



## PART 2

# PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

## Chapter Eight

### A LEADER MADE OF CLAY

#### CLAY POTS ARE HUMBLE

That is how the man plowing a field in the famous parable of [Matthew 13:44](#) might have uncovered hidden treasure.

[Matthew 13:44 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>44</sup>“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid *again*; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

His plow might have broken a clay container and thereby unearthed the treasure. In fact, that is precisely how the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the caves at Qumran. A shepherd boy, working in those hills, threw a rock into a cave and heard a clay jar break. Inside were priceless manuscripts.

But Paul was describing a treasure meant to be put on display, not hidden. His emphasis was on the trivial importance of the container, compared to the priceless value of what it held. He was admitting that his critics might well denigrate his looks, vilify his manner of speech, or point to his other weaknesses. He wouldn't even try to defend himself on those grounds.

What did they expect from a garbage pail? Paul said he was the chief of sinners ([1 Timothy 1:15](#)).

[1 Timothy 1:15 \(NASB\)](#)

<sup>15</sup>“It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, **among whom I am foremost of all.**”



As far as he was concerned, his own merits were worthless. He counted them as dung, excrement, the lowest kind of filth ([Philippians 3:8](#)). If it weren't for the priceless treasure God had entrusted to him, he would have no value at all.

**Philippians 3:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup>“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.”

That is true humility, and it is one of the keys to Paul's effectiveness as a leader. Since the day of his conversion on the road to Damascus, he had never thought of himself as anyone special. Quite the contrary.

As we saw in the previous chapter, he regarded himself as

- 1) “least of the apostles” ([1 Corinthians 15:9](#));

**1 Corinthians 15:9 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup>“For **I am the least of the apostles**, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

- 2) “less than the least of all the saints” ([Ephesians 3:8](#));

**Ephesians 3:8 (NASB)**

<sup>8</sup>“**To me, the very least of all saints**, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ.”

- 3) “formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man” ([1 Timothy 1:13](#));

**1 Timothy 1:13 (NASB)**

<sup>13</sup>“Even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief.”

- 4) a “wretched man” ([Romans 7:24](#)).

**Romans 7:24 (NASB)**

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

But God delights in choosing menial, plain, foolish, common, despised, ignoble people, whom society might say are good for nothing. The Corinthians themselves knew this full well. Some of them had been fornicators, idolaters, thieves, drunkards, and worse ([1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#)).

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11 (NASB)**

<sup>9</sup>“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals,

<sup>10</sup>nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers,



**will inherit the kingdom of God.**

**<sup>11</sup> Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”**

Paul could easily point to them as proof that God calls base and lowly people. In fact, Paul already had done so:

**1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (NASB)**

**<sup>26</sup> “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;**

**<sup>27</sup> 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,**

**<sup>28</sup> and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are,**

**<sup>29</sup> so that no man may boast before God.”**

By using common, ordinary clay pots, God puts His glory on display in bold relief. The Corinthians of all people knew that was true.

I occasionally hear Christians say, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if that famous person over there, or this stunning beauty over here, or some great genius in the academic world became a Christian? Wouldn’t they be amazing spokespeople for Christ? What an impact they could have!” God does occasionally use such people, but as Paul says, “not many.” He generally ignores that strategy and employs plain clay pots—in order that it may be clear to all that the power is of God and not from us. Even the notable and talented of this world must learn to become clay pots in order to be used by God to maximum effectiveness.