

# **Conceit vs. Humility!**

Our Text: **1 Corinthians 4:6-13** *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*

*You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.*

As Paul is wrapping up his rebuke of the Corinthians and their division-causing ways, he needed to teach them the difference between **Conceit** and **Humility**. One is of the flesh, the other is of the Lord.

When Abraham was interceding to the Lord on behalf of Sodom he said:  
**Genesis 18:27** *Then Abraham answered and said, “Indeed now, I who am but dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord:*

When Jacob was afraid that Esau was about to attack him, he prayed:  
**Genesis 32:10** *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies.*

When God commanded Moses to go before Pharaoh and demand the release of the Israelites, Moses replied:  
**Exodus 3:11** *But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”*

Gideon also responded to God's call to deliver His people from Midian in a similar way:

**Judges 6:15** *So he said to Him, “O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.”*

John the Baptist could not comprehend why he needed to baptize Jesus:  
**John 1:26–27** *John answered them, saying, “I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.”*

**Matthew 3:14** *And John tried to prevent Him, saying, “I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?”*

*Why go through all of this? BECAUSE GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO BE COVERED IN HUMILITY!!!*

The Corinthian Christians, however, had not learned that virtue—not from the Old Testament saints or from Paul or even from the Lord Himself.

**So let's confront this head-on!**

### **The Corinthians Were Conceited!**

**1 Corinthians 4:6–8** *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*

*You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!*

**The major problem with the Corinthians was that they were proud and boastful!** Some claiming Paul, some Apollos, and some Cephas . . . **AND THIS WAS ALL ROOTED IN PRIDE!!!**

*(This is why there were so many divisions.)*

Now, these leaders themselves were godly and humble servants of the Lord, and the Corinthians had much reason to be grateful for His having sent them such men . . . But instead of being grateful because of humility, they were **“puffed up”!**

**Puffed Up** = **φυσιόω** *physioō* = *To inflate. To be proud, vain, or arrogant.*

If we remember what we've covered all the way through 1 Corinthians so far, we will have to recall that Paul has been continuously teaching them **NOT** to exalt **“human wisdom”**, or **“human leaders”!**

In fact, notice he says, **“I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes”**. *What does that mean?*

So far in his letter he used the figurative examples of:

- Farmers (*1 Corinthians 3:6–9*)
- Builders (*1 Corinthians 3:10–15*)
- And Servant-Stewards (*1 Corinthians 4:1–5*)

He applied all of these figures of speech and analogies to himself and Apollos . . . And his reason is to begin to teach them **NOT TO EXALT THEMSELVES!!!** , This is why he says, **“that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.”**

- Servants are faithful and meek, not proud.
- Stewards are trustworthy and submissive, not arrogant.
- **AND A CHRISTIAN SHOULD BE NEITHER PRIDEFUL NOR ARROGANT!!!**

*Should God's faithful servants receive proper honor and respect? YES!!!*

***1 Thessalonians 5:12*** *And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,*

***1 Timothy 5:17*** *Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.*

But godly respect can easily turn into ungodly exaltation when ***“we exceed what is written”***.

***“When loving gratitude and legitimate loyalty are contaminated with pride and conceit, Christ's church is fractured and weakened. What God Intends as a means of unity Satan turns into a means of division.”*** John MacArthur Jr.

**The bottom line is that the Corinthians were going far beyond scriptural respect for ministers and they were actually developing factions!**

Here's how easily it can develop:

- When the Israelites were being delivered from Egypt, Moses was clearly the leader.
- Moses had stood before Pharaoh and demanded the release of his people.
- Through Moses the Lord had performed the great miracles that finally convinced Pharaoh to let them go. Moses was the undisputed head of his people.
- After the Lord sent a special anointing of his Spirit on seventy of the elders, two of them, Eldad and Medad, continued to prophesy in the camp after the others had stopped.
- When Moses was told what they were doing, his young assistant, Joshua, was annoyed and look at what he said:

***Numbers 11:28*** *So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, “Moses my lord, forbid them!”*

- But look at Moses reply:

***Numbers 11:29*** *Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!”*

**Wow! Clearly see that Joshua's loyalty to Moses was misplaced, and misplaced loyalty, even to faithful men of God, inevitably brings hostility to others of God's servants! It causes envy, competition, and division . . . AND THIS CANNOT BE!!!**

*Remember we just defined the words “puffed up”?* Paul actually uses these words three more times to describe the Corinthian believers (*1 Corinthians 4:18, 1*

Corinthians 19; 1 Corinthians 5:2). And then three other times he will warn them against pride (1 Corinthians 8:1; 1 Corinthians 13:4; 2 Corinthians 12:20).

But he also mentions another closely related sin . . . **“boasting”**.

**Boast** = **καυχάομαι** *kauchaomai* = To glory in exultation. To Brag.

Sadly, **PRIDE MUST BRAG!** So Paul challenges them by asking them why they are bragging?

In fact, he actually asked the question in three parts:

- First, **Who regards you as superior?** “Why,” he says, “do you think you are above other believers in the church? Why do you think your group is better than any other? You are made of the same stuff they are and have been redeemed by the same Lord. You are no better. You have nothing to boast of.”
- Second he asks, **And what do you have that you did not receive?** What does anyone have that, in one way or another, was not given to him? We did not give ourselves life, the food and care and protection we had as babies, an education, talents, the country we were born in, the opportunity to earn a living, the IQ we have, or anything else. No matter how hard we may have studied in school and worked at our business or profession, we would have nothing except for what the Lord and many others, by His providential hand, have given us.
- The third question follows logically. **But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?** In other words, if they possessed only what someone else had given them, why were they boasting as if they had created the things themselves, or earned them? The whole foundation of their boasting was nothing more than a fabrication of their pride. Nothing is more self-deceitful than pride. We are inclined to believe almost anything about ourselves if it is favorable.

Here are some thing to remember as noted by John MacArthur Jr.:

- **If we have a good pastor, God gave him to us.**
- **If we have good parents, God gave them to us.**
- **If we live in a good country, God gave it to us.**
- **If we have a good mind or creative talent God gave it to us.**
- **We have no reason to boast either in people or possessions.**
- **Not only ministers, but all Christians, are but God’s stewards.**
- **Everything we have is on loan from the Lord, entrusted to us for a while to use in serving Him.**

**I love how God loves us too much to allow Satan to so mislead us!**

Then notice how Paul drives home his point with sarcasm:

**1 Corinthians 4:8** *You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!*

Notice that he is telling the Corinthian believers that:

- They are great and wonderful.
- They are satiated with every good thing.
- They are wealthy.
- They are royal.
- They had it all.
- They had arrived.

If it were not for the context, the Corinthians probably would have taken Paul's words in verse 8 at face value . . . **BECAUSE PRIDEFUL PEOPLE DO THAT!!** After all, this is exactly what they thought of themselves. They were just like the Laodiceans:

**Revelation 3:14-22** *“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, “I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked— I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’ ’ ”*

**I love how God loves us too much to allow Satan to so mislead us!**

Now, let's look at the flip-side . . .

### **But The Apostles Had Humility!**

**1 Corinthians 4:9–13** *For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.*

The Father had allowed Jesus, the Son, to be sentenced to death and made a spectacle . . . Now **“God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death”**.

- To the world they were worthless teachers teaching worthless ideas,
- They were seen as contributing nothing to mankind.
- The only thing they deserved was death.
- The imagery used here is of persons brought into the arena, condemned to die as criminals.
- The last ones brought out for slaughter were the grand finale.
- In this case, God brought the apostles out to be a spectacle in the sight of men in order to show His glory.

I will let this part speak for itself:

- The words describe Paul's condition in contrast to what the Corinthians considered their condition to be.
- They thought they had everything in themselves; he knew he had nothing in himself.
- When a Roman general won a major victory it was celebrated by what was called a triumph.
- The general would enter the city in great military splendor, leading his officers and troops.
- Behind those would come a group of prisoners in chains, with the conquered king and his officers prominently displayed for all to see and mock.
- The prisoners were under the sentence of death and would be taken to the arena to fight wild beasts.
- That is the spectacle to which Paul refers.
- In the spiritual warfare he was fighting, he was considered to be that sort of captive, that sort of conquered prisoner, condemned to death.

It's very interesting that shortly after His transfiguration Jesus told His disciples about His soon-coming arrest, death, and resurrection. They did not understand what He was talking about; but instead of asking Him to explain, **they began to argue about which of them was greatest.** When Jesus asked what they were discussing, they understandably were ashamed to reply.

***Mark 9:35–37 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.” Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, “Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.”***

- The life of discipleship is the life of servanthood.
- And the life of servanthood is the life of humility.

Remember . . . THIS IS WHAT JESUS DID!!!

**Philippians 2:6–8** *who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

In fact, Jesus even spoke of Himself as:

**Matthew 11:29** *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

There will be a time during the millennial kingdom that the twelve apostles will reign with Christ on earth:

**Matthew 19:28** *So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

But while they were on this earth they were anything but rulers. On the contrary, they became **“a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.”** They were ridiculed, spit upon, imprisoned, beaten, mocked, and generally treated like criminals. Then they were last . . . **But in Christ’s coming kingdom they will be first!**

**GOD KNOWS WHAT HE’S DOING!!!**

**We need to learn humility and be will to be a spectacle that everyone can see that will bring glory to God, and God alone!**

Let’s pray . . .