

1Corinthians 4:6-8a "Boast Only In Jesus!"

**1 Corinthians 4:6-8** <sup>6</sup> Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. <sup>7</sup> For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? <sup>8</sup> You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, *I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.*

When we look at the life and ministry of the apostle Paul one of the things we notice in his letters to the church is his concern for its growth and unity. This is why he spends so much time teaching on the importance of maturing in our faith. And in that maturing process we call sanctification, our ability to be those servants for Christ is enhanced.

EPH 4:11-15 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, *so that the body of Christ may be built up* <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. <sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, *we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*"

Jesus Christ has given servants to His church to help us grow up and mature so that we can bring glory to our Lord as we love and serve Him while serving one another. The apostle Peter also writes how it is the word of God that enables us to grow in this salvation, as we are nurtured on the truth of God's word.

1PE 2:2-3 "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, <sup>3</sup> if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord." (NASB)

In his second letter, Peter contrasts the truth of God's word with the false teachers and teachings they bring by encouraging us to remain faithful to the truth.

2PE 3:17-18 "Therefore, dear friends, ..... be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."

It is only as we are humbling ourselves before God and seeking to follow Him, as we consider every word He has given us in the Scriptures, that we will find our strength in Him is increased and ready to be used in battle.

EPH 6:10-11 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."

Essentially, what Paul has been saying in his letter to the Corinthians is that their ability to stand against the devil's schemes has been so hampered so as to actually have become participants in the devil's schemes in bringing division to the body of Christ as they've taken their eyes of our Savior and placed them on men.

And so, this is why Paul has spent so much time in trying to paint a picture of how servants are to be used in the body to encourage unity. It is a picture of servants who act like farmers diligently tending to the crops, but watching God cause them to grow.

It is this picture of God's servants acting like construction workers and builders who lay a foundation based on the word of God as Jesus Christ is pictured as the Rock upon which that foundation is laid.

It is this picture of God's servants being those under-rowers in the hold of the ship struggling and sweating and laboring to make sure the ship is always moving forward to stay on course, with the truth of God's word as their guide, and with the love they have for their Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

And in all of this, the servant of God is found to be faithful to the end, which is why Paul writes, "now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful." (1CO 4:2)

And so, as we come to our text this morning Paul is bringing to mind all of these things as he continues.

1CO 4:6 "Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the

meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another."

He's saying that all of these analogies about servants who are planters and builders and stewards of the mysteries of God are meant to be applied to Paul and Apollos, or any other servant of the gospel; but only to the degree that they are under-shepherds of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

In other words, no matter how important a servant of Christ may appear to be, he is only a servant; not to be placed on a pedestal, but to be appreciated for who he is and what he does as our eyes are directed back to the one he serves for our benefit.

And what Paul is saying in our text this morning in verse 6 is that everything we do as believers in Christ must be tempered by the only true standard we have. That standard is the revelation God has given in His word. To go beyond what has been revealed is to go beyond the will of God.

To place a servant of God in a position of distinction where that servant is elevated beyond what the Scriptures say is to hamper the ability of that servant and the church he serves.

The Scriptures are clear on this matter. And by the way, the Scriptures which Paul speaks of here are primarily the O.T. Scriptures, since at this time, which is around A.D. 54 there were relatively few N.T. writings. There were some which had undoubtedly been copied and passed along to the church.

James' letter to the church was one of the first N.T. Scriptures written, followed by Paul's letters to the Galatians and Thessalonians. The gospels didn't come until a number of years later with the gospel of Mark being written around the late 50's, while Matthew and Luke were written in the 60's and John around the end of the first century.

And so, until these letters were being copied and sent around the world, much of the Scriptures the church had to rely on were a few N.T. letters, but mostly the OT.

And the O.T. Scriptures were enough of a guide to help the early church understand its role and to grow in the faith as they understood that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the O.T. Scriptures.

When Paul was with the Corinthians for about a year and half I'm sure he pointed them to portions of God's word like the prophet Jeremiah, and others, who dealt with how we should view the wisdom of men and how the wisdom of men can cause division in the body.

JER 9:23-24 "This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD."

ISA 5:21 "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight."

PSA 33:16-18 "No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. 17 A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save. 18 But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,..."

Paul is saying, don't place your confidence in men. I like the way one commentator puts it: "The sandlot baseball concept of choosing up sides should not be followed by humble Christians." (Robert G. Gromacki)

And that's exactly what Paul intimates at the end of verse 6....  
"Then you will not take pride in one man over against another."

Pride, we are told, goes before the fall. And Paul loved these people enough not to want to see them fall and hurt each other in the process. But more important, he didn't want them to stumble in such a way as to dishonor their Lord and Savior, which at this writing they evidently had.

But, despite their sinful attitudes, you'll notice that Paul still calls them brethren in the beginning of verse 6. And so, he encourages them not to lose heart at this exhortation, but to reconsider how they're representing Christ.

And the way Paul is about to help these people is to have them consider the irony of their behavior in light of the fact that not even Paul puts any confidence in the flesh or the wisdom of men, despite the fact that he is an apostle.

1CO 4:7-8 "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? 8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings - and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!"

He begins with a series of questions. For who makes you different from anyone else? The NASB puts it, "For who regards you as superior?" In other words, 'why do you think you're superior to anyone else in the church? What makes you think that your special little group is better than anyone else?'

We are all indwelt by the same Spirit, we are all redeemed by the same blood of Jesus Christ and we are all called and invited by Christ to be part of His forever family, not based on anything we did to earn such salvation, but based purely on the grace of God. 'So, tell me again', Paul asks, 'what makes your particular little group so special?'

The same can be said of different groups today. There are a variety of denominations in the body of Christ. And though we may not agree with all of the differing takes on theology, which usually necessitates such variety, we are not given the option to place ourselves above anyone else, or to put our confidence in our stance on any theological difference.

Does this mean we shouldn't divide ourselves out of a church which we believe is not being faithful to the word of God? Not at all. But, if that church is still being faithful to the essentials of the faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ then we cannot look down on them to the point where we place ourselves above them as though our salvation was better than theirs.

In fact, even if we are more mature in our faith, as we are faithful not to compromise the whole counsel of God's word, that still doesn't make us better than anyone else. It's only by the grace of God that we're able to stay on track.

Yes, we should be about staying faithful, and we should delight in doing God's will according to His word even if others are not, but we should never take the attitude that we are superior to anyone else, and I would include even the unbeliever.

If we've been given a gift in Christ that we have received by faith, then how can we possibly boast as though we were better than

someone else and we deserved this gift? Paul touches on this in this very same verse.

Verse 7 ... "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

There is nothing more nauseating than for a Christian to look down his or her nose on an unbeliever. That doesn't mean we should accept the things unbelievers do or believe about God. But, we shouldn't have such short memories as to forget that we were also once unbelievers who, we felt, had all the answers to life which didn't include God.

Instead of pride in ourselves, we should always realize that it is only God's grace and mercy which we should look to as we boast in the gift-giver, Christ Jesus.

I see an attitude of pride and superiority in many Christian groups who feel they have been specially endowed with certain gifts of the Spirit as though they somehow earned them. And if you don't practice such gifts with them, then, according to some of them, you're either not saved, or you are not filled with the Spirit, both of which are false.

Your filling has nothing to do with practicing any one particular gift. In fact, it is in this very letter that Paul points out to the Corinthians that despite how they have been practicing such gifts, they still are fleshly and carnal. They were not using their gifts with the love of Christ. They were using their gifts to puff themselves up.

Why do you think Paul wrote what we call the love chapter in chapter 13 of this letter? He didn't write this so modern people could simply include them in their wedding service. He wrote that portion to show the Corinthians that they weren't practicing Christ's love despite the fact that they were practicing the gifts of the Spirit.

This is why we can never use the practice of the gifts of the Spirit as "the" litmus test for spiritual maturity. It is not the gifts of the Spirit as much as the fruit of the Spirit which demonstrates maturity in Christ. And as we are truly filled with the Spirit we will demonstrate such fruit, and in that fruit the gifts of the Spirit will flow so as to advance the kingdom of God, not our pet projects.

These Corinthians were boasting in things they had no business boasting in. And what they were doing was acting like they were God's gift to the church instead of realizing that Jesus Christ is God's gift to them. This is where they began to take their eyes off of Christ and place it on themselves and other people.

Look around today. How many times do we hear of Christians running off to some Church or meeting when they hear of what they consider a special speaker or servant of God who is "anointed"? And usually, the only reason they go is to get their special blessing at the hands of this anointed one, be that healing or whatever.

Now, I'm not against going to see servants of God whom we consider to be anointed. But, if I place that servant above another to the point where I feel I can't get a blessing from any other place, especially the church Christ has placed me in, then I've put my confidence in men.

Do you have to go to Orlando to be physically healed? Can God heal you wherever you are? Well, someone will argue, when there is such a lack of faith in any particular church you must go to the church where such faith abounds. Oh, so now your boasting is in faith. Is not faith a gift? Why would you boast in such a gift as though it was not received, but rather specially endowed on a select few?

And if it is a gift cannot any Christian ask for such faith and know that God is faithful to give such faith? Do we have to travel the ends of the earth to find God as He is working among His people? Is He restricted to any geographical place?

The whole argument is silly. "My Jesus is better than your Jesus. My Jesus has gifted us with gifts you don't have." Hey, if the fruit of the Spirit is not the main objective in that church, I'll take the fruit over the gifts any day. But, what you'll find is that the fruit will produce a humble attitude to where the gifts will be used properly to the glory of God and the advancement of His Kingdom.

If the gifts are only relegated to a side-show atmosphere then they will only get in the way of what God really wants to do in that church. You never see the apostles boasting about their gifts. They always used their gifts in relation to the gospel, not as a substitute for the gospel.

So, as Paul suggests with his question, where is the boasting? There should be none unless it's in Christ. If we have gifts they should be used for one another, not exclusively for ourselves.

1PE 4:10 "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

But as we come back to our text Paul is not finished with the irony of it all as these people claim to have it all together and have come to rely on themselves.

1CO 4:8 "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings - and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you!"

What does Paul mean by all of this? Well, notice that he hits on 3 specific things which these people have come to boast in. Paul says, "you have all you want." Other translations put it, you are already full, or already filled. "You have become rich." "You have become kings."

What's Paul's point in all of this? Is he praising them? Well, if you were to take this passage out of its context you could certainly conclude that he was praising them. But as it turns out he's trying to help them see themselves as those who had become blinded through self-deception. We might call it sarcasm.

'Yeah, you guys are too much. You're just so wonderful. You've got it all. You've arrived. I mean look at you. You're in no need of anything. You have all you want, you're wealthy in both physical and spiritual terms to the point where I see you as kings and queens. We all should be bowing at your feet.'

The Corinthians would hopefully say, "Okay Paul, you can lay off the syrupy stuff now. We get your point." But Paul's point is not just sarcasm. Because you see what Paul is doing here is showing these Christians in Corinth that they have an inflated view of themselves in what is reserved only for glory. No one has arrived on this side of eternity.

No one can claim to not be in constant need of Christ and the servants He provides. Look again at the phrases Paul uses.

"Already you have all you want!" What does that suggest? "They were self-satisfied, and therefore were missing the blessing and

satisfaction of those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."  
(Mat.5:6) (John MacArthur)

They lacked the spiritual appetite for such things. They were an end to themselves as they placed their confidence in men and themselves. We see this in the church today as well. In fact, one area we see this is actually with those who aren't part of the church even though they claim to be part of the universal church.

These are the one's who don't need the church which Christ Himself instituted. "I'll just study the word on my own. I don't need teachers to teach me, I've got the Holy Spirit." Or, "I don't need the fellowship of other believers, God and me alone, we're doing okay."

And so, many Christians will forsake the assembling of themselves together with the rest of the body. Ironically, many others show up, but they just aren't committed. Bringing our warm bodies to the church doesn't mean we're committed to the work Christ has for us. And you can, in a sense, forsake the assembling of yourself with the body of Christ by not being committed to each other in that body.

We're going to find that many of the Corinthians were fellowship happy. They loved coming together with the rest of the church. Unfortunately, in many cases, their fellowship was not to promote an atmosphere of unity in the church. They fellowship on their terms, not God's. They were not really committed to their fellowship if it didn't serve their purposes.

I could spend all day here. But we need to move on. Paul then says to them, "Already you have become rich!" This is an expression which would come to identify all that is wrong with the church as our Lord Jesus leveled this accusation against the Laodicean church in the book of Revelation.

REV 3:15-19 "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm -neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. 19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent."

"Instead of seeing themselves as citizens in God's kingdom, the Corinthian Christians act as if they're rulers in that kingdom. They claim to be kings rather than subjects of the king." (Simon J. Kistemaker)

And so, when Paul alludes to these Corinthians being rich it is an accusation that it is a false wealth; a wealth that sees themselves as being of royal status. This is why he says, "You have become kings - and that without us!"

They didn't need Paul or Apollos or anyone else to be meddling in their affairs. They were an island to themselves. And they would make the rules as they went.

In fact, Paul goes so far as to say that they did all of this, and arrived at this spiritual level without him. And next week we're going to see this irony in all its glory, as these relatively new believers are placing themselves above others and puffing themselves up as though they had arrived, when the apostle Paul had only spent his life ministering for Christ, without taking the attitude that he had arrived.

Oh, the deceitfulness of man's heart when he thinks he's arrived, or is better than anyone else.

PRO 16:18-20 "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. 19 Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud. 20 Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the LORD."

That's the bottom line. Trusting in the Lord. If we will do that, as we humble ourselves before Him with the gift of eternal life we've received from Him by faith, then we will always see ourselves as thankful servants and children and followers of Christ rather than an elite group of people who have arrived and looks down on the less fortunate.

EPH 4:1-3 "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."