

1 Corinthians 4:6-21

“Pride Is A Problem”

The proverbs tells us, “*A man's pride will bring him low, But the humble in spirit will retain honor.*” Prov 29:23 We read, “*By pride comes nothing but strife, But with the well-advised is wisdom.*” Prov 13:10 Prov 16 states, “*Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.*” Prov 16:5 and Again Prov 21, “*A haughty look, a proud heart, And the plowing of the wicked are sin.*” Prov 21:4 Of course we read in James, “*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*” James 4:6 Pride...is a problem, and it's a problem that will devastate and destroy you spiritually if not dealt *with* and repented *of*.

Well as we're well aware of by now, Paul has been dealing with division in the body of Christ in the city of Corinth thus far in this 1st epistle to the Corinthians. and When you wipe away the debris, clear away the rubble and get to the core of it all, at its root...is pride. People wanting to be identified with this guy because he's a powerful preacher, or associated with the other guy because he's an outstanding orator, or they decided to link themselves to that individual because he's an incredible exhorter. and It's not that being able to receive more from one as opposed to the other is a bad thing, it's when I think I'm more spiritual, a little more mature, or somehow a little better than anyone and everyone else because of whom I'm under or where I go to church.

and Paul has been seeking to show the absurdities of that mentality. Because 1st of all the people that you're pitting against one another (he says) are on the same team, you're dividing over people who share the same objective, are looking to accomplish the same goal and are working together to achieve the end result that's been committed to their trust. and 2^{ndly} to narrow it down and settle in on only 1 person whom you're willing to receive from is only to your own loss. Sure God calls us to respective fellowships, and as such we're to come under the leadership of the fellowship of which we call home (and be accountable accordingly). But God wants to teach you, to instruct me, to transform us more and more into the image of Christ via what He can say and show to us through all kinds of people, through various situations and circumstances. He's given us *all* things in Christ, be it Paul, Peter, Apollos, things present, things to come, life, death, all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. So don't limit your learning to one person. Anyone whom God has placed His Spirit upon in order to bless and benefit His body has something of value to say to me. Anyone whom God has placed His Spirit in *period* and called His child has something to offer me from which I can learn, perhaps I'll learn what *not* to do, but I'll learn nonetheless. and So to isolate myself to one person at the expense of everything and everyone else is only to the detriment of my own spiritual growth and development. and To think that no one else has anything of value to offer me is only to act in arrogant pride.

Outside of that it's simply wrong to exalt preachers of the gospel and teachers of the Word of God to a celebrity like status. They're to be worthy of *imitation* (as we'll see today) but not *exaltation*. The bottom line is that we're *servants* (1st and foremost) of Christ, and *stewards* or managers of the mysteries of God. and An appropriate perspective will help us to walk in the proper balance of the will, the work and ways of God. (Notice Vs 6)

Vs6

and Of course the words “puffed up” speaking of acting in arrogant pride on behalf of one against the other. and So the obvious exhortation is that we’re not to be displaying this type of attitude *towards* one another as the body of Christ, acting in arrogant pride (as if there’s any other kind) *against* one another. We’re to be of one heart and one mind (that is the mind of Christ) as a body before the Lord.

“Well what is the mind of Christ?” The Holy Spirit through Paul the apostle summarizes that in the book of Philippians when he says, “*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind (or mindset) be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*” Phil 2:3-5 **That mindset of humility that places priority on the needs of others as opposed to self. and What you discover is that when you place priority on others, that’s cohesive. When you place priority on self, it’s contentious. We’re to be acting with a cohesive nature, not with a contentious nature, in such a way as to make peace, not break peace, to unify the body, not divide the body in arrogant pride.**

and He says that he’s figuratively transferred these things to himself and Apollos for their sakes. and As for exactly what he means by that there seems to be a bit of a debate. Some say that he’s used himself and Apollos as an example when in reality it was local preachers and teachers they were debating and dividing over. But he was showing the absurdity of the situation by transfiguring that mentality upon himself and Apollos. **Others say that with this idea of servants and stewards he wasn’t speaking literally in the sense of they weren’t literal servants or stewards of a business, but figuratively speaking this is who we are in Christ.** Still others say that he’s saying he’s applied these principles to himself and Apollos (with the idea of servants and stewards) but here he broadens the application to include us all. So that we understand that none of us are to be exalted but that we’re *all* servants and stewards and in that *none* of us are to be puffed up on the behalf of one against the other because we’re *all* simply servants and stewards.

But the fact of the matter is that that particular debate doesn’t really matter, because that’s the *peripheral* point of this Vs. The *primary* point is that he would have us to learn in them not to think beyond what is written thereby not being puffed up, or acting in arrogant pride on behalf of one against the other.

Now we’ve focused on this phrase regarding being puffed up; I want to take a moment here and consider this phrase that precedes that one, “...that you may learn in us not think beyond what is written.” and I want to break that down still farther into 2 main “chunks” (if you will), 1st of all, “...that you may learn.” and I want to bring to your attention the idea of personal responsibility when it comes to learning the Word of God. Yes, God has given teachers of His Word to us; to help us get a grip, learn to grasp the principles and precepts of His Word that they might become practical in our lives. But He *hasn’t* given us teachers that we might be spared the time it takes to search His Word for ourselves, and save us the trouble of personal study. The proper response would be that having heard God’s Word taught we’d be spurred on to a more intensive searching of the scriptures. Remember what the bible says about those believers in Berea, as Paul would preach to them and teach them the Word of God.

The book of Acts tells us, "...they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." Acts 17:11 They didn't take the position, "Hey, he's the preacher so if he says so that must be the way it is; now I don't have to figure it out for myself." They received what Paul said, and then searched it out for themselves. Remember what Paul told Timothy? He said, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Tim 2:15 So the biblical exhortation to learn is by no means limited to a body collectively but it extends more pointedly to you and me personally. I have a personal responsibility to learn and be led by the Word of God rightly divided.

This 2nd phrase is equally important; in seeking out, studying, and learning the written Word of God I'm accountable and responsible, "...not to think beyond what is written." We're not to go beyond what is written in our *evaluation* of preachers and teachers of God's Word, or in our *application* of the principles of God's Word.

The bible is very clear what the standards are that are to be applied to leadership in the body of Christ. Yet often times a pastor may be evaluated on the basis of entertainment value, perhaps his appearance, or his marketing skills. But those types of things go beyond what is written; they're unbiblical standards. and On a more personal level we need to be careful not to go beyond what is written with the things we consent to and approve of as acceptable to take part in or be apart of. You know there was a time in our society that we considered something biblical as long as it came from the bible. But somewhere down through the years this mentality came in that said something must be biblical as long as I can't find a Vs that specifically condemns it. In other words, "If the bible doesn't speak out specifically *against* it, than it must be *for* it, or it's ok for us to take part *in* it." But to go there in your thought process is to think beyond what is written. and So to put it plainly the exhortation of this particular Vs is to learn the Word of God and then allow God's Word to establish the parameters of acceptability in our lives, and we're be careful to safeguard those parameters so as not to go beyond that which is written.

Vs7

Now remember that the problem Paul is addressing here is the problem of pride, and so he asks 3 questions here that if answered honestly could only serve to burst that bubble. He says, "For who makes you differ from another." Now in one respect we're all the same in Christ. We're co-laborers, co-equals, no greater or lesser, the bible says, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Gal 3:28 and So why would I act like I'm all that if in reality in Christ there's no difference that's recognized. No difference in social status, richer, poorer, particular gender, ethnic background, none of that matters; we're all one in Christ. Yet in another respect we realize that there are certain things that *in* Christ distinguish us from one another. Some have been given administrative gifts, others teaching gifts, some the gift of helps, or giving, in some God instills amazing natural abilities. But to answer the question, be it in natural talent, or supernatural gifts of the Spirit, who is it that gives those gifts, or instills those abilities? It's God, God ordains who is to function in what capacity of the body. My hand had no choice in the matter, God ordained that this member of my body would be a hand and that's just the way it is, this member was to be an ear, and this member was to be an eye.

There was no vote taken in the womb as to which member would be what, these things are God ordained. So to with the body of Christ, God ordains who the mouth is, who the eyes are, who the hands are that get work done, who the feet are that keep the forward momentum. It's not *because* of me that God ordains what member I am, it's despite of me, and so if God ordains the capacity in which each of us are to function in, how can I boast in that? The reasons for God doing what He does aren't found in me, they're found in Him.

Question #2, "What do you have that you did not receive?" and Really the entire doctrine of grace can be established in this single question. Because what is it that we have but that we haven't received it? Salvation, sanctification, the gifts of the Spirit, or even abilities that we were born with that just come naturally, you're either an artist or your not, oh sure it can be refined, but you can either paint or you can't. You can either sing or you can't, again it can be worked with and dialed in, but by and large some people can carry a tune, others can't. But the point is that any and every good thing that comes into your life, or my life be it spiritually or practically is a gift of God's grace. Remember James said, "*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights,*" James 1:16-17 "Well I went to school for 12 yrs to get where I am," that's neat who gave you the mental capacity to absorb those kinds of intensive studies?

You see, God is the giver of all things good. J.B. put it real plainly when he said, "*A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.*" John 3:27 We don't have anything but that we haven't received it as a result of God's grace.

Which leads to question # 3, "Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as though you did not receive it?" You see God doesn't bless us because *we're* so good, but because *He's* so good, what then gives me the audacity to act as though I'm distinguished above someone else? We're all just sinners who've been recipients of the love, grace, and mercy of God. Accordingly we should be walking in a disposition of humility, because God has been so gracious to someone so undeserving as I am. You see a proper perspective will always work humility into me, and you can always know that something is amiss when I begin to act arrogantly in pride, there's something that I'm not seeing just right.

You see the Corinthians had this attitude that said that they were all that and a bag a chips. and Paul in essence is saying, "I wish I could be important like you, but I'm just a lowly apostle." and He uses a bit of "sanctified sarcasm," here to get his point across.

Vs8

You see the Corinthian mentality would state, "Hey, God blesses the truly spiritual, health, wealth and prosperity baby, we've got it all, we're in positions of importance, we're the King's kids." and Paul is in essence saying, "Wow I wish I could be spiritual like you, but we lowly apostles don't have it so good." It's like, "We apostles must've missed the memo of what true spirituality looked like, because we're poor, lowly, dishonored and despised in this world. But you guys seem to have it all." and He reflects for a moment on the fact that it would be cool if they really were reigning because then they'd be reigning as well (which is a reference to the millennial kingdom which we don't have time to talk about today) but he says.

Vs9-10

Vs 9 is a statement that doesn't mean much to you and mean when we sort of read through it but to them it painted a powerful picture. Because during the days of the Roman empire when a Roman General would come back victoriously from a great battle there would be a great parade and procession with thousands of people lining the streets shouting their praises and all the rest. **and The general would lead the procession in all his pomp, then the spoils of war would follow after him, and then lastly in the procession would be the captives all chained together that were being brought back to be condemned to death in the coliseum whereby they'd be thrown to the lions to fight for their lives.** and That's the picture he's painting for them when he says, "We apostles have been displayed last, as men condemned to death." and This word "Spectacle" is actually the word from which we get our word, "theatre" they'd be publicly placed on display, and in this case it would be for the purpose of humiliation and condemnation. and He says here that that's the way this world views them as apostles.

He says, "We're fools for Christ's sake." The world considered them foolish, Paul gave up position, power, and prestige; wealth and influence when he came to Christ, lost everything. How foolish in the eyes of the world. Yet the bible says, "*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*" Matt 16:26 It was Jim Elliot who said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." and with contrast after contrast he's trying to shake them out of their "blinded by pride" type position. **It's like he's saying, "Listen, we're the apostles of God, yet this is the way the world perceives us, now how are you perceived by the world? Do you find any discrepancies there? One of these things is not like the other, think this through."**

Jesus said, "*Woe to you when all men speak well of you*" Luke 6:26 If the world thinks you're the greatest thing since sliced bread and they don't have a problem with any of your convictions then there's a problem. Notice

Vs11

So much for the prosperity doctrine. It wasn't uncommon at all for the apostles to be hungry, or thirsty, poorly clothed and have no place to call home. Jesus said, "*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*" Matt 8:20 But Paul is placing the focus on humiliation, as opposed to exaltation and pride. **The Corinthians were concerned with the image of success and power in the world's eyes, and many of them despised Paul and the other apostles because they didn't display that image. But I find that the church today is in many ways saturated with this same mentality, longing to be seen as a source of success and power in the world's eyes.** and There seems to be no shortage of ministers who want to display those qualities and no shortage of people who will value that image in them, and it makes for a source of pride, it goes beyond that which is written.

Vs12-13

Notice he says, "We labor, working with our hands." Now to the Greek this was about as low as you could go, manual labor was something reserved for slaves, not anyone distinguished, and so the idea of an apostle working was all but offensive to them, especially when he purports himself as an acceptable standard. That it's an honorable and commendable attribute.

Now there's something else I want you to see here real quick, there's a cost to count when it comes to ministry. It's not always going to be smooth sailing, so often there can be a sense of envy or jealousy in ministry over various position, primarily the public ones or the ones that hold authority. But I've been around just long enough to discover that when it comes to the way God uses people's lives, they don't get where they are with out paying a price, and generally the toll is pretty steep. I mean we can begin to think, "Man, what lucky dogs, these guys were apostles of God, what I wouldn't give to be used like that." Are you sure? Look at the job description here, they lived their lives in hunger, in thirst, torn and tattered clothing, they were frequently beaten and homeless, they labored, they were reviled, persecuted, defamed, and seen generally as the scum of the earth. **Do we have any volunteers? I have found that generally speaking to the degree that God exalts a man He will humble him equally. You start thinking, "Man I wish my ministry was like that guys," or "I wish God would use me like that," and then you get a bit of their testimony and you think, "Maybe I don't want to be used quite like that after all." To be used in the deep things of God, one has to go through deep things, there are no exceptions, the breaking, the humbling.** The proverbs tell us, "*The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom, And before honor is humility.*" Prov 15:33 It's just the way it is. and What's the response to the beatings, to the reviling, persecutions, the defaming and all of that?

Notice Vs 12-13, "We labor, we bless, we endure, we entreat." They maintained the eternal perspective striving for the souls of men. When people persecute you, it's nothing personal, if you were of the world they'd love you as their own, but because you're not of the world Jesus having called you out of the world they hate you. It's not you they have a problem with it's the Lord in you. and Jesus said, "*Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*" Matt 5:11-12 and On down in Matt Ch 5 He said as for those people who persecute you, who are enemies to you and look to impose damage upon you; bless them, do good to them, pray for them, shed grace upon them and so shall you be sons of your Father who is in Heaven. **and Here we see Paul saying, "This is who we are, but my fear is that it's not who you are."**

and It's not that he's saying there's an issue if you're not being beaten or persecuted, or reviled for Christ, he's not trying to shame them, but he is seeking to warn them regarding the danger and the problem of pride. **God may've chosen a different path for you, perhaps you're not being reviled, or persecuted, beaten or battered, but that doesn't make you better than those who are, be careful. Being materially wealthy doesn't make one spiritually healthy, it usually creates further difficulty. But it's those core qualities that Paul is concerned with, humility equals usability, but pride will get you set aside.**

Vs14-16

What a powerful personal appeal, and he's not saying that he's the reason that they're saved. He's careful to say that they've been begotten through the gospel, it's the gospel that brings forth life from the dead, being brought from being dead in sin to alive in Christ. But he was instrumental in bringing the gospel to them, which gives him a relationship with them that no one else can really have.

When you lead someone to Christ, you have a place in their lives that no one else can have, you're like a spiritual parent to them. and It's not that you can lord over them, it's not an authority trip, but it can allow for that opportunity of discipleship that goes beyond the platform of the way that just anyone might be allowed to speak into their lives. There's a relational closeness there. Paul says, "You might have all kinds of instructors, tutors, people who teach you principles and practicalities, but you only have one person who's led you to Christ, and that was me." (and Look at Vs 16, read)

You see Paul's not asking for their exaltation, but their imitation. and This isn't the only place that he issued this exhortation, it was common for Paul to call people to imitate what they saw modeled in him. They didn't have bible's o plenty, they would learn godliness through the life of a godly man. The question that confronts you and me is can we say this same thing? Especially if you've know the Lord for any amount of time at all. What an awesome thing to pray for and strive towards. What if everyone prayed just like you do, they imitated your prayer life, would they have a healthy prayer life? What if everyone studied their bible just like you, would we be workmen that need not be ashamed, studying to show ourselves approved unto God? Or would we be spiritually weak and anemic, always struggling with getting a grip on godliness because we don't spend any time in the Word of God. What if everyone acted like you do, or what if they served to the degree you do, would anything be getting done in the fellowship or out in the community. What if everyone gave just like you, could we make our payment here, have an incredible V.B.S. for the kids, would we ever get the playground or give to missions? If you set the standard for imitation... Paul said, "Do what I do, and God will take care of you and be well pleased with you."

Vs17

We spoke of faithfulness last week Timothy was faithful, and Paul was sending him to remind them of Paul's ways in Christ. How often we need to be reminded of what God desires and requires of us as His children, how we're to lead our lives that others might see Him *in* us and be drawn to Him *through* us.

Vs18-21

There were those saying, "Paul is all bark and no bite, he writes strong letters but he's weak in person, he won't even show." Paul says, "Don't you worry I'll be there Lord willing. and I'm going to know those of you who think you're something, because the kingdom of God isn't empty words but the power of God at work through the word of God saving souls and changing lives. So godly affection, or godly correction, the choice is yours." God loves us so much and one way or another He'll deal *with* us, God give us that heart of repentance, that we might experience the affection and be spared that painful, yet often time's necessary correction.

Prayer Points:

God give us humble, willing to yield and repentant hearts. Lord extract any pride or haughtiness from our hearts that we might be more like Jesus, that we might decrease so that He might increase in our lives. That we not act in arrogant pride on behalf of one against another, but that we be of one heart and one mind, walking together in unity that You might receive honor and glory. and God we want you to use our lives, so we just submit ourselves to Your path for our lives, help us to count the cost, we want our lives to count for Your Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is not in word but in power, the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to transform your life, from dead in sin to alive in Christ. But it's up to you, today God is willing to cast your sin as far as the east is from the west, it's His desire, His will that none should perish but that all should come to repentance. [All repentance means is a change of direction, you're currently walking in a way that's contrary to God, just turn around and come to Christ, whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Don't allow pride to be a problem, humble yourself before the Lord and He'll lift you up, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.](#)