

TITLE: RESOLVING THE “CORINTHIAN PRIDE” PROBLEM

TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 4

INTRO: 1 Corinthians is a letter of problems & solutions. Paul addresses several issues this church had & gives commandments from God in order to solve the problems and get the church back on the right track. **Ch. 4** provides the solutions for their problem of divisiveness over leader affiliation – proper judgment, proper humility, and proper discipline!

I. THE NEED FOR PROPER JUDGMENT (v. 1-6):

- A. (v. 1-2) Continued from **3:21-23** – We’re servants for you, not vice versa! *Let a man so account (regard) of us.* And we have the responsibility to be faithful in this duty, *as good stewards* (taking care of what God has entrusted to us) *of the mysteries of God – His wisdom, P.O.S.– 2:7,10).*
1. These inspired men were to be good, faithful stewards. **1 Pet 4:10**–“*As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*” These men were required to be faithful in what they had been given!
 2. You and I have been given more! At the time Paul wrote, he knew in part (**13:9-12**). The Spirit was revealing God’s wisdom bit by bit. Eventually it was completed (**2 Pet 1:3**), and this is what we have today! *If they were to be good and faithful stewards, how much more so must we be?!*
- B. (v. 3-5) The judgment of faithfulness:
1. (v. 3) *It’s a very small thing* (insignificant & useless) *that I should be judged by you, or by man’s judgment* (by human wisdom, which alone will never understand God–**1:21**). *Your judgment by human wisdom means nothing to me; I judge not mine own self.* I don’t even judge me!
 2. (v.4) *For I know* (am aware of) *nothing of/against myself* – I believe I’m okay (Paul’s good conscience – **Acts 23:1; 24:16**), *but this doesn’t justify me.* Conscience doesn’t determine right & wrong; it convicts us of what we’ve already learned to be right. Paul himself had been wrong, but thought he was right (**Acts 26:9**). Now he says “I think I’m right – I know nothing against myself – but **the Lord** is the judge.” (Remember this context for v. 5)
*As a preacher today, I need to listen to constructive criticism, but if I’m teaching truth, I am not judged by any human (only by God’s Word). Many times, even in the church sometimes, I’m told that I should only teach positive things. But I’m supposed to “preach the word” (**2 Tim 4:2**). And it’s this Word that will judge me (**John 12:48**), not man’s opinions!
 3. (v. 5) So, *judge nothing before the time...the Lord...will bring to light...the counsels* (will, purposes) *of the hearts.*
 - a. This isn’t saying “don’t judge!” In ch. 5 he tells them to judge the immoral brother (Also **Jn 7:24**–*judge righteous judgment; Mt 7:1-5*). Context: judging God’s inspired messengers by *man’s* wisdom! **1**) These men are receiving God’s word directly; you don’t know it until they reveal it. So don’t judge! **2**) This doesn’t mean these men are perfect. They may still have bad motives in their hearts. God will judge this!
 - b. *Judge nothing before the time.* This verse indicates that there are some things we cannot judge – we don’t always know the thoughts or intents of a person’s heart. But God does. And so does His word (**Heb 4:12**). So we present the Word, and let it convict people of what’s in their hearts. Our judgment is *always* to be by *God’s* wisdom (that which, for us, comes 100% by the Bible, but for the Corinthians came by the OT and by the spoken & written words of inspired men).
- C. (v. 6) *These things... application* of the truth that *God’s* judgment, not man’s, is what matters. Don’t judge Paul & Apollos by *man’s* wisdom/judgment. Applying this to us will help you not to *think above that which is written* (“of men” isn’t there, but has been added because of the context). *Written* – OT, as well as what Paul and other inspired men were writing.
1. Don’t go beyond the Scriptures! This had a broader meaning to the Corinthians (written *and* spoken word), but for us it is more definite, since the Scriptures are now complete. We have everything we need, so do not go beyond it!
 2. If I go beyond the Scriptures, then I’m obviously teaching either my own doctrine, or someone else’s (since it’s not Scripture). This is usually (if not always) a result of pride (*puffed up for one against another*).

II. THE NEED FOR HUMILITY (v. 7-13):

- A. The Corinthians’ lack of humility (v. 7-10)
1. (v. 7) *Who makes you to differ* (judge, make distinction)? *What do you have that you didn’t receive? Why do you glory/boast as though you didn’t receive it?* So not only were they claiming affiliation to various leaders (**1:12**), but they also claimed they knew everything by their own human wisdom. (In **ch. 12**, this attitude regarding spiritual gifts will be addressed.) No one knows anything except what God has given, and nobody has any ability but that which God has given (their spiritual gifts; preaching, teaching, song leading, etc.)!
 2. (v. 8) Paul now rebukes them sharply (w/sarcasm)! *Ye are full...rich...reign as kings without us!* You know it all and have it all, without any help from us **inspired** men! Test yourself: Are you full, rich, reigning? Do you think you’ve “arrived” spiritually, that there’s nothing else you could learn about the God, the Bible, or a particular Bible topic?
 3. (v. 9) If we look at it the way you Corinthians do, then it seems that God has obviously **1**) made us apostles last, **2**) doomed us to death, and **3**) made us spectacles (theater; place of public show)! *We’re fools for Christ’s sake* (this is true – **3:18**, but meant sarcastically), *but you’re wise...!* This is all according to *their* estimation.
- B. The apostles’ example of humility (v. 11-13)
1. (v. 11) *Even unto this present hour* (i.e., in the past, and even now – always!), *we hunger, thirst, are naked* (not having our basic needs provided), *beaten* (as promised–**Mt 10:17**–they’ll deliver you up to councils, scourge you in their synagogues; **Jn 15:18-21**– they hated me; they’ll hate you). *We have no home* (where was Paul’s residence?).
 2. (v. 12-13) *We labor with our own hands* (though worthy of pay – **9:14**). *We’re reviled, but we bless...* We’re following in the steps of Jesus (**1 Pet 2:21-23**–*Christ suffered, leaving us an example...when he was reviled, reviled not again.*”).

3. Obviously what he said about them is sarcasm, but not v. 11-13; **all** of this was real! Paul committed every breath to teaching and saving souls, even being beaten for it! He isn't now telling them this for glory, but because they needed to know these things. They needed to learn from (and grow from) His example. **1)** This isn't boasting! **2)** This isn't anger or retaliation toward them (as he's about to explain in v. 14). It's intended for them to see their need for humility!

III. THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE (v. 14-21):

A. (v. 14-17) Love motivation

1. (v. 14-15) *I say this to you, my children, not to shame you (though they should feel ashamed), but to warn you* (put in mind; admonish, reprove). *For though (if) you have 10,000 tutors in Christ, yet not many fathers.* Remember me – I'm the one who "begot you in Christ through the **gospel**" (acknowledgement of the source). Apollos and others watered, but I planted. I don't want glory for this; I just want you to trust me in what I'm about to say (v. 16).
2. (v. 16) Purpose of this – to encourage them to imitate (mimic) him. This is obviously not Paul saying to follow me as *your* leader (the very problem he's writing about in ch. 1-4)! *Mimic* me – same word as in **11:1**–*Imitate me as I Christ*. Christ was the ultimate example of humility, and Paul imitated this example. Follow my example, but only if I'm following Christ's example. Christ didn't come to compete with others for glory and to get a following. He came to seek and save the lost (**Lk 19:10**). And so did I!
3. (v. 17) *For this cause* (for help & an example to follow), *I sent Timothy*. He's been with you (**Acts 18:5**). He's faithful, my beloved son (**1 Tim 1:2**). *He'll bring you into remembrance of my ways which are in Christ*.
 - a. Imitate those who imitate Christ. Imitate those who imitate those who imitate Christ! As long as Christ's ways are being imitated, then there will be no problems with lack of humility, and choosing one leader over another!
 - b. Remembrance – ***Deut 6:6-9** – God told the Israelites to remember His laws! We take the Lord's Supper weekly to remember Christ's sacrifice for us. We need to read the Bible daily to remember it. We need to read it again to remember what we read before (study it again...). Continue to quote your memory work, so you don't forget it!
 - c. *As I teach every where in every church* – is there anything today that is taught everywhere in every church?! If you're going to preach in every church today, you'll have to change what you preach! Paul wouldn't (& didn't) do that! What makes one church different from another? **Man's doctrines!**

B. (v. 18-21) Fear motivation

1. (v. 18) *Some are puffed up* (proud, haughty, arrogant) *as though I weren't coming*. Apparently some of them were talking big while the "teacher" was out of the room! They were too arrogant to accept rebuke. They may have been thinking that Paul wasn't man enough to come back! By the time of **2 Cor 10**, they were claiming he wrote big, but was small in person! It's hard to imagine any **Christian** giving another brother (especially a teacher and apostle like Paul) such grief!
2. (v. 19) *But I will come shortly, if the Lord will* (**Jam 4:14** – acknowledgement that we are not in ultimate control). Regardless of what these brethren **say**, I *am* coming. And when I do, *I'll know, not their speech, but their power*. Talk is cheap! Actions speak louder than words! Paul isn't talking about starting a fight, but disciplining them. As an apostle, he had authority to discipline erring brethren (cf. **5:3**).
3. (v. 20) He had been given power from God, *for the kingdom of God* (church) *is not in word, but in power*. It's not all talk! God gave his messengers powers/abilities to prove whose messengers they were. It wasn't (and isn't) a religion based on feelings, doubts, and guesses, but on power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit (**2:4**). And Paul was about to do some demonstrating!
4. (v. 21) *What will (want) ye?* What would you prefer? Should I come boldly, with the rod, or in meekness? Seems like an obvious choice, but he's letting them decide. Their reaction to this letter will determine Paul's demeanor when he comes.
5. Sometimes we all need fear motivation. This is why passages like this are here. This is why Jesus warned of Hell and its severity (**Mk 9:43-48**). And this is why preachers today must be willing to preach about Heaven *and* Hell – because both are real. And we all need to know about both of them, so we'll make the right choices.

CONCLUSION: Paul concludes this first part of his letter by letting them know he's coming, and giving them the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and make the right decisions. We too must learn from their mistakes. Whether it's following another human (preacher, etc.) or our own human wisdom, this is what divides Christ's church and causes many to follow false doctrines and practices. And even though these people, by their own actions, remove themselves from Christ's body, the effects are still felt in the world, and the church's influence on the world is diminished. Let's make sure we are **always** going to the Bible to make sure the things being taught are correct.