

## 1. God's Grace Leads to Humility

- a. Though they were set forth by God to establish the Church, they are weak and humble
  - i. Servants, Stewards, Fools, Weak; Not as kings, but as servants; Last of all; men sentenced to death; held in disrepute; like the scum of all things
  - ii. Though the apostles have every worldly reason for holding and exercising power and prestige and esteem, they give it up because they know that their judgment and the others' judgements of their greatness is insignificant nothingness.
- b. He applies these things "for you".
  - i. There is great good for all of us in being servant/stewards and in giving up our rights for the sake of others
  - ii. This is the way that humans were created to live, and like a fish excels in water, but dies in the air, so we flourish in bold humility and shrivel in arrogant self-reliance.
  - iii. The apostle is trying to instruct, admonish, and mature the Corinthians by speaking so strongly about these things in the lives of their teachers.

## 2. We Must Remember and Believe the Scriptures to Avoid the Dysfunction of Distended Self-Glory

- a. Self-Glory is to see, extend, and compare greatness: to "puff up"
  - i. This puffing up takes the form of "one in the place of the one against the other"
    - 1. "puffed up" or "inflated" is used 6 times in this book, indicating that it is a serious problem in Corinth
    - 2. the only other time it is used in the NT in Colossians 2:8 which indicates the arrogant self-authoritative "receiver of visions" who is disconnected from the Head, which is Christ
  - ii. It seems to be not merely one person fighting another person, but rather a person *on behalf of another person* fighting another.
    - 1. Thus, it is party warfare, politics, championing with arrogance.
    - 2. Glorifying in Paul, Apollos, or Peter, etc.
- b. This type of glorying in men exceeds the bounds of Truth.
  - i. There is a danger of "going beyond or over" (hyper) "the things which have been written."
  - ii. What is the significance of "over"?
    - 1. What kind of things would be "over" or "beyond" the things which have been written?
      - a. It is related to "puffed up" – distended, distorted, too much Humanity, rather than an appropriate, Scripturally-defined and instructed self-image
      - b. There is a view of the Self which is overly-esteemed, which places myself at the center of my world, nay the Universe, when I am created to be non-central
    - 2. This kind of comparative competition based upon achievement, glory, performance, etc. is, in reality, placing our estimation of Truth and Virtue and Beauty ABOVE the revelation of God.
      - a. It is mutiny – the seizing of authority which does not belong to it
      - b. It is excessive – though the Scriptures do give humanity honor (Ps 8) as the image of God, it is limited honor with no power in itself – it is assigned honor given from God
  - iii. What are "the things which have been written"?
    - 1. What does the revelation of God in the Scriptures teach about God? Man?
      - a. Scripture NEVER places humanity at the center of importance.

- i. James 4:14 - "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes!"
    - ii. Psalm 144:4 - "Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow."
    - iii. Psalm 39:5 - "Behold, you have made my days a few handwidths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!"
    - iv. Isaiah 40:6-8 - "A voice says, "Cry!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. <sup>7</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. <sup>8</sup> The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever." (Peter writes that this word is the gospel preached, 1 Pet 1:24-25)
  - b. Self-esteem, in the world's sense, is taught NOWHERE in the Word of God
    - i. Even Psalm 8, which explains that God has crowned humanity with glory and honor in Creation, is really about how odd and strange and unexpected that this is! (It is wholly GRACE)
    - ii. We need to be discerning with what we accept, tacitly or otherwise, regarding the presuppositions of the world's view of Self in our literature, movies, media, education, commerce, politics, and religious teachings.
    - iii. Too much Self-love has interloped in these areas since the opening of Eden's back door and is informed not by God's Truth but by "foolish hearts which were darkened" (Rom 1:21f) by self-trust and God-denial.
- 2. How does God view power and the expression of power?
  - a. Not in self-interest, but in servanthood
    - i. When we teach our children to "breath fire" in order to demand that they be honored, we are being completely unlike Jesus
    - ii. The only thing that people who breath fire receive is a scorched earth and singed friendships
    - iii. We need to see the One who was torched with the fiery wrath of God *for His enemies* to see how Life ought to be lived
  - b. This is the great irony of this section of Paul's letter:
    - i. Paul launches into an ad hominem attack to deflate them by showing two things: their pride, and he and Apollos' weaknesses
    - ii. They have "arrived"; he is like a man condemned to die in the arena.
    - iii. They are wise, strong, and honored; he is foolish, weak and dishonored.
    - iv. Then, he boasts in the very things which they disdain and find contemptible (v11-13)
    - v. How they perceive themselves is precisely how they think that he ought to be; But the way that he actually is, is the way that they all ought to be (imitate me)
  - c. The apostles were showing that the gospel necessitates this way: should not the servant tread the path of his Master? The way of the Cross of substitutionary death to Self-glory for the sake of enemies.
- 3. What about when you are taken advantage of and mistreated?
  - a. SEE THE CROSS!

- b. Trust Him for resurrection when you called by God to die to your Self and to live to God for the sake of others, even your enemies.
  - i. You and I think that by defending our honor, by fighting for our reputation, by proving ourselves worthy and deserving of better, we will bring life to ourselves.
- c. But WE ARE DEAD and only RESURRECTION can bring life
  - i. And you and I cannot resurrect ANYTHING
  - ii. Only Jesus can.

### 3. Arrogance Comes From Believing That You are Differentiated by Your Own Greatness

- a. Paul questions the basis of their “puffiness” by asking three questions, then entering into sardonic comparisons.

- i. “For what differentiates you?”

- 1. “differentiates” – to discriminate, to distinguish, to single out
- 2. We must always ask what it is that makes us take a stand and differentiate ourselves from others *as better*
  - a. In a sense, Paul is asking, “Who do you think you are?”
- 3. The truth is that we are all completely dependent upon God for all and any good.
  - a. Thus, it is not merely that we see ourselves as different, but we see ourselves as better *by our own doing and not from God’s gift*
  - b. This blindness to God’s grace leads to competitive puffing up and distorts and distends parts of the Body to dysfunction, pain, and weakening

- ii. “What do you have which you did not receive?”

- 1. This is an extremely extensive question – take it all the way down
  - a. Every gift, every strength, every success, every production, every work, every step, every breath, every insight, everything comes from God.
  - b. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (Jam 1:17)
- 2. Everything belongs to God and is rightfully His
  - a. Creation belongs to God
    - i. Every quark, every electron, every atom, every molecule, every element throughout all of the expansive Universe is His
    - ii. Every moment, every minute, every line from A to B, throughout all of Time is His
    - iii. He is the eternal God, exceeding before and beyond all Time and Space, uncontained by dimension and distance, from the farthest reaches of the yet to be discovered to the never-will God claims ownership
  - b. Your individual distinction was given to you
    - i. Your creativity? It comes from Him and belongs to Him!
      - 1. You don’t create ex nihilo
      - 2. You only create with what has been given to you
      - 3. Unless you can create a new color, then your creativity is something which depends upon reception
      - 4. Unless you are the maker of language and communication, then your writing is something which depends upon reception

- ii. Your intellect?
      1. Your genetics were given to you
      2. Your education was given to you
      3. The culture into which you were born was received by you, not made nor fashioned nor originated in you
      4. The pencils with which you wrote come from a tree which you did not grow nor make
    - iii. Your emotional stability?
      1. Your family and frame did not arrive at your command
      2. The very boundaries which you despised were the same boundaries which strengthened you
      3. The very sufferings which you hated were the very sufferings which built your character
      4. The things which you would not have chosen (but now may be thankful for) were given to you and made you
  - c. Even your faith was given to you
    - i. Eph 2:8 – your faith is a gift which you receive
    - ii. You were dead and made alive – life is received
    - iii. The very breath by which you cursed God was a gift from God and so the very words by which you utter love to God comes from the same source: God Himself
- iii. “If you have received it, then why do you boast?”
  1. What ground is there, then, for looking down on another?
  2. The truth that God is the source of all good gifts and of all faith absolutely destroys any degrading thoughts of His Creation, especially of His image-bearers, regardless of the brokenness or rebellion currently at work.
  3. Though we call evil what it is, evil, and call to account the workers of evil, this does not imply that we are good by our own volition or skill or wisdom or work.
    - a. Whatever good may be done, by us or by others, is because of God and thus we cannot boast, but MUST praise Him for what good is revealed and produced
    - b. This truth also gives us great hope for good, and leads us to cry out to the One to whom all things belong
- b. How one answers these questions will reveal what they truly believe, and the answers, according to the gospel revelation of the mysteries of God, is intended to humble us and eliminate all arrogance, which only created divisive competitive party factions.
  - i. Thus, the key to growing in servant-heartedness is not merely a command to do it, nor to see Jesus as a mere example of it (although these certainly play a part), but rather it is to behold two powerful truths:
    1. The infinite grandeur of the eternal Creator
      - a. God cannot receive anything by necessity.
    2. The finite austerity of our creaturliness.
      - a. We must receive everything by necessity.
  - ii. In the light of these two truths, the gospel of the self-sacrificing God, the God of uncompelled love, explodes upon our souls as glorious beauty and extravagant generosity to *unworthy idolaters* and results in our humble joy and His well-deserved praise

## Conclusion:

This is the gospel which the Church has held for almost 2,000 years: That the eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, uncreated, all-wise, almighty God created all that exists for His glory. And this that we know about God, we all, without exception, have suppressed this truth and profaned His glory. We reject His goodness and His authority, we hate His rule and His reign, and we did not consider it worthy to acknowledge Him as God or to give Him thanks for the gifts which He has given to us. We gave authority to the stones which He made for His glory that we might belittle His glory. In doing so, we proclaimed our mutiny and ingratitude with the mind which He gave us and the breath which He has continually placed in our chests. We love lesser things more than Him with the heart and affections which He graced us in His image. We suppress the Truth with the brains which He made. This is the great irony of blasphemy. In so doing, we made ourselves enemies of God, and God being just and righteous and holy for the sake of His glory and His rightful uncreated and perfect name, is not going to allow such great evil to continue to wreak havoc on His creation, so He must pour out wrath upon evil. Yet, we are the makers of evil in Creation. So God, not able to spare His wrath, sends His Son in the flesh and crushes Him. All the anger of justice, the fury of righteousness towards injustice which belonged to the children of men He poured out upon the Son, killing Him. Then God raises Him from the dead, vindicating the righteousness of the Son and His willful submission to the glory of God above all, and the same power which raised Him from the dead is now at work in those who believe in Him.

You are not acceptable to God because of what you can or cannot do, what you can or cannot achieve, or think, or perform, or create, or deny. You do not hold the power of life within your grasp, or the keys of death within your grip. You and I cannot raise anything from the dead to the newness of risen and sanctified life. We cannot resurrect anything! Christ can. God did. You are justified because of what Christ Jesus has done. This is the hope of the gospel. This is why Jesus' death and resurrection is good news, and why we center all things on Him in gratitude for His great and glorious grace. This life is about Him, for Him, from Him, through Him, and to Him. We don't sing about us, we sing about Him! We don't rejoice in us; we rejoice in Him! We don't boast of ourselves and inflate our name in pretense. We boast of Him, and He cannot be inflated with hollow worth, for He is worthy of all praise, adoration, dominion, power, authority, and glory. In the words of the apostle Peter by the hand and voice of the Holy Spirit of God:

“May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.  
<sup>3</sup> His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, <sup>4</sup> by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. (2Pe 1:2-4 ESV)