

1 Corinthians 4:6-8 Puffed Up Falls Ch. AM 2/25/2024

Reading this passage is like listening to someone near us - talk on the phone, so that all we can hear is one-half of the conversation. We are not sure to whom he is talking, and what is the topic being discussed. However, the person on the other end of the phone knows.

Here we read what Paul is saying, but we don't know the exact situation of the church in Corinth. But the church in Corinth knew! When they read it, they knew exactly what was being referred to, and about whom.

And the kicker is – all of this was intentional by God the Holy Spirit for two audiences to each get what is needed. Audience 1 is the church in Corinth, the first to receive this letter. Audience 2 is all later readers of this letter, without knowledge of Corinth's details. We don't need those details.

We are given this letter as part of the perfect Scriptures, of what to believe, and how to live. This is perfect as is, for God to give us the Bible this way.

The point is clear, which is...

The damage from being puffed up with pride, is the sins that flow from it.

1. Do not go beyond what is written, for no person is better. (v.6)

Verse 6, *“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.”*

The phrase *“all these things”* that Paul had applied to himself and Apollos, refers back to verses 1-5, where Paul wrote about church leadership. Why had Paul applied that to himself and Apollos? For the benefit of the believers getting this letter. The ones that Paul was most focused on were the someone's and the anyone's referenced back in chapter 3:10, who were building on what Paul had built. Since Paul could take the teaching of this letter and apply it to Paul, then they could be expected to take the teaching of this letter and apply it to any leader

in the church in Corinth. Paul was encouraging them to use this required test on any current and future leader – according to verse 2 - is he found to be faithful? Is he a servant of Christ (vs. 1)? Is he a steward of the mysteries of Christ (vs.1)?

What better way to find out than by asking the main question this way, according to verse 6 here. Have the Corinthians learned one fundamental thing – which is what? Have they learned to **not go beyond what is written in Scripture?** In other words, have the Corinthians insisted of all of their leaders post-Paul, after-Paul, following-Paul, after the foundation had been built, that every new leader building on that foundation must not go beyond what is written in Scripture? To say it another way, with the language of (3:17), were any of the leaders in Corinth in danger of saying or doing destructive things to God’s temple?

So here in verse 6 Paul expected the church to learned from the example of the apostles not to exceed the Scriptural standard for church leaders. Church leaders were expected to be faithful, but not perfect. The believers were not to think of their leaders more highly than the Bible authorized Christians to think of their leaders. What does God say about this? Jeremiah 9:23-24, “*Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord...”* Church leaders are expected to know God, and to know God as Lord, and to follow all of the Lord’s instructions in His Word, and not to add to or subtract from those instructions of the Lord.

The believers in Corinth had become proud of their connection to one person - either to Paul or to Apollos or Peter. These various connections - to use the language of verse 6, *being in favor of one against another* – was precisely what had led their church to divisions and strife. But here Paul was revealing that it all had started with treating church leaders too highly in the first place! Remember

what Paul wrote in the previous paragraph! Apostles were servants – servants of Christ. The followers of Paul lifted themselves over the followers of Apollos, and the followers of Apollos thought of themselves as better than the followers of Peter, and so on. To be above others, is to be against others. This is truth that we know inherently. The Packers are better than the Bears, so Packer fans are against the Bears. To be above others, is to be against others. That is, the Corinthian followers of Paul thought Paul was above Peter, so they had developed a hostile attitude towards the Corinthian followers of Peter. Some zeal for Christian teachers is certainly normal, but as soon as it goes too far, we can develop hostility toward other teachers, and that is where trouble enters!

How do we correct this? We return to a Scriptural standard. What is written by God about it? What is written is the gospel of Christ crucified and risen again. We do not go beyond that. We never graduate from that. We stay focused on that. In other words, do not invent a Christ PLUS equation. Example: Christ plus Apollos. Adding to the cross, and expecting something else also in addition, creates problems. The work of Christ is complete – He died and rose again. We do not go beyond that, and we do not supplement with a second-stage wisdom-based spirituality. We do not adopt a new two-stage process: first stage is the cross, and the second stage is some extra wisdom needed that only my guy Apollos brings. No.

Not going beyond what is written is believing that there is not some special category that we are in, in which we can follow a different set of instructions.

Three more times Paul uses this same word for “*puffed up*.” Total 4 times.

In 1 Cor 5:2, the people to whom Paul was writing were arrogant, or puffed up, they were inflated with complacency about their sins of immorality.

In 1 Cor. 8:1, it is knowledge which puffs up, in contrast to love which builds up.

In 1 Cor 13:4, love is not arrogant and love is not puffed up.

The image for puffed up is of a pair of bellows. A bellows is an ironworker's tool, used to make a fire hotter. When toolmakers in Corinth needed to make the fire hot enough to work on the iron of their tools, they used a device to make the fire hotter, called a bellows. We call it a pair of scissors because it has two parts in one tool. Similarly a pair of bellows had two handles attached to a hinge, holding both sides of a large air bag that when squeezed, would give out a strong blast of air on the fire. That makes the fire hotter.

To be puffed up is to be the person who, when there was a disagreement in the church in Corinth, he would blow on the disagreement to make it hotter. Paul wrote here in verse 6, *“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.”*

Every single thing ought not to be divisive. SI – when my children were in elementary school, we bought and opened a bag of Christmas M&M's, and one of my children separated the green candies from the red candies. I said what are you doing? The child said “War.” If even a young child's candy can apparently be found to take sides in war, we human beings can be found to take sides in conflict, if we are puffed up with ourselves. Green candy team says green candy is better than red candy. Meanwhile red candy team says red candy is better than green candy.

One Christian says church leaders who side with author xyz are better than church leaders who side with author abc. Take that disagreement and blow on it, and it becomes hotter and hotter. Do not go beyond what is written, for no person is better than another.

2. Do not boast, for everything we have, was received from God. (v. 7)

Verse 7, *“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?"

Who goes around comparing? Who makes one different from another?

Maybe Apollos or Paul were viewed as better presenters or had better content? Maybe Peter was viewed as better, because Jesus Himself had told Peter to go feed My lambs? All such comparing is harmful and divisive.

Here Paul was expounding on the truth of chapter 3:23, that we are all "*Christ's, and Christ is God's.*" We are one. We are on the same team. We can appreciate all 3 - Apollos, and Paul, and Peter. We don't have to compete!

SI - A young frog set out on his first adventure away from home. As he came out of the pond he saw a large ox grazing in a field. Having never before seen such a creature, he hopped excitedly back to his father, the bullfrog, and said, "I have just seen the biggest frog in the world!

"Humph!" said the Daddy bullfrog, "Was this other bullfrog as big as me?" and Daddy Bullfrog puffed himself up.

"Oh, much bigger than that!" said the little frog.

"Was he THIS big," said the bullfrog, puffing himself up even larger.

"Much, much bigger than you!" said the little frog.

"Ridiculous!" said Daddy bullfrog, who fancied himself much more important than he was. "He couldn't be bigger than me! I'm the oldest frog in the pond. I was here first! Was he bigger than THIS?" He puffed and puffed himself up so much...he burst!

Do not boast, because everything we have, we received from God. God made both the frog and the ox. God made both the policeman and the motorist, God made both the teacher and the student, both the doctor and the patient.

Why did God give the gifts across the farm, the gifts across the workforce, the gifts across the sports arena, and the gifts across the church? Was it for various recipients to each find random reasons to gloat? No. It was to bring joy to all.

When we have received gifts, why do we boast? Paul knows why we boast, but Paul is asking us the question, so that we realize the answer! Because our hearts are prideful. I won't actually ask you to raise your hand and repeat after me, but you can pretend, okay? Pretend you are saying this: 'I sometimes boast, because my heart is prideful. I sometimes compare, because my heart is prideful.' The church in Corinth needed to stop comparing and complaining, and gloating and bragging, and feeling intimidated, and feeling left out. How? They needed to stop getting joy from gifts and instead get their joy from Christ the Giver. Everything they had, they received from Christ. Same for us.

3. Do not settle in here, for the best is yet to come. (v.8)

Verse 8, *“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!”*

Here Paul uses written irony.

Two things stand out in the ancient mindset, that Paul is pointing out here.

1) God's heavenly Kingdom arrived. The ancient people actually believed that the Kingdom of heaven had already arrived! There was nothing else coming later. Heaven had arrived. This was it. They were living in it. That is why Paul wrote, “Already you have all you want!” in verse 8.

2) The second thing in the ancient mindset was that they believed that they were kings. They believed that the moment they had been converted, that they had become kings within the kingdom of God. New Christians in those days believed that they were filled with power, that they were free, that they were royalty, that they had entered a higher realm of existence or life, that they could do anything. They were in the Spirit, after all. Consequently, they actually were taking their new-found Christianity as a reason to feel superior to the other people in the city of Corinth! This is why Paul wrote in verse 8, *“Already, you have become rich!”*

Without us you have become kings.”

How is Paul supposed to correct this thinking in the mindset in Corinth?

There are two key words, that you might have missed. Paul wrote, “WITHOUT US”!?

So, Paul was exposing their thinking – that the kingdom of heaven has come, but Paul and others were not included!

And Paul was showing that there was now a ruling class of people on earth, but that Paul was not involved in it!

Paul was bursting their bubble of false beliefs by confronting them with one glaring problem – they forgot Paul. Oops. The triumphalism of the Christians in Corinth was surely premature. They were too early. They thought they were in heaven already, but they were not home yet!

What did Paul say next? His last phrase in our passage. *“would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!”* If you have it, we have it, so let’s all enjoy the arrival of the kingdom. Come Quickly, Lord Jesus! When they came to Moses saying others are prophesying, isn’t that your job – Moses said ‘would that all would be prophets!’ Would that you did have the arrival of the full kingdom of heaven, says Paul. Let’s go home! Because if the full kingdom of heaven arrived for you, it arrived for all of us!

What is Paul saying? UNITY. We are all going to be in heaven together! This truth was written in order to combat the divisiveness of their errors. Truth is unifying. Falsehood divides. Truth unifies.

Conclusion:

The opposite of being puffed up is being brought down to size. The opposite of being kings is seeing ourselves as servants. The opposite of pride and divisiveness is to think modestly of oneself, and to be reconciled to others, and to have a proper level of respect for God and for all the leaders that God has put into

place.

The cross of Christ and His resurrection unify us, Hebrews 2:8-9, *“in putting everything in subjection to [Christ], [God] left nothing outside [Christ’s] control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to [Christ].⁹ But we see [Christ] who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God, [He/Jesus] might taste death for everyone.”*

Because we are unified in this way, we don’t compete. We don’t puff ourselves up. We encourage others. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, *“encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*