

Phusioo

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1 Corinthians 4

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Bob and his wife live up north. One winter morning while listening to the radio, they hear the announcer say, "We are going to have 4-6 inches of snow today. You must park your car on the even numbered side of the street so the snowplow can get through." Bob's wife goes out and moves her car. A week later while they are eating breakfast, the radio announcer says, "We are expecting 6-8 inches of snow today. You must park your car on the odd numbered side of the street so the snowplow can get through." Bob's wife goes out and moves her car again. The next week they are having breakfast when the radio announcer says again, "We are expecting 8-10 inches of snow today. You must park....." Suddenly the electric power goes out. Bob's wife is very upset, and with a worried look on her face she says, "Honey, I don't know what to do. Which side of the street do I need to park on so the plow can get through?" With love and understanding in his voice, Bob says, "Why don't you just leave it in the garage this time?"

Sometimes there are things that happen in our lives that tend to knock us down a few pegs; to show us that we are not as wonderful as we think we are. And I got to thinking this past week, what if God orchestrated these events as a way of reminding us that we've gotten too big for our britches; that we need a lesson in humility. Well, it is the Christian whose life is guided by the Spirit and the Truth that is best prepared to recognize God's hand in these humbling events. And it is the wise Christian who learns from these lessons and lets go of destructive pride.

Consider the situation in the Corinthian Church. In the opening chapters, Paul has been addressing the divisions that have taken place, and these divisions are literally destroying this church from the inside out. And what were these divisions founded upon; Pride and Arrogance. They had Pride in their human wisdom and reason. In their arrogance, some within this church felt that their spiritual supremacy and their enlightened understanding of scripture made them better than the average Christian; they were literally "puffed up" about themselves, Arrogant and Proud (*Phusioo*). But what Paul is about to show them is that in all their self

proclaimed wisdom and puffed up pride, they were destroying God's church, and literally working against God.

Take your Bible and read **1 Corinthians 4**, and watch the humbling process begin.

I'm not surprised that Paul uses the word *Phusioo* four times to describe these Corinthian believers, three times in this chapter alone. Let's face it, in a church where this is the predominate attitude, we expect fellowship and harmony to be torn apart. So Paul raises three important questions here designed to make these people stop and think. He wants them to learn from this experience and start practicing some humility (see verse 21).

"Who regards you as superior", he asks in verse 7. In effect Paul is asking, "Why 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."

Secondly, Paul asks, **"What do you have that you did not receive"**? They had Salvation, eternal life, God's Word, God's Spirit, His love, and countless other blessings that they did not earn and did not deserve (God made them Saints). All of these are gifts of God's grace.

And finally Paul logically wonders, **"If you did receive it, why do you boast is 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.

Some of the Christian in Corinth were self-satisfied and felt that they had it all (verse 8). They had arrived. Like the Church in Laodicea they considered themselves to be rich and in need of nothing. However, they were really **"wretched, and miserable and poor and blind and naked"** (Revelation 3:17). Paul's solution is to contrast their pride and arrogance with the life of the Apostles in hopes that they might finally learn that a Christian must be humble.

Where pride focuses upon self, humility focuses on others. Where arrogance is puffed up, humility is empty of self. But humility was a difficult lesson for these Greek believers to learn. They believed humility was a despicable trait of a slave, a sign of weakness, not a characteristic of great men (See Plato *Laws* 6. 774c). ¹

Since humility is a necessary characteristic of Christianity, how can we know if it exists in us? What would our lives look like if we were humble in a way that is pleasing to God? Well, Paul mentions three things right here that we can use to measure humility in our own lives.

First, only God is complete. He alone possess all the gifts of the Spirit, which is why God pours out His gifts in portion to we humans. It is the humble Christian who realizes that it takes many different parts to make up the body of Christ (verse 6b). And no one Spiritual Gift is more important than the next, for they all have come from God. Second, since a humble Christian realizes these gifts have come from God, they understand that they are merely a steward (verse 7b). It is God who has given these abilities; He has entrusted them into our care. It is our responsibility to not only recognize this fact, but to utilize these gifts as we labor for Jesus in this world. Third, it is the humble Christian who knows that they labor not for their own glory and honor, but for God. God is glorified when we, the faithful stewards, labor for Him in this world. And as Paul points out, God is glorified especially when we humbly accept what He asks us to endure (verses 12-13). We labor not for present honor or prestige, but for eternity. A humble Christian knows that what they endure today will pass away tomorrow.

These Christians needed to be reminded that the Corinthian Church existed in God, from God, and for God; not in them, not because of them, and not for them. The success of the Corinthian church did not spring out of their own wisdom. They did not have the freedom to do church any way they saw fit. And they certainly should not be seeking their own glory and honor. I wonder how many churches today need to learn this lesson.

¹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:513). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.