you too are *one* of them; for even the way you talk gives you away."

⁷⁴ Then he began to curse and swear, "I do not know the man!" And immediately a rooster crowed."

Peter himself confessed that he was a sinful man ([Luke 5:8](#)).

[Luke 5:8 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ "But when Simon Peter saw *that*, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"



The apostle John and his brother, James, in the spirit of Jonah, wanted to call down fire from heaven to destroy people whom Christ had come to save ([Luke 9:54-56](#)).

[Luke 9:54-56 \(NASB\)](#)

⁵⁴ “When His disciples James and John saw *this*, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”

⁵⁵ But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of;

⁵⁶ for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.”] And they went on to another village.”

James and John (in a blatant display of sinful pride) also conspired with their mother to ask Jesus to grant them thrones in the kingdom on Christ’s right and left hands ([Matthew 20:20-24](#)).

[Matthew 20:20-24 \(NASB\)](#)

²⁰ “Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him.

²¹ And He said to her, “What do you wish?” She said to Him, “Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.”

²² But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to Him, “We are able.”

² He said to them, “My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.”

²⁴ And hearing *this*, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.”

All of these were fragile, imperfect men of clay.

Like every such earthenware vessel, Paul had imperfections too. He graphically described his own struggle with indwelling sin—especially the sin of evil desire ([Romans 7:8-23](#)). He even referred to himself as a “wretched man” ([v. 24](#)).

[Romans 7:8-23 \(NASB\)](#)

⁸ “But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin *is* dead.

⁹ I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive and I died;

¹⁰ and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me;

¹¹ for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.

¹² So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

¹³ Therefore did that which is good become *a cause of* death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.



¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

¹⁶ But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good.

¹⁷ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not.

¹⁹ For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want.

²⁰ But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

²¹ I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

²² For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man,

²³ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.”

Romans 7:24 (NASB)

²⁴ “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?”

But the weaknesses he was being attacked for in Corinth were not any sinful tendencies. They were normal human limitations—physical frailties, supposed shortcomings in his leadership style, alleged defects in the way he communicated, under achievements, and whatnot. Paul had no need to deny such accusations. Rather, he embraced his own weaknesses and showed how those very weaknesses were further credentials of his legitimacy as a leader.

Notice that he saw no need to defend his apostleship by citing his own past achievements, by defending his natural talents, or by otherwise promoting himself in the eyes of the Corinthians. Instead, he explained how the very same qualities that made him a lowly clay pot also equipped him to lead.