

## Message #17

## I Corinthians 4:6-17

The Corinthians were proud of their worldly wisdom, of their wealth and of their success and they were equating all of that with spiritual success and prosperity.

**GOD'S CHURCH NEEDS TO BE REMINDED THAT MENTAL, NUMERICAL, AND FINANCIAL SUCCESS AND PROSPERITY ARE NOT THE SAME AS SPIRITUAL SUCCESS AND PROSPERITY AS CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED BY THE LIVES OF THE APOSTLES.**

A key word and a key problem in Corinth, which clearly shows up in this context and all throughout the book is the problem of arrogance (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4). The word literally means to blow up or inflate. The present tense indicates this was a continual problem for the Corinthians. In other words, the Corinthians were continually inflating their spirituality by claiming that their wisdom and wealth were signs of great blessings, signs of spiritual prosperity.

Paul wanted the church to realize that their mental and physical success and prosperity did not mean they were spiritually successful and prosperous.

**APPEAL #1** – The appeal of a direct statement. 4:6

The Christian who exalts himself above other Christians and uses his intellectual or financial success as a basis for judgment is one who is as carnal as the Corinthians. Those who arrogantly do such things are in clear violation of direct statements of the Word of God.

The key to an impacting spiritual life is to dedicate one's self to understanding and applying what is written. Carnality is directly related to the Word of God. Those who are carnal know very little of what God put in writing (i.e. 3:1-3), but they love to theorize, spiritualize and project themselves as spiritual winners. Carnal people love discussion, they love debate, they love to make judgments but they do not love to apply the written Word of God to their own lives.

**APPEAL #2** – The appeal of Divine sovereignty. 4:7

The conjunction “for,” which begins **verse 7**, lists a series of reasons why people in the church should not be arrogant and puffed up against other believers.

**Question #1** - Who gave you your superiority? 4:7a

The word “superiority” is one that means to be in such a superior position that one can make discriminating and discerning judgments as an arbitrator.

As I see it, in the original, Paul is asking “Who made you judge?” “Who put you in charge of judgment?”

**Question #2** - What do you have that you did not receive? **4:7b**

Paul, in asking this question, is making a very Calvinistic assumption, namely, everything you have has been given to you by God.

**Question #3** - Why do you boast as though you did not receive it? **4:7c**

They loved to elevate themselves and they had forgotten that everything they were and everything they had came from the gracious hands of a Sovereign God.

Spiritual people develop the mindset that everything they have has come from God.

**APPEAL #3** – The appeal of apostolic example. **4:8-13**

The Corinthians had a very high opinion of themselves. They viewed themselves as being already filled, totally satiated (**4:8a**), they viewed themselves as already rich, very wealthy (**4:8b**) and they viewed themselves as kings, reigning royalty (**4:8c**).

Some were so proud that they apparently were even claiming they had arrived at this special elevated level without the help of any apostle like Paul (i.e. **4:8**, 18).

When people in a church think they can become spiritual giants all by themselves without the help of those who have been called and gifted by God, they are thinking like the carnal Corinthians.

**Contrast #1** - The Status Contrast. **4:9**

The Corinthians saw themselves as first on God's list of great saints because of their success. So Paul says we apostles must be last on God's list because we don't seem to have the success and status of you Corinthians; in fact, we are theatrical spectacles being put to death for our faith.

**Contrast #2** - The Intellectual Contrast. **4:10a**

They saw themselves as very wise, skilled and prudent in the things of God. Paul says we apostles, on the other hand, appear to be fools for Christ's sake.

**Contrast #3** - The Strength Contrast. **4:10b**

One cannot help but be reminded of the words of our Lord: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for in the same way their fathers used to treat the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). The world saw the Corinthians as strong, distinguished people and they saw the apostles as weak men without honor. One's own estimation of one's self, the world's estimation of one's self may be entirely different than God's estimation of one's self.

**Contrast #4** - The Physical Contrast. **4:11-12a**

- (Blessing #1) - At times the apostles did not have enough food. **4:11a**
- (Blessing #2) - At times the apostles did not have enough drink. **4:11b**
- (Blessing #3) - At times the apostles did not have good clothing. **4:11c**
- (Blessing #4) - At times the apostles were physically mistreated. **4:11d**
- (Blessing #5) - At times the apostles did not have a house. **4:11e**
- (Blessing #6) - At times the apostles had to work as an ordinary laborer. **4:12a**

**Contrast #5** - The Reaction Contrast. **4:12b-13a**

We can tell much about our spiritual condition by our reaction to adverse criticism.

**Contrast #6** - The Social Contrast. **4:13b**

Apostles were viewed as the scum of the world and as the dregs of all things. That word “dreg” means the apostles were considered to be those who should be wiped off the earth.

**APPEAL #4** – The appeal of personal concern. **4:14-17**

**Way #1** - Through his fatherly writing. **4:14-15**

Notice carefully what can change a person; the admonitions found in the writings of God.

**Way #2** - Through his personal example. **4:16**

The word “imitate” means Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to mimic him. He was willing to make sacrifices for God and was willing to put up with all types of criticisms and hardships for the work of God. Paul did not continually boast about his apostolic gift; in fact, he was humbled by the fact that God gave him this gift (I Cor. 15:9).

**Way #3** - Through his personal son. **4:17**

Paul was so concerned about this church that he was willing to send his own son in the faith, Timothy, to the church to help straighten it out.

Are we a success in our sight or God's?