

1 Corinthians 4:6-21 The Example of True Wisdom

One of the main problems in the Corinthian church was arrogance or pride. In this passage Paul wraps up the section on divisions within the church that he began in 1:10. To drive the point home he uses biting irony to contrast their supposed “lofty position” with the position of the apostles which was “lowly”.

Verse 6

I have figuratively applied – Paul had used the illustration of farmers, builders, servants, and stewards to describe himself and Apollos. This was to show them the proper relationship between God’s ministers.

Not to exceed what is written – They should learn to live faithfully by the Scriptures.

Arrogant – This word (Greek- *phusioo*) literally means to inflate, blow up, make proud. Of the seven uses of this word in the New Testament, six are found in 1 Corinthians (4:6, 18, 19, 5:2, 8:1, 13:4, Colossians 2:18).

Verse 7

What do you have that you did not receive – God had given them everything they had. They should be grateful, not boastful.

Verse 8

You are already filled...rich...kings without us – They were acting as if they had already received their commendation at the judgment seat of Christ.

I would indeed that you had – The irony is that Paul would like to enjoy the coming rewards but he understood that suffering must precede glory.

Notice the irony – They perceived the way they were as how Paul should be. The truth was that they all ought to be like Paul.

Verse 9

Men condemned to death – Paul may have been thinking of the Roman games where condemned men fought wild beasts in the amphitheaters. “To the Corinthians the Christian life

meant flaunting their pride and their privileges and reckoning up their achievement; to Paul it meant a humble service, ready to die for Christ.” (William Barclay, *The Letters to The Corinthians*)

Verses 10-13

The contrasts of these verses clarify the differences in their conditions. To the natural man the Corinthians looked wise and the apostles looked weak. The viewpoint of the Corinthians was almost identical to that of natural, unsaved people.

The reality is that dishonor often befalls those who bear the message of the cross. The amazing thing was that Paul followed the example of Jesus and blessed those who persecuted him (Luke 6:27-28)

Verses 14-21 – Paul’s final appeal and exhortation

Verses 14-16

Having reminded them of his apostolic authority Paul now appeals to the Corinthians as a father to his children. The purpose of his strong words was to admonish them to maturity. Even though they had many “tutors” in Christ only Paul was their spiritual father.

Be imitators of me – They were to learn from Paul as a son learns by observing his father.

Verse 17

I have sent to you Timothy – Timothy would serve as Paul’s personal representative to teach them. Timothy would remind them of what Paul taught and modeled in all the churches.

Verses 18-21

Apparently those who had become “puffed up” did not believe that they would have to face Paul again. Paul did plan to come again and he reminded them that real power is the power of the Holy Spirit working through humble messengers.

Their response to this epistle would determine whether Paul returned to them as a stern disciplinarian or a delighted father.