

February 24

Admirals and Under-rowers - Working Together!

Most people know that Jesus washed feet. The hallmark of His incarnation and ministry was that God in the flesh takes on the form of a humble servant (*Philippians 2*). The point of that famous passage is that Jesus took that humility all the way to the Cross. He served all of mankind by carrying **all of the sins of every human who ever existed, exists, or will exist**. How did He do that? He did it by taking the lowest position in creation: the position of the world's worst sinner (*II Corinthians 5:21*).

Our Lord's willingness to take the lowest position, along with the blame for the wrongs of all others, is the ultimate example of being a "scapegoat."

Christ's willingness to be a scapegoat is connected to the word that St. Paul uses to describe himself and others in positions of leadership in *I Corinthians 4:1*. In this verse St. Paul writes, ***"Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."***

The word St. Paul used for "servant" in this passage is literally "under rower." Roman naval vessels had three tiers of rowers. The lowest rowers worked alone and held a single oar. Above them were longer oars, which were pulled by two men. And above them were even longer oars pulled by three men... 72 men on each side of the boat.

Paul is implying that he himself is the lowest in the ship. Imagine St. Paul – who we might describe as an admiral in the kingdom of God in the first century – taking the lowest spot. Of course, that's Christ-like. And it should be every-Christian-like. In fact, after Jesus washed His disciples' feet, He told them they should do the same for each other. They should be like their Master.

St. Paul actually is describing a position of authority in *I Corinthians 4:1*. The "us" is a reference to apostles and other leaders in the Church. He wanted people, especially in the Corinthian congregation often caught up in power struggles, to realize that leaders should be serving *only* their Master Christ when they are in positions of leadership. The goal, of course, is that the Church be unified.

Imagine an under-rower in a Roman vessel, deciding that he was not going to serve others by rowing in sync. He would mess up an entire side of rowers on a ship if he didn't row in sync. Interestingly, many Roman ships had 144 rowers: 12x12. Sound familiar? The famous 144,000 Saints of Revelation were not a special class; they simply represent the full number of the true people of God.

Think about that one defiant under-rower. *"I'm not gonna row!"* So, all the other oars come smashing into his sequentially, and pretty soon one side of the boat is not rowing, but the other side is. The boat goes in circles!

We follow our Master. We do this together so that the boat can move forward to where our Master wants!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, help us to act humbly, even when we cannot think humbly. Help us to be perpetually repentant, letting Your Word bring us down to the bowels of brokenness. From that position, help us hear Your voice of grace: "Come to Me all ye who are weary and heavy-laden." May we joyfully pull the oar of humility and service in faith to You – the humblest of all! Amen.*