

**04/13/25 The Problem with Pride
1 Corinthians 4:6-13**

Welcome...

We are studying the book of First Corinthians. Beginning from chapter 1 verse 10 through chapter 4, Paul has been addressing division in the church. The Corinthians were in turmoil because they misunderstood the nature of the Christian message (the gospel of Christ and Him crucified as the wisdom of God), they misunderstood the role of the Christian minister (the shepherd is a servant and steward), and the misunderstood the attitude of the Christian minister (humility).

The Corinthians had a pride problem. They were taking pride in particular spiritual leaders and the Corinthians were arrogant in terms of who they thought they were and what they had achieved. Paul knew how deadly pride can be in the body of Christ, the local church. So Paul confronts them head-on with strong sarcasm and irony.

Let's read about it now in 1 Corinthians 4:6-13...

Earlier this year I went to physical therapy for a hip pain I was having. After weeks and months of treatment, I was still having stiffness and pain. Then a friend said, "Have you tried an inversion table?" That never crossed my mind.

The next day I found one for sale on Craigslist and I started to use it and was surprised how much it helped my hip. Each day for a few minutes the world is upside down to me or should I say I am upside down in this world. And when I am upside down all the blood rushes to my head and it feels like my head is swelling.

In our text, the Corinthians heads are swelling, even though they are standing right side up! Paul says they are puffed up with pride. They had become arrogant because they believed they had arrived spiritually when, in actuality, they were babes in Christ who needed much spiritual growth.

Main Point: In 4:6-13 we see four ways the Corinthian's pride is contrasted with the apostles' humility so that believers will be grateful for God's grace and be unified in Christ.

Pride causes division v. 6

Pride leads to ungratefulness v. 7

Pride gives a false view of ourselves v. 8-9

Humility requires sacrificial commitments in 9-13 (Pride makes us superficial in our commitment)

With our text this morning we need to take a hard look at our own lives. As we talk about pride the tendency will be for you to think of all the people you wish were hearing this sermon. I am asking you to confront that tendency! Look at YOUR life. The Bible tells us that "pride comes before the fall." Let's work hard to try to prevent ourselves from falling.

My prayer is that we each will humbly evaluate our hearts and be willing to make the sacrifices for the sake knowing Christ and making Him known.

I. Pride Causes Division

Verse 6...

Paul again addresses the Corinthian church with tact and gentleness, calling them “brethren.” He tells them that he has “applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit.” Paul and Apollos are examples for the Corinthians.

“These things” in verse 6 refers to the various images in 3:5–4:5 of coworkers, farmers, master builders, servants (under rowers) and stewards as appropriate analogies for those who minister for the Lord. Paul tells his Corinthian brethren that he has applied these figures of speech and analogies to himself and Apollos. His reason is to teach the Corinthians not to exalt themselves.

Paul and Apollos had been given as illustrations of what true ministers should be: humble servants and stewards. Servants are faithful and meek, not proud; stewards are trustworthy and submissive, not arrogant. We are called to put off pride and put on humility. If the Corinthians saw themselves as God sees them -- as servants, under-rowers, stewards, builders -- this would serve to deflate their puffed-up egos!

The Corinthians were measuring different men by their own personal preferences and prejudices. They were even comparing ministers with one another. Verse 6 says the only true basis for evaluation is “that which is written”—the Word of God. The Bible clearly reveals what kind of life and service is required of God’s ministers. There is no need for us to devise new standards.

Verse 6...

The Greek word used in verse 6 for “arrogant” literally means to “puff up, inflate, blow up.” The term was used metaphorically to indicate pride, which is having an inflated view of oneself. Paul uses that word four times to describe the Corinthian believers (here in verse 6, then in 4:18, 19; 5:2) and three other times to warn them against pride (8:1; 13:4; 2 Corinthians 12:20).

C.S. Lewis wrote, “There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty of themselves . . . The essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Lust, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

Pride is demonstrated in sinful judging. The Corinthians were going beyond what was written, evaluating Paul on an extrabiblical standard. The true standard is faithfulness to the Word of God - not personal preferences.

Pride is demonstrated in a wrong view of self. The Corinthians thought that they had everything they needed, and were ignorant of how immature they were. We never are without sin and opportunity to grow in this life.

Pride is demonstrated in a wrong view of ministry. Christian ministers are not often considered highly in the world - eloquence, riches, and status is what the world values, but these are no measure of a teacher. Instead of looking down on others, we are to esteem others, being willing to admit our own pride.

Because pride causes division.

II. Pride Leads to Ungratefulness

Verse 7...

Verse 6 teaches us not to boast about whom we follow. Verse 7 teaches us not to boast about what we have. After all, it is all because of grace.

Like a careful prosecuting attorney Paul will use 3 rhetorical questions in verse 7 to expose their arrogance and pride remind the church that any good thing they have is the result of God's grace in their lives.

Of the first question, "For who makes you so superior?" The English equivalent ... would be, "Who in the world do you think you are, anyway? What kind of self-delusion is it that allows you to put yourself in a position where you look down on others?"

Second question, Paul asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?" The Corinthians forgot that everything they had was grace, a gift from God's grace. James 1:17 reminds us, "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."

This truth should squash our pride! This question parallels the truth in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 that all believers are servants and stewards of God, slaves who have been given eternal life and spiritual gifts, but all from God, through God and to God, to Him be the glory. Amen!

Third question, Paul says, "If, in fact, you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" God's grace leads to gratitude. Pride leads to ingratitude or ungratefulness. Grace says, "Thank you, Lord." Pride says, "Look at me, Lord."

Warren Wiersbe gets to the heart of this issue when he writes, "The best commentary of 1 Corinthians 4:7 is the witness of John the Baptist who said in John 3:27 "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven..." and in John 3:30 "Christ must increase, but I must decrease."

God's grace gives us what we have and what we need. It gives us what we do not deserve and cannot earn. It saves us. God's grace sustains us. It gives glory to the one who rightly deserves it: God should get the glory, not us.

We saw this morning video testimonies of Ryan and Kristin and Tim and Karen sharing how they appreciate Pastor Dan. Would it be appropriate for the videos to instead be about Ryan and Kristin or Tim and Karen and instead of talking about Dan they start talking about what they appreciate about themselves? No! The video is not about you. The focus is supposed to be on Pastor Dan. That's who you should talk about.

God is the One who has reached out to us in His love. He is the One who has brought us from spiritual death to spiritual life, from darkness to light. He is the One who is the giver of every good and perfect gift. He is the one we should be focusing on. Paul said 1:31, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord". In other words, if we are going to brag, we should brag about the greatness of God.

But when pride takes hold of our lives, we rob God of His glory.

Pride leads to division in the church. Pride leads to ungratefulness.

III. Pride Gives a False View of Ourselves

Verse 8...

If you just picked up 1 Corinthians 4 and just started reading at verse 8 it would be easy to miss what the Apostle Paul was trying to communicate. In fact, you might conclude that the Corinthians were some kind of super-church. The text sounds like this church had tapped into God's storehouse of blessing in a way that made even the apostle

Paul envious. However, to draw that conclusion would be to miss what Paul was saying entirely! If the passage is read in context, it is obvious that Paul was actually speaking sarcastically!

In verse 7 he had challenged the church to adopt an attitude of humility. In verse 8 he shows them how much they need to change. They were arrogant.

The whole section of verses 8 thru 13 is filled with irony and sarcasm. Paul never watered down his words. He drew a contrast between the wretched state of the Apostles and that of the Corinthians in their ease. Pride and arrogance do not lead to a spiritual church but to a self-sufficient, complacent church as seen in the Corinthians.

Verse 8...

Jesus teaches in Matthew 19:28 that during the millennial kingdom the Twelve Apostles will reign with Christ on earth, sitting upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. But during their earthly lifetimes they did anything but rule. Instead, they were ridiculed, spit upon, imprisoned, beaten, mocked, and generally treated like criminals.

Paul acknowledges he would love to be reigning now with the Corinthians, if that were possible. At the end of verse 8, he states, "How I wish you really had become kings so that we might be reign with you!" He would be glad to escape all the persecution, trials, traumas, and struggles of this life. But while they think they have arrived, Paul knows he has not. He knows he is still a pilgrim here, with his ultimate citizenship in Heaven.

In the book of Revelation, John was given messages to seven churches. To the church in Laodicea the Lord Jesus said in Revelation 3:15-17, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked."

Have you ever been in one of those carnival fun houses? You look at yourself in the mirrors and it distorts your image. You become tall and thin or short and wide. It is not a true image; it is distorted. The same thing happens with pride. We believe we are spiritually strong, but we are really disconnected and in reality, are spiritually immature. We think we don't need any help and find it hard to turn to the Savior.

Pride causes division, pride leads to ungratefulness, pride gives a false view of ourselves. However,

IV. Humility Requires Sacrificial Commitments

Verses 9-13...

The Corinthians were proud about their position, but Paul explains the sacrifice that humble service to Christ requires. By showing these humble acts, Paul implied the Corinthians had fallen into a state of complacency, indifference and apathy because of their pride.

The Apostles were men condemned to death, a spectacle, on exhibition. The imagery behind this would have been a common sight to anyone living in the Roman Empire. It is the picture of a conquering Roman Caesar or general. As he returns from a victorious battle, he arrives at the palace in triumphant procession. Citizens line the roadway and archway leading to the palace. There are garlands, the tossing of flowers and money, and shouts of praise and acclamation as the returning general comes home.

Behind the general in this parade are the proud soldiers who participated in the battle and last in the procession are the prisoners who were made captive in the conflict and who were condemned to certain death before Caesar and the public. As these prisoners moved along, bound in chains and dressed in rags, the people jeered, mocked and harassed them by spitting on them, punching them and throwing garbage or whatever on them. It was a humiliating experience because some of the prisoners may have been generals, officers or dignitaries in the defeated army. These captives would be put to death in a Roman arena either as a gladiator or thrown to the lions.

Notice in verse 10 Paul states in three staccato contrasts between himself and them...

Then in verse 11 he peels off in rapid succession what it has meant for him to be an apostle for the past twenty years, "to this present hour we are:

hungry,
thirsty,
poorly clothed,
roughly treated (beaten),
constantly on the move (homeless),

Verse 12 says, "and we toil, working with our own hand." The fact that he worked with his own hands as a tentmaker would have lowered him in the eyes of many, because the Greeks despised manual labor.

Impelled by the call of Christ to take the word of God to the Gentiles, Paul has suffered unspeakably in the uncertainty and vulnerability of the missionary's life.

Verse 12-13a describes how the apostles graciously responded to the way people treated them...

What was the result of their gracious self-control? Verse 13 says they were treated as "as the scum of the world ... the dregs of all things." Scum and dregs are synonyms and refer to scrapings or offscourings cleaned from a dirty dish or pot and then thrown away. The words were commonly used figuratively of the lowest, most degraded criminals, who often were sacrificed in pagan ceremonies. That is the way the world looked at the apostles.

They were religious scum and dregs, and no better than the criminals like whom they were often treated.

Paul and the other apostles were treated just as their Lord Jesus was treated; but God vindicated them and brought glory to His name.

So, we see the stark contrast between the Corinthians and the apostles. The Corinthians were exalted, satisfied, and pampered. The apostles were working hard, sacrificing, and facing abuse. The Corinthians reflected the world. The apostles were living like Jesus.

In 1 Peter 5:5-6 Peter writes, "clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time."

The positive counterpart to pride is humility.

Humility is anchored to a profound sense of God's greatness. We see how small and dependent we are on God. Humility recognizes that we should not expect to be treated any better than Jesus was treated. Humility leads us to be open and teachable. We know we are sinners, so we are willing to learn from others even as we stand on God's unshakeable truth.

Humility makes us soft rather than hard. The humble person shares the truth without that “edge” that so often closes people to the truth. We share the truth of Scripture not from a superior position but from the position of service to Christ and love for the person we are speaking to.

Humility makes us willing to sacrifice. The humble person is willing to do what God wants them to do and go where God wants us to go.

John Piper wrote, “The humble person is one who realizes that even the seemingly most ridiculous command from God is still to be trusted over that which seems most wise to us.”

When we read the great 11th chapter of Hebrews, referred to as the Hall of Faith, we can focus upon the first part of the chapter, where the great heroes achieved amazing victories by faith. Hebrews 11:33 says “by faith they conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection.”

But Hebrews 11 continues with the very next words starting in verse 35, “and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.”

Why would they sacrifice so much? Because humble people are focused on God and others, not on self. Even their focus on others is out of a desire to love and glorify God. They want to serve others for the glory of God. They understand that humility requires sacrificial commitments.

I think of Pastor Dan. He did not ask or seek to be recognized today for his 10th anniversary here. In fact, he never brought it up.

You see, the humble have no need to be recognized or approved. There is no competition with God or with others. The humble don’t boast about their favorite teacher or who they have connections with. The humble have no need to elevate self because they know that they are recipients of God’s amazing grace, and they know God’s love has been undeservedly and irrevocably set on them.

In short, a humble believer lives out 2 Corinthians 5:15 and “no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

Do you know Christ? Are you humbly living to make Him known?

God is asking some of us to be gladiators for Him this week - spectacles for Jesus at work, in school, or in our neighborhoods. Will you share the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ with your relatives, your classmates, your coworkers, and your neighbors at the risk of being treated like scum?

Today is Palm Sunday, the day we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, one week before His resurrection. Palm Sunday began with Jesus and His disciples traveling over the Mount of Olives. The Lord sent two disciples ahead to find an animal to ride. They found the unbroken donkey just as Jesus had said they would.

As Jesus ascended toward Jerusalem, a large multitude gathered around Him. This crowd understood that Jesus was the Messiah; what they did not understand was that it wasn’t time to set up the kingdom yet—although Jesus had tried to tell them so. The crowd’s actions along the road give rise to the name “Palm Sunday.”

On that first Palm Sunday, the people were waving palm branches and honored Jesus verbally. Matthew 21:9 says, “The crowds that went ahead of Jesus and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

“Corrie” ten Boom was a Dutch watchmaker and part of the Dutch resistance during World War II. For her role in sheltering Jews in her home, Corrie ten Boom was arrested and sent to Ravensbrück, a women’s concentration camp in northern Germany. Corrie survived the Holocaust and went on to become a writer and speaker who never stopped communicating God’s goodness.

Corrie ten Boom was once asked if it was difficult for her to be humble. She replied, “When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on the back of a donkey, and everyone was waving palm branches and throwing garments onto the road, and singing praises, do you think that for one moment it ever entered the head of that donkey that any of that was for him? If I can be the donkey on which Jesus Christ rides in His glory, I give Him all the praise and all the honor.”

This is a wonderful image to keep in mind, especially for those of us in ministry. We are just the donkey! As the apostle Paul tells the Corinthians and speaks to us this morning: We are the servants, the under rowers, the stewards. We are not building our own kingdom or fame, but that of Jesus Christ. Our lives should mean nothing to us except to serve as a vehicle for His praise, glory, and honor.

Let’s pray...