

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

Pride vs. Humility

1 Corinthians 4:1-13

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.18-19.10

1 Corinthians chapter 4: This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, 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 held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness.

What do we know about the Corinthian problem, the Corinthian situation? Let's do a little catch up. We've been through three chapters of 1 Corinthians. We're entering chapter 4 today. So far the theme has been consistent through all three chapters. What's going on in Corinth? There's conflict right? What's the cause of the conflict? What do you know of the conflict so far? That there were factions or groups of people that have risen within the church and have elevated one leader against another, right? Paul has written about this a couple of times. He said some of you are saying I follow Paul and the other is saying I follow Apollos; no I follow Cephas. And what's going on here is these factions are rising up; their causing division within the church. Why is that occurring? Paul tells us in chapter 3. He says because these people are of the flesh which is another way of saying they are spiritually immature.

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They are following their own fleshly desires, not the spirit, the Holy Spirit that is within them.

Now, this is resulting in one main issue that he is going to tackle in chapter 4. Today, what we're going to look at almost exclusively is the issue of pride. What is the result of their fleshly actions of elevating one leader over another causing conflict, he says, pointing back to their pride.

I played a little game with my kids this past week; my junior high girls. I said give me a one word definition for pride. And it was interesting the words that they chose. They chose words like egotistical, big-headed, stuck-up. One of them said arrogant. I said that's it. That's the meaning of pride is arrogance. That's the sense that Paul gives to the word *phusiōō* which is the word puffed up in verse 6. He says these people were puffed up. They were being arrogant which literally means to blow. In other words, in our vernacular they were blowing smoke. They were blowing hot air. Then something interesting happened with my girls. They began to associate people they knew with the words that they had chosen. Have you ever done that? You're working through some definition and some name or some person's face pops into your mind. And so they start chatting back and forth about the people they knew who were egotistical; who were big-headed; who were stuck-up; who were arrogant. And that's true. That's probably very humanly of us to think that way but have you ever done this? Have you ever thought of the issue of pride or arrogance and your own face popped up in your own mind? I would imagine that you haven't experienced that.

But this is what the text forces us to do. The text forces us to look in ourselves. It's not a reflector that's looking out and thinking of other prideful people. Actually what's going on is it's a mirror. It's actually looking into ourselves and so when we approach chapter 4 we have to look at our own selves to see if the Corinthian problem is our own personal problem. That's where we're heading this morning. If you haven't already done so I definitely want you to take a bible and turn to chapter 4 because what we're going to be doing is actually going through verse by verse. That's what we're doing in our study – exegetical study. So it's important to have a bible open before you so you see where we're working through. What we're going to do is let's look at the Corinthian problem; the pride problem in Corinth.

Now, I need to start by helping you understand the text isn't easy to understand. Maybe you picked that up in the reading. It actually sounds as if Paul is moving back and forth in his thinking but actually he's on one subject and this will become clear. Let me give you a key. This might be something that you want to write down, jot down in the notes to help you understand. Paul is in the midst of contrasting. That's the whole chapter. It's a chapter of contrast and Paul contrasts the Corinthian pride with the humility of the teachers that were teaching them. Paul himself, Apollos, maybe Cephas who was Peter. We're not sure maybe others. Whoever the dividing factions were rallying behind Paul is contrasting their pride, the

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Corinthian pride with the humility of these teachers and what he's going to do is he's going to correct the Corinthians and then give them an example to follow.

Let me give you a little outline and then this will help you follow the movement of the text. A, B, C. I did that so it would be easier to remember. Attitude, Behavior and Conduct. That's what's going on here. Number one we see the apostle's attitude in verses 1 through 5. Paul just explains his attitude of life. It's good for us to know. And then in verses 6 through 10 we see the Corinthian behavior, what's going on with these Corinthians. What's causing the pride issue and then he reverts back in verses 11 through 13 to the apostle's conducts. We've got the apostle's attitude, the Corinthian behavior and the apostle's conduct. We're going to stop at the end of verse 13. That's where we're heading this morning. Let's just in. Let's look at the first point the apostle's attitude in the first 5 verse. Follow along. Let's go back to the text.

Paul writes, this is how one should regard us. Now, stop right there. Who's the us? Who is he talking about? He's talking about the teachers of the Corinthian church. You could say well, he's talking about the apostles but I think he's narrowing this. He's saying, us. Those who you associate with. Those whom you know. He says, this is how you should regard those of us who are teaching you. And then he gives a list. He gives three descriptive words. You might want to underline these in your bible. He says, you should regard us as servants. The first word you should underline – servants of Christ. Stewards, second word you can underline. Stewards of the mystery of God. It's also required of students that they become trustworthy. That's the third word. Servant, steward, trustworthy.

What is Paul's attitude about himself thus far in the text? Now, what do you know about Paul? Paul is a powerful man. He's an apostle. He's well educated. At one point in his life he was a Pharisee of Pharisees within the Jewish religion. That's as high as you can get in overseeing the religiosity of the nation and so at one time he had position; he had power; he had prominence – all the things, by the way that the Corinthians would have loved to have themselves. But he does not mention that at all. What does he say of himself? What does he say of the teachers? He says you ought to think of us as servants, stewards and people who are trustworthy.

Servants. We looked at this word in chapter 3 just a couple of weeks ago. It's the word *hupēretēs*. There are twelve different Greek words for the word servant. So, Paul had a lot of words to choose from. The bottom of the rung would be the word that could be translated servant or translated slave. He uses that word later in 1 Corinthians 7:22 when he says we are slaves of Christ. But he ratchets it up one level and he uses this word *hupēretēs* and it means, remember, we looked at. It means under-rower or it means subordinate. The guy in the bottom of the ship, pulling on the oars. Another way you could translate it is table waiter or busboy. That's what Paul thinks of himself as a teacher of the Word of God he doesn't see that he has all this authority over people even though he was an apostle; even though he did

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carry great authority from God. Primarily what he saw of himself was as a servant. He didn't come to be served. He came to serve. That was his mindset.

Not only that but he was steward. A fascinating word. It's actually two Greek words put together to make a concept - oikonómos. Oiko means house. Nómos means administrator. So it would be like a house administrator. People in the early century or in the early beginnings of the church, that whole culture, which would have been especially true of Corinth; those with means; those with wealth would have hired oikonómos and they would come in and they would run the affairs of the home. It would be like a treasurer. People would care for the family's finances. Now, what does a treasurer need to be? A treasurer needs to be what? Trustworthy, right.

So, that's the third thing that Paul says of himself. He says I'm a servant. I'm a steward. I'm trustworthy. With what? Well, go back to the text. Servant, steward, trustworthy with the mysteries of God. What's that? That's the Gospel. The mysteries of God. That's not like a secret. He doesn't say I've been entrusted with the secrets of God. No. A mystery is something that was once hidden; now has been revealed. That's what it means that is was once not fully understood until God brought it to life. What is he talking about? He's talking about the Gospel; talking about salvation. Paul says I am a servant. I am a steward. I've been entrusted with the teaching of the Word of God. He was called to take the word of God and to dispense it to the people.

He says in Acts 20:20 I did not shrink from declaring anything to you that was profitable to you. It's not always easy to proclaim the Word of God. Think back in the Old Testament. We have the Prophet Jeremiah, the Prophet Ezekiel, the Prophet Isaiah, the Prophet Elijah. All had very difficult messages to proclaim and yet they did not, like Paul says in the New Testament, did not shrink from declaring that to them. Why? Because they were trustworthy.

By the way, Apostles were men called to serve Christ and called to serve the church. They could not serve Christ and they could not serve the church unless they saw themselves rightly. Do you understand that? If you don't understand yourself correctly you cannot do what God has called you to do. And so how does Paul understand himself? Paul understands himself as a servant, as a steward, as someone who is trustworthy. See, that is saying that same concept is true for us as believers. That's Paul's point. You cannot effectively serve Christ. You cannot effectively serve the church if you don't understand yourself rightly. That was the Corinthian problem. They didn't understand themselves. They place themselves in the seat of judges to evaluate their leaders. They've placed themselves, really in a place of prominence and said no. I would rather listen to or follow this leader than I would that one. And another group was saying the same thing. I'd rather follow or listen to this leader than that one and that started to create waves within the body and before long there was schisms, divisions, conflict.

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Do you know what Paul says to this? Paul comes to them and he says you know it's a small thing to me what you think of me. He understood who he was. That's what he means in verse 3. Look. He says but with me it's a very small thing that I should be judged by you or any human court. In fact, I don't even judge myself. In other words, I understand my sinful nature. I don't even go about evaluating myself. He says I leave that up to God. I'm not aware of anything against myself but I am not thereby acquitted just because I don't know of anything that might be against me. It is the Lord who judges me. So what Paul is saying is why Corinthians are you sitting in the seat of judgment judging your leaders; deciding which one you will follow; which one you will listen to; which one you will learn from.

Now, parenthetically – does that mean that we're not supposed to evaluate the leaders within the church? No. We should be constantly evaluating the leaders within the church. There's a number of passages I could take you to. We could at the passages in 1 Timothy. It talks about the evaluating qualifications for those who lead. I could take you to 2 Timothy 4:2. You could see my job description. My job description is very clear. I am to preach the Word in season and out of season. I'm supposed to rebuke. I'm supposed to reproof. I'm supposed to correct through what? Through the Word of God. You should be evaluating me. You should be evaluating anyone who stands before you as a teacher. I could take you over to Titus – another list of those who'd say they have an aspiration for leadership. What's the qualifications for them. We should be evaluating our leaders. That's not what Paul is talking about.

The scriptures give very clear parameters for that but, what were the Corinthians doing? Drop down to verse 6 – look. He says but you were going beyond what is written. What does that mean? They were going beyond the parameters of scripture when evaluating their leaders and their behavior demonstrated that.

Just so you know where we're at in the outline. So far we've looked at the apostle's attitude. Now as we move into verse 6 we're going to look at the Corinthian behavior. Follow along. I've applied all these things to myself. What is the things? What things is he talking about? He says well, the very things we looked at in verse 1 and 2. The fact that he was a servant, a steward and he was trustworthy. He says I've applied this to me. I've applied to myself and Apollos, another teacher of the Corinthian church. I've applied this to us for your benefit brothers that you may learn by us not to go beyond what was written; not to go beyond scripture that none of you may be puffed up; none of you might be arrogant in favor of one teacher against another. Then he fires at them three rhetorical questions that are scathing and helps us understand their behavior.

He says, for who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Now, let me break this down. Let me understand what Paul was saying here. Paul in these three rhetorical questions is bringing to surface for the Corinthians their pride, arrogant problem. And he starts with the

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first question. For who sees anything different in you? Now, first of all notice he changes into a singular pronoun – you. He says this is in your face is what’s going on. And the way you could read this is what makes you so superior to judge? That’s kind of what he’s saying? Who sees anything different in you? What makes you superior to judge? He says have you not learned that all that God’s given you is a gift including the leaders and the teachers that are over your church? Follow them willingly. Be teachable. And that might be the first thing that we learn about the behavior issues of the Corinthians. They weren’t teachable. They really didn’t have a teachable spirit. You can’t have a teachable spirit if you say I’m only going to follow or I’m only going to learn from this teacher. You know, when they were saying I like Paul better than I like Apollos or I like Cephas better than I like Paul or Apollos. Basically in tunnel vision – they were just saying no. I just want to learn; I just want to follow after this one guy. And Paul was basically saying you can’t do that. That’s arrogance.

Think about it. How do we evaluate our present day leaders and teachers? It might be their teaching style that we just gravitate towards their teaching style. It might be their personality. Maybe they’re humorous. Maybe theirs some connection, something they’re into – we’re into. And so we make that kind of connection. Maybe it’s their educational background; there’s some sense of eruditeness to their teaching – you enjoy that type of thing. And you just kind of just gravitate towards that. By the way, there is nothing wrong with having our favorites. We all have our favorites. But when we exclude another who we may not necessarily connect with and we say I’m not going to learn from that person we’re actually acting just like the Corinthians. And it would be Paul who would be saying to you what makes you so superior to judge? You’re telling me, that’s what Paul is saying, you’re telling me you can’t learn from that person?

Second rhetorical question – what do you have that you did not receive. Now, think about that. What’s he saying? We think about this in the wide scope of everything. What do you have that you did not receive? What’s the answer? Nothing. Right? I mean, as believers we come to that understanding pretty quickly. We don’t have anything that the Father didn’t give to us, right? James says, James 1:17 – every good and perfect gift is from who? From the Father of life coming down from above. So, we understand that everything we have, our homes, our jobs, our food, our life, our health, everything is from God including our church, our community, our teachers – all that is from God. And so when he says what do you have that you did not receive it’s as if he’s saying why are you boasting? Really, if you did not create it, if you did not make it what’s left to boast about because someone else gave that to you. Which tells us something – that if someone else, God, giving us everything what should be our response? Thankfulness, right?

And so what does it tell us about the Corinthian behavior? Not only we’re they not teachable. They weren’t thankful. They were basically ungrateful for those leaders, those teachers whom God had given them.

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Now, the third rhetorical question is like the second and actually a continuation of it. If then you received it then why did you boast as if you did not receive it? Do you hear what he's saying? He says if you possess only what someone else gives you why are you boasting? He's just reiterating what he's saying. He says the whole foundation of their boasts is basically a fabrication of what? Pride, arrogance. Are you starting to pick up the behavior of the Corinthians? Un-teachable, un-grateful, boastful, arrogant and Paul is calling them out and he actually becomes so angered that he becomes highly sarcastic.

You don't get this very often. There's just a few places in scripture where the writers of scripture who remember were ordained by the Holy Spirit become sarcastic. And if you read this with anything but a sarcastic bent you really miss out the sense of it. Listen to verse 8. He says, already you have all you want. Already, sounds like my mother talking to me. He says already you've become rich. Without us you've become kings. And with that you did reign so that we might share the rule with you for I think God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. Which is interesting isn't it? Which is actually true. The apostles did become spectacles to the world but here he's saying we became spectacles to not only the world but to the angels; to the natural and the supernatural is what he is saying. We are fools for Christ but you are wise, Corinthians in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. Do you hear the sarcasm that is just playing out? They're full of themselves. That's basically what he's saying. He's scolding them. He's scolding them for their behavior.

Now, remember. What did I tell you is the key to understanding the passage? The key to understanding the passage is a series of contrasts, right? So, Paul is contrasting the attitude and the actions of the teachers against the attitude and the actions of the Corinthians and he's about ready to make that switch again so as we move into this next phase, verses 11 through 13 we see the apostle's conduct. This section also, by the way is laced with irony. Just listen to it.

Beginning in verse 11. I'll explain as we go. To the present hour we, the leaders, the apostles, teachers. To the present hour we hunger and thirst. Which was true. Most leaders of the early church, most apostles, most disciples who were teachers were itinerant. In other words, they went from place to place because they were often forced out of an area by the Jewish synagogue leaders. They were forced out to go to the next region to carry the Gospel. By the way, that's how the Gospel began to spread so rapidly around Asia Minor. Persecution was the flame that ignited, really this fervency that happened like a spread all throughout Asia Minor. He says, we were hungry, we were thirsty. We didn't have much food. We were always looking for food. We were poorly dressed.

Interestingly, Paul probably used to be exquisitely dressed as a Pharisee with his robes, the adornment that was given to him. When he chose to follow Christ he gave that system of

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belief up and he was forced to go back to just common dress. He says we were buffeted which literally means fisted. They were always in fights. They were always being persecuted. They were homeless. It doesn't necessarily mean that they didn't have a home. It means that they didn't stay in one place for long.

We labored. We worked with our hands. Now remember Paul is a highly educated man. He would have normally been taken care of by the temple, by the temple tasks. He would have never had to really physically work another day in his life. But, all Jewish boys as they were moving from the education system those who thought could go on for higher education still had to learn a trade – usually their father's trade and that's exactly the thing that Paul's referring to. I had to labor with my hands. I had to go back to my trade work. And what do we know what his trade work was? Look in the book of Acts. He was a tent maker. So he works with his hands. Nothing wrong with that.

He says when we were reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endured; when slandered, we entreat. I like this because do you know what slander means? Slander in the scriptures is that your words were taken and were turned and used against you. Have you ever had that happen? Someone takes your words, turned them around and uses them against you? Isn't that just very personal? And don't you want to lash out and attach? Well, notice what Paul says. He says when that happens to us we entreat. Do you know what that means? It means to call forth comfort. When people were hurting us we were calling to comfort those very people. Think about the character and the conduct. It was really displayed before the Corinthians.

It says we have become and are still like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. A great word picture – scum of the world, refuse. Think of it as the debris, the dirt that is swept up on your floor and you sweep into a dustpan what's left over as you've been cleaning your home. This is what you pull together in that last pile. He says this is what we're like.

Now, some of you look at this and you might be thinking, Paul needs a major self-esteem makeover. He's really suffering here but don't miss the point. Paul is saying my strength is no longer in myself. In fact, I don't even trust myself because I understand how much I have fought, how sinful I've become. And without the righteousness of Christ I'm embedded in depravity. He says I don't even trust that. I don't find strength in myself. I find it in Christ.

Now, remember I told you the whole chapter is dealing with contrast. This is the greatest contrast that we're seeing. The Corinthians thought that they had everything in themselves. They were kings. Paul understood that he had nothing in himself. Did you catch that? The Corinthians thought that they had everything in themselves. They were puffed up with pride. Paul knew he had nothing in of himself. So, what does that make Paul? Teachable? Thankful? Humble? What a comparison to the Corinthians who were judging, evaluating

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their leaders, deciding which one they wanted to follow; deciding which one that they wanted to listen to. I mean, think about that.

Now, come out of the 1st Century into the 21st Century. What did I tell you this text would force you to do? Forces you to look at yourself, doesn't it? It's like a mirror. It's not easy actually to look at this chapter because you know what this chapter does specifically? It leaves us to look at our response to who are leaders are and who teach us. Now, let that sink in for a moment. If you want to know how can I apply this text you just have to ask one question and it's a question you ask to yourself. You ask the question – does my favor for one teacher over another keep me from hearing from God through the less favored teacher? Let me say that again. Does my favor for one teacher over another keep me from hearing from God from the less favored teacher? The Corinthian problem was that they had so narrowed their scope of who they would follow and who they would listen to, who they would learn from that it was causing these factions within the church. Paul called them out and said you're arrogant which is another way of saying you're immature. What you should really be doing is coming together as a group of believers, Corinthians and you should be hungering and thirsting to know the Word of God. And if you hunger and you thirst to know the Word of God it really doesn't matter who stands before you to teach it because that man is God's gift to you to reveal God's Word to you.

You see how easy this is to jump past all those centuries into modern day? We all have our favorites. We all have those who we gravitate towards. There's nothing wrong with that but when we close down our mind and say but I can only learn or I'll only want to we shut down the Spirit of God and we really exhibit a spirit of immaturity. Let us be a church that hungers, thirsts for the Word of God and that whatever man God brings before us to teach us the Word of God, once our open hearts say I'm not going to slip into the Corinthian pride problem but I'm going to sit here teachable. I'm going to sit here with a sense of thanksgiving, humble to hear the Word of God given to me. Amen? Let's pray about that.