

Apostle Paul's attitude toward his opponents

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Corinthians Explained

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Congregation, next week we hope to begin the Advent time. Four Sundays before Christmas, we usually preach on the coming of the Savior, of the Lord Jesus Christ. So next week, I cannot preach on 1 Corinthians 4 and for a while I cannot, so I would like to yet cover the whole chapter, yet cover the verses we have not talked about yet in 1 Corinthians 4, and I think it is possible. I don't think that it's too much, so this morning we hope to deal with the verses 6 through 21. But let me just read you one verse, verse 8,

8 Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us:
and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

So far.

"The Apostle Paul's attitude toward his opponents." You know, the Apostle Paul had enemies and opponents and people not agreeing with him, and how did he approach them? What was his attitude? Three thoughts. In the first place, Paul encourages humility, that's in verses 6, 7 and 8. Encouraging humility. Secondly, the Apostle Paul confesses his dedication in verses 9 through 13. In spite of all the opposition and problems and persecution and nakedness and you name it, he is still dedicated. In the third place, Paul expresses his love in verses 14 through 21. He still loves that people, loves that congregation and he cares for them deeply. So Paul's attitude toward his opponents: Paul encourages humility, Paul confesses his dedication, and Paul expresses his love.

Congregation, young people, this might be a little bit difficult chapter so I have to simplify it and first show you a few things that draw the attention so that you are able to understand the context better. So let us talk about sarcasm first. Do you see the sarcasm in this chapter? I will show you. What is sarcasm? Sarcasm is not only mockery like they mocked the Lord Jesus and said, "Save thyself! He has saved others, save thyself!" That's mockery. But there is also sarcasm and sarcasm is usually saying something, saying something but you really mean the opposite. So you walk in a room and it is really messy and clothes and books and things everywhere, you walk in and your mother says, "You are really on top of things." But you're not, that's sarcasm. And maybe she smiles, and maybe she means it serious, but it's sarcasm. Maybe it sounds funny, maybe it sounds serious, "You are really on top of things." This depends on how she looks and the

intonation of the voice. That's sarcasm, you say something and you mean the opposite. You mean, It's such chaos, your room. You're not on top of things."

So the Apostle Paul also uses that method and you have to be careful with that, with sarcasm. You can easily hurt people like that. And his purpose is, of course, not to hurt and not contend and not to inflict pain but he wants them to realize things. He wants to instruct them and that's why he says in verse 8, "Now," today, "ye are full." He means the opposite. "Now ye are rich." Yeah, you're rich, right? "Ye have reigned as kings without us." So the Apostle Paul uses sacred sarcasm to teach the people and especially false teachers in Corinth about the fact that they themselves feel so full. "Now you are full. That's your experience. You are full and you're not only full, you're rich. You're kings." There is even a climax in verse 8, "Full. No, rich. No, a king."

So the Apostle Paul means the opposite. He means to say, "You aren't. You're so poor. You are not rich. You are not full. Ye have not reigned as kings without us." Without us. And the Apostle Paul says, "I wish it was true. I wish you were rich. I wish you were full. I wish you would reign as kings because if you would reign as kings, then I would reign with you because reigning as kings is when the Lord Jesus returns. So now you're full, now you're rich, ye have reigned as kings without us, but not really. And I would to God ye did reign." Do you see that? "I would to God, I wish of God that you would reign, so that we also might reign with you. You are reigning without us in your riches, not me, not connected to me. You are reigning," tongue-in-cheek, "you are reigning as kings without us, but I wish and I would to God that ye did reign, that so we also might reign with you."

So the Apostle Paul expresses also a desire, a desire that they will reign with Christ in the future because some day it will come, right? The Apostle Paul speaks in verse 8, at the end of verse 8 about the Second Coming of Christ like he did before in verse 5, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God." He speaks often about the Second Coming of Christ so in verse 8 he says, "I desire of God that you do reign, that you may belong to that kingdom of God and reign as kings yourself and have a crown on your head, but all of God's children will be reigning, all God's children will be kings, and then I will be with you and we will be together. Because now you are reigning without us here, meaning reigning without us in your pride, now you're so full, meaning that really you are so rich, meaning you have reigned as kings without us, not really as kings but, yes, without us, but I wish we would be connecting and together for the throne, and would to God that ye did reign because that would mean that we also might reign with you."

So think of the time, think of that time in the future. Who knows how quick it can come that God's children will reign with Christ on a new earth and all God's children will be kings. They all will be kings, and they will all have a crown on their head, and they will all take the crown off and will all cast the crown before the throne and say, "Thou art the glory and thou art the honor."

So the Apostle Paul encourages humility, that was in verses 6, 7 and 8, but now all we've talked about is verse 8, so now we have to go back, right? Verse 6, "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes." What is he talking about? "These things," what things, "these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos." He has used the figure, right? That's what he says and he has applied the figure, he has applied the picture to himself. He is referring to the previous verse. He says, "Have I not been talking about an under-rower, a minister? Have I not been talking about a steward who owns nothing but is just responsible for everything in the house and on the farm? Well, I use that figure, I use those examples of a minister and a steward for myself and for Apollos so you would understand that, for your sakes."

"These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn," that you might learn, "that you might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written." Not to think of man above that which is written. Written? Well, you should look it up in a concordance, written. Written. When the Apostle Paul speaks about "written," then he means the Bible. Then he means, "I have read this in the word of God, that ye might not learn in us not to think of men above that which is written." Because it is written in the word that we are nothing. It's written in the word that we really depend upon the Lord. We read in the word verses like Job 25:6. May that be also our insight and our experience, Job 25:6, "How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?" A worm in the ground cannot even lift himself up, right? He cannot stand straight. He can only be on the ground. So that's what is written, so don't ever think of people more than worms. These worms, do you know what? Pastors and elders and deacons and the whole congregation is worms in the eyes of God. They're just nothing. "How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?"

We read about it in Psalm 8. It is written, "What is man," what is man, "that thou art mindful of him," why would the Lord even think of people? "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" That's unreal that God is visiting worms.

Psalm 144, "LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him!" That the Lord even notices and pays attention and knows that, that he takes knowledge of man. That's unreal. "LORD, what is man. We don't understand that that high majesty of God is looking down and taking notice and knows such small creatures."

So, "these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another." Being puffed up. The original word speaks about being puffed up, about inflated, about bloating, about being big. So don't be puffed up like a peacock, showing all the feathers. Puffed up, that you might learn in us not to think of men or yourself, of pastors, of your own teachers. Nobody is excluded,

that you might learn in us, by us, not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one another.

You know, that is one of the main things in the Bible, humility, the realization that we are worms and that God looks on those worms, fallen worms, sinful worms. Not only dust and ashes, small and insignificant but fallen creatures. And that's the wonder in the gospel, that the Lord Jesus has come to save sinful worms, that the almighty one in the heavens, the God Almighty, has sent his only Son and that he became a worm himself. "I'm a worm. I'm no man." And he humbled himself to such a low place and took upon himself the form of a servant, and he did not care about his reputation, became a man of no reputation and he bowed so deep and he gave himself to his Father. A worm and no man.

You know, when the Lord gives life to a soul, when the Lord speaks sense into someone's mind in a saving way, he makes you feel very small. You become a worm. You become unworthy of life. You understand that all those afflictions come over you because, "Who am I?" And you feel something like, "Who can stay the hand of God?" And who can say in a fancy way, who can say, "What does thou? What doest thou, Lord?" You know, that might be the case nowadays, right, when you sometimes say, "What is the Lord doing? I don't like this anymore. I can't handle this anymore. I'm so lowly. I'm upset." Oh, may the Lord give in the homes in some sense and manner and in our workplaces and in the church, may God give us that humility of being nothing, not being puffed up. And also in a time of stress like nowadays, there's lots of stress, extra stress in families and on marriages, it is so important that we are humble because if we are not humble, we are not only stressed out, we can get really angry and that anger is looking for a way out, and we start getting offensive and hard on people because we feel that our desires are not met, our needs are not met.

So when the Lord gives life to a soul, the Lord takes away that pride and breaks the heart and gives true humility and real meekness. Obadiah 1:4, "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle," you see, children, do you see the eagle flying with his big wings? "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle," you figure, eagles, right, not just a sparrow, an eagle. "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD." You know, you can have the highest thought of self and think, "I'm an eagle," and the Lord will just bring you down. It's conversion. And yet even after that, even the disciples, right, were not always so humble, and also the people in Corinth, God's people were not so humble. The Apostle Paul does not write them off and say, "You know nothing about those things. You have never become converted. You are just in your sins yet." He doesn't say that. He believes that many are those people, that even God's people can be so proud again.

Note the disciples said to the Lord Jesus in Mark 10, "They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory." So to the disciples, they said, you know, "Can we have that special place at the right and left hand?" And we read in Revelation 3 in the epistle to the Laodiceans, "Because thou

sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

So it is much better to be meek. The Apostle Paul in verses 6 through 9 speaks about and encourages meekness. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways. Have you been made meek? Have you been made brokenhearted? Not only brokenhearted because of the consequence of sin and the loss of dear ones that can also break your heart, right, get real sadness, but a broken heart in the Bible means more being humbled, your self-righteousness is being taken away, you're just a broken man in a spiritual sense, unworthy of life. That's how the Lord works so that Christ can be exalted, the Lord Jesus may become valuable, that he so becomes precious.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me," the Lord Jesus said, "because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek." Good tidings, yes, to the meek. Not that they deserve it but the Lord knows that meek people, they need it. "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

Verse 7, "For who maketh thee to differ from another?" Who do you think you are? Are you different? You're different from the unconverted and there may be differences in gifts in the congregation, but "who maketh thee to differ from another," deep down you're the same, "and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" All you have, did you receive grace, really? Did you receive some gifts? Now don't boast because those gifts are gifts. "Now if thou didst receive it," didst receive them, "why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" If you have only received it, realize it's only received, only a gift, it's not from your side and not from your heart.

So the apostle encourages humility and uses, coming back to verse 8, that holy sarcasm, Now you're full, now you're rich, you have reigned as kings without us. Not really, and I would to God." You know, that's Old English, "and I would to God," I desire, I really desire, I really hope. I desire to God, "that ye did reign and that we also might reign with you," together. So he expresses at the end of this first section a desire for God and a desire for unity and fellowship in the congregations, to be together. "That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you that ye also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."

So ask for that humility. I need that. You need it. You need it in this special time. You need it in your marriage. Your marriage would be so much better if we have more of that humility. In church, in school, in some manner everywhere we need humility. Humility. Paul encourages humility. Let's go to the second thought. Paul confesses his dedication, verses 9 through 13.

Let me again do the same thing and just draw your attention. I see a Roman General from the army, a General coming home after a war. And they won. They conquered the enemy. And I see a procession, a long procession entering into the city of Rome, for example. At first the General at the head of things, and then his army, all his soldiers marching, and

then the booty, all that they took together, took along, the artifacts and the gold and the silver and the cattle, and then in the back the prisoners of war. So the General, the army, the booty, the prisoners of war all in chains with their hands together and just marching along. And then I see people in the central of the street laughing and ridiculing those people and throwing things, stones and fruits at them, and ridiculing them. They're giving them a hard time, those prisoners of war. And those prisoners of war, they probably will be killed in the arena, in the theater, because they will be thrown before the wild animals and be devoured and people like it. That's what I see in those words. I see that procession. I see those prisoners of war in the back and that's how the Apostle Paul feels. The Apostle Paul feels like in the back, in the tail of this procession and people just throwing things at them, and then they must die afterward.

You say, "Well, I didn't see that in the Bible. I didn't read it in this piece." Yes, you did. Verse 9, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death," do you see that, "for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake." So the Apostle Paul is honest about it and the Apostle Paul says, "My life is a life of being threatened, of being persecuted, of being taken prisoner, and I have experienced so many things in my life. It's not always easy." You know, when we think about the Apostle Paul's ministry, you almost feel ashamed. You know, I live [unintelligible]. I'm healthy. There is peace in the congregation and I'm not persecuted and I'm not stoned and I don't feel in the back of the procession people throwing things at me. Not at all. But he feels that way, and the Apostle Paul, his whole life was like that. His whole life was being in one city and fleeing to another one, and always under stress and having to work with his own hands because of lack of funds, and you name it. And yet so dedicated. He didn't say, "I must quit." He didn't say, "Well, the Lord is not with me." He didn't say, "Well, you know, I'd like an easier time. I'll take another job." He was so dedicated. There was so much love in his heart.

"For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death," do you see them, "for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels," you probably have to read "as to men." So for people and for angels, so he kind of indicated angels see it happening as well, right? Angels. Angels rejoice, right, when sinners are converted? And angels, I cannot make anything else of it, angels see it, that God's people are persecuted.

Verse 10, "We are fools for Christ's sake." Really? Does he meant that or is it again sarcasm? Well, that's how people view him, right? Because they say, "You are a fool." Because those people in Corinth, they thought if you work with your own hands, that's kind of the work of a slave, and to be in such circumstances, that's foolish. So the Apostle Paul also agreed with that and said, "You know, in that sense, we are fools but I also desire to be a fool. Just look at me as a fool, that's fine, for Christ's sake. Just think of me, whatever you think, we are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ. That's what you think, right?" Sarcasm. "We are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace," you're homeless, "And labour, working with our own hands," and people look down on that, "being reviled, we bless; being

persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." You know, he feels like refuse, he feels like garbage, he feels like the scraps, he feels, "We are the filth. We are the filth of the world." You know, he feels kind of they are God's servants and God's people, but here on earth it looks like the other way. God's people other people regard the least.

The churches are looked down upon in that culture. You know, there was a time that people looked up to people that go to church. You know, they have ethics and they work hard and they are nice people, but the culture is changing among us as well, and more of the Christians will end up in prison, I am sure, and they will be looked down upon because they dare to disagree with abortion, and they dare to disagree with gender issues, and sexual issues, and that they are just looked down upon. They are the refuse, the garbage of this world. Count on it. Hungry. Thirsty Naked. Laboring. Working. Persecuted. Reviled. Defamed. But although they do that to us, although the government and whoever just puts pressure on us and this marginalizing the church, we are reviled, we bless, right? Reviled, we bless. And if persecuted, we suffer it. We suffer it. Do you know I did not realize this when I prepared this, that this is so applicable. I just see it now.

So let us bury our attitude today also in the time we live in, also in the time that we may not gather so far in the churches, they say. But reviled, now maybe not really but, you know, it looks like. Being reviled but we bless them. We pray for them and we bless them. We are kind to them. Be kind to them. Being persecuted, we suffer. Being defamed, defamed, we entreat, we preach, we are good to them. We are made as filth of the world, and are as of the offscouring of all things unto this day, it's fine. Let them say that. Let them do that.

So that's all so biblical, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities and reproaches in necessities, in persecutions. I take pleasure in that. I take pleasure in them for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, I am strong." What's behind that, do you know, children, young people? How can the Apostle Paul with such a life of being buffeted and persecuted and being homeless and you name it, how can he be so kind? How can he be so encouraging? Why can he be so loving?

So there must be a hidden source from where he gets his energy and joy. Yes. He also writes about that in 2 Corinthians 12, about that thorn, right, thorn in the flesh? That's similar. How could he handle that? How could he handle that sharpness and that pain, whatever it means, in his flesh? "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, gladly, "therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." So his grace is sufficient for him. That's that hidden source of love and strength and energy and joy and comfort. Christ is sufficient to him. God's grace.

So with God's grace he can be in prison, and with God's grace the people can yell at him and ridicule him and make him a prisoner of war and whatever they want to do to him. He can yet smile. He can yet glory. He can take it. Now I hope you can take it as well,

whatever is happening to you. I hope you can take it. It will be hard for children, for people, for married ones, for single ones, for widows, for widowers, for all of us, it can be hard to just take it, to take that cross joyfully, to joyfully bear your cross because of that grace of Christ. It's sufficient for me. That's real Christianity, of being nothing but finding your strength in another, and that's also in ministry, right? Also in school and wherever you are. "This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD." And that's the way the Lord comforts, that's the way the Lord makes it well, by letting sinners treasure Christ.

So, "Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him." They reviled the Lord Jesus as well. They reviled him. But when he was reviled, he reviled not again. He did not revile back. When he suffered, he threatened not. Even did not threaten, no. But committed himself to him that judges righteously. That's his life. How committed are we as Christians? As churches? Do we fear persecution? Do we keep our mouth closed? You are regarded more and more as the filth of the earth. It's getting closer. And yet we still [unintelligible]. And yet the Apostle Paul is dedicated. May we have that same dedication.

Going to the third thought: Paul expresses his love. First we sing.

Congregation, you would think that the Apostle Paul is kind of mad, so upset with the people of Corinth and hard on them, and ridiculing them and using sarcasm. No. It is sacred sarcasm. It's not to shame them. It's not to hurt them. It's not contempt. It's love. So he writes in verse 14, "I write not these things to shame you," do you see that, "but as my beloved sons I warn you." So the people opposing him and being hard on him, he said, "I love you. I don't want to shame you. You are my beloved sons."

"For though ye have ten thousand instructors," he says paidagogos, not paidagogy. Little children, "even if you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers." He says, "I'm your father." How is he their father? Because, "in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. When I was in your area, I preached the word of God and the Lord used it as an instrument in his hands, and I was at your cradle. I saw you born. I saw you as little babies. I know you're growing up. I'm still your father. You can have many instructors and people teaching you, but I'm your father. I was at your cradle. I witnessed your birth by the gospel. So did you forget?"

"For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Through the word. And especially the gospel, that good message. The gospel. It says ho euangelion, the good message, the good tidings. "I have begotten you through the good tidings. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me." Now he is contradicting himself, isn't he, because the one said, "I follow the Apostle Paul and I follow Apollos and I follow Cephas," and now the Apostle Paul says, "You have to follow me." He said before, "Don't follow people because it is written that nobody has that authority." He does not mean follow me

personally, don't be a fan of me, but follow me in my example. Follow me in humility. Follow me in dedication. Follow me in the gifts the Lord has given me.

"For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church." Lots of little things in verse 17. I like that verse. Timotheus or Timothy, who is my beloved son. The Apostle Paul is single, right? He had no children but he was at the cradle and he had begotten people in Christ. And he also has kind of an adopted spiritual son, Timothy or Timotheus, that's the same. So he was a father to him. There was a bond between them. He taught him. He instructed him. There was a spiritual connection there. Do you have spiritual connection with people? Younger ones? Older ones? Each other in your marriage? Children? Parents?

"Who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord." Oh, what a joy to have such friends, friends in the Lord, friends in Christ. And he will come and "shall bring you into remembrance of my ways because you have to remind of it, you have forgotten things." So he's talking to God's people, how God's people can forget things and the Apostle Paul says, "I have sent you Timothy, my beloved son in Christ, to remind you, to bring those things back into your memory, who shall bring you into remembrance." Keep in mind also, people of God, that we have to be reminded time and again of many things because we fall back and there is lack of insight and slacking off. "Who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ." That's crucial, right, the ways which be in Christ. God's ways. Christ's ways of humility in particular. "As I teach everywhere in every church."

So the Apostle Paul says, "I preach only one gospel, wherever it is, what time it is. If I am in Asia or in Egypt or in Israel or Nigeria or in North America, in the Netherlands, the gospel is the same everywhere. The same people." I remember that so well when I visited for the first time [unintelligible] many years ago as a Dutch minister and we had meetings, and we had a consistory together, and some told of their conversion in the house of one of the elders. And I felt that same work of God is here. I felt for the first time so far away from home from the Netherlands, and all the way in North America, and the same gospel and that same work of the Spirit. It's ever the same and that connects, right? As I teach everywhere in every church.

Then he goes back in verse 18, "Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I am coming. So maybe you don't like me to come. But I will come to you shortly," verse 19, those were his plans anyway, "if the Lord will," now we can have intentions but the Lord can stop us, "and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power." Some people have the speech but not the power. For some people he might here focus on the false teachers. They can talk so well and just beautiful things to say, but the power is not there.

"Not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." In power, meaning the Holy Spirit, right? "What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?" I think

"spirit" needs to be printed with a capital. In my Bible it does not. In the original language, there are no capitals so I'm not blaming anyone. "What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?" How do I, why do I say that? Well, we read about the spirit of truth and the spirit of adoption and the spirit of wisdom, so "the spirit of" always means the Spirit himself. He is the Spirit of truth and he is the Spirit of meekness. Meekness comes from him and from that side.

So the Apostle Paul has a forgiving attitude. Paul's attitude towards his opponents, Paul encourages humility, especially that humility of Christ. "Learn from me as I am humble and meek of heart," as the Lord Jesus showed. Paul confesses his dedication, his dedication. In spite of all the trouble he experiences, he just feels his calling and this love in his heart. Paul expresses love. "I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you."

Congregation, bring this to the Lord in prayer and ask yourself the question: do you know those things? What do you know of that humility? That brokenness of being nothing? Being a worm. Being a worm that cannot lift itself up. Being a worm that is guilty. A worm that is willing to be stepped on. How would you feel if you, for Christ's sake, are in the position in the back and you will be killed and people throw things at you? Paul expresses his love even to them that oppose him. Amen.