

**CHRISTIAN AND PROUD**  
 (Unity)  
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**I Corinthians 4**  
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Do you remember ever seeing or hearing the musical "Sound of Music"?

Julie Andrews starred in the motion picture version of that story about the Von Trapp family.

I believe it was after she discovered that the widowed naval captain Von Trapp was as interested in her as she was in him that she sang with delight words that contain this line:

"Somewhere in my childhood I must have done something good!"

In other words, the happiness she was experiencing then was a reward for the good things she had done earlier.

That is fairly common theology - even today, and even in the church.

How many times have you or I thought,

"Things are going so well, I must be doing something right."

Our job is going well, our business is prospering, our family is healthy and happy and we think:

God must be really pleased.

Somewhere in the middle of that thinking is that VonTrapp theology I just mentioned: "Somewhere in my childhood or more recently I must have done something good."

We are prone to taking proud responsibility for our good fortune.

We reveal that this is, in part, our theology in that when things don't go so well, we immediately assume God's disfavor - "What did I do that would cause God to treat me this way?" we ask.

But it's the other face of that erroneous theology we see in I Cor 4 - a pride of life.

And there is another related matter that I bring up by way of introduction.

What churches in Denver stands out in your mind as the most successful ones?

Some of you are fairly "quick" and so you ask, "What do you mean by "successful", preacher?"

And I say, "Wait a minute, that's my question but I'm asking it differently."

If you responded off the top of your head - what churches, in Denver, would you say are the most successful?

Now the next question: Why did you pick those churches?

By what standards, on what basis, using what criteria, did you decide those churches were successful?

Did it have to do with size, or recent rate of growth, or their much talked about programs, or well-known preachers, or the size of buildings, or the beauty of facilities, or the amount of money taken in or given out?

Without having time to think about what is the "right" measure to use, what measure did you use to answer the question: What churches in Denver are the most successful ones?

Our answer to a question like that gives just a little glimpse into our value system.

That is, by what values do we judge churches and Christian leaders and Christianity itself as successful?

These two issues, "pride" and "incorrect judgment" produce divisions in the church.

For much of the first four chapters of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians he has been speaking to the issue of unity or more specifically, disunity, in their church.

It seems that the Christians were dividing from each other by claiming allegiance to one or another leader.

These divisions resulted in rancorous factions being developed.  
There was jealousy and quarreling between the groups.

Christians were separating from each other with animosity.  
They were writing each other off.

In earlier weeks I cited how similar this sounds to some of what takes place in churches today:

There are churches that split.

There are independent churches and denominational churches that will have nothing to do with each other.

And there are even Christians that will have nothing to do with other Christians because they differ in non-essential doctrinal or lifestyle issues.

In chapters one and two of this letter, Paul has made an appeal that when we are truly brothers and sisters in the Lord, that means, when we have come to the same cross for salvation and when we are indwelt by the same Spirit of God, we ought not separate from each other or treat each other as enemies but we are to treat each other with the respect that goes with being part of the same family of God.

In chapter three he makes an appeal to them to not pick certain spiritual leaders to the exclusion of others.

Or as I put it two weeks ago:

Our preference for certain spiritual leaders crosses the line into factionalism when we begin to judge right and wrong, good and bad, based on what our favorite pastor, leader or writer says rather than on what God says - we are focusing on the leader rather than on God.

It is factionalism when our allegiance to a leader is so high we would defend that leader even if it meant dividing the church.

It is factionalism when our preferences for one or more leaders cut us off from the value God has for us through other leaders and teachers.

Look at how he ends chapter three: v 21 "So then, no more boasting about men!"  
Don't put one spiritual leader up as your guru to the exclusion of others.

Now when we come to chapter four, Paul is still dealing with the same issue:  
Look at the end of verse 6: "Then you will not take pride in one man over against another."

Do you see it? Chapter 3 "no more boasting about men" and Chapter 4, "do not take pride in one man over another".

Rampant in that church was a divisive attitude that today would look like:  
I am of MacArthur, or I am of Ryrie, or I am of the King James Version, or I am of Luther, or Calvin, or Wesley, or I am charismatic or I am not charismatic, and so on, ad nauseum.

Now it seems to me that in the first six verses of chapter 4 the Apostle reiterates the points he has already made in chapter 3.

He begins in verse 1 by saying that the Corinthians should not have an inflated view of the importance of their spiritual leaders.

As he said in chapter 3, don't put spiritual leaders in the place that belongs to God alone.

So in chapter 4, he writes, "You ought to regard spiritual leaders as servants of Christ and as stewards of the gospel.

Yes, spiritual leaders have authority but it is granted authority.  
Never forget that Jesus is the one with the inherent authority.

So a true spiritual leader is one who is a servant of the Lord - doing what the Lord said to do.

In keeping with that idea, in verse two he notes that the real test of a spiritual leader's effectiveness is "faithfulness".

If he has been entrusted with the secret things of God (meaning that which was formerly unrevealed but is now revealed in Christ) then the test of that servant's effectiveness will be how faithfully he communicates that Gospel and how well he lives it - in other words how faithful he is to his master's will.

In verses 3-5 Paul says in essence the crucial test of my faithfulness is not what you think of it, or what others think of it, not even what I think of it myself - but what the Master thinks.

When Jesus comes again he will reveal the motives of men's hearts and bring to light what we can't possibly see now.

So until that time - be careful - don't prematurely judge other spiritual leaders.

He is not saying we shouldn't be discerning and careful but he is saying if a spiritual leader is truly a brother or sister in the Lord, don't write them off.

And whatever you do, don't line up against them.

Then in verse 6 he writes, "Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us..."

My understanding of this verse is that if Paul and Apollos are servants answerable to their Lord and shouldn't be judged prematurely by the Corinthians then that is true of all spiritual leaders - and (to use the language of verse 6 "the Corinthians should not take pride in one man over against another."

So once again Paul has emphasized the central idea - don't separate from each other.

Stop these divisions among you.

Don't select your favorite spiritual leaders and then build camps opposed to each other.

My sense is that what Paul writes next, in verses 7-13, is getting to the root of the problem.

Why are there so many divisions in the church?

Why do people line themselves up behind one leader or another and do battle with other Christians?

Why do Christians write each other off when they don't agree on certain issues?

**PRIDE!**

At the end of verse 6 Paul infers that these Christians were taking pride in one man over against another.

Pride is driving it and in verse 7 he confirms that.

READ 7a "For who makes you different from anyone else?"

Or in other words, "Who distinguished you?" "Who made you better than anyone else?" "Who is the world do you think you are?"

You have a haughty attitude toward others. You think you are better than they are.

READ 7b "What do you have that you did not receive?"

Or in other words, "Everything you have is a gift from God - you didn't earn it."

READ 7c "And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

Or in other words, "If everything you have is a gift, why do you act as though you did earn it - You are proud as if you are blessed because you deserve to be."

I think I Cor 12 helps us understand what Paul is getting at here.

Apparently these Corinthian Christians were taking great pride in their spiritual gifts.

12:28 will help us.

"In the church God had appointed apostles, prophets, teachers, workers of miracles, those with the gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with the gift of administration, those speaking in different kinds of tongues, among many other gifts.

Then in verse 29 he asks, "Are all apostles, or prophets, or teachers etc.?"

The unspoken answer is "of course not - all are needed."

Look back to verse 21.

Using the analogy of the human body, Paul writes, "The eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you or the head to the feet, I don't need you."

Then in the middle of verse 24 we pick it up again.

Please notice that right in the middle of the sentence Paul switches out of the metaphor of the human body and back to what is going on in the Corinthian church:

"But God has combined the members of the body (eyes, hands, feet, etc) and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, (here's the switch) so that there should be no division in the body (the church), but that its parts (its members) should have equal concern for each other."

Now what earlier part of the letter does that sound like? Yes, chapters 1-4.

Apparently these Corinthians were taking pride in the spiritual gifts they or their preferred leaders had and they were looking down on those who didn't have their particular gifts.

"Our leader has the gift of teaching."

"Yes, but our leader has the more important gift of compassion."

"You're both underprivileged, our leader has the gift of prophecy."

They were coalescing around different leaders depending on their gifts or their style of ministry or whatever and were quarreling about which was more important.

What does that look like today?

Those who would divide on whether to speak or not to speak in tongues?

Those who would divide on whether to prophesy or not to prophesy?

Churches which split on whether women can be elders in the church?

We take such pride in our doctrinal positions that we are willing to fight rather than even consider that our brother or sister in the Lord may be stressing a different and equally important dimension of the same truth.

Pride is a powerful and pervasive sin.

We are so proud that any differences others have with us are perceived as an attack on us.

Someone else's preference of a different pastor, or church, or theological persuasion is seen as an attack on our preference and hence an attack on us.

If they don't have the same appreciation for our point of view that we have, our egos are offended - isn't that right?

And when offended we retaliate.

The Corinthians and we treat our abilities and our beliefs as if we earned them.

We possess them, they are ours!

Instead we should recognize they are gifts from God.

And if they are from God we don't need to defend them by attacking our brothers or sisters who have different abilities or different preferences or even different beliefs.

Not only was pride causing divisions between Christians but in verses 8-13 we find another faulty way of thinking that was causing division.

To understand what that faulty way of thinking is we must see what Paul is doing in these verses:

He will draw a sharp contrast between what the Corinthians think following the Lord means and what following the Lord truly means.

Verse 8 is loaded with sarcasm. READ

The Corinthians were a self-satisfied bunch.

They had their group, they had their spiritual gifts, they had their beliefs and they felt like they were rich - had everything they needed.

They didn't need to learn anything - least of all from any of those other groups.

Paul writes, "You have become kings..."

Or in other words, "you've begun living like kings, or reigning like kings."

When Jesus comes again we will reign with Him.

The trouble with the Corinthian's thinking was that though they knew Jesus had not yet come back they thought that everything that would be true of the Kingdom of God in the future was theirs to experience now.

They thought they should be healthy and happy.

They thought they should be prosperous and popular.

They thought they should be enjoying the good things of life - after all they were children of THE King.

Or as a man said to me one time: "God doesn't want His children to go second class."

Paul writes, I wish you had begun your reign in the Kingdom of God for that would mean Christ had already returned and we would be reigning with you. That would be great!

But Paul goes on in verse 9 in essence saying, "Look at reality. Look at us apostles.

We aren't reigning like kings instead the exact opposite is true - we are living like conquered slaves in a Roman General's victory procession, about to be thrown into the arena to die.

Look at verse 11 READ

Look at the end of verse 13 READ

No, Paul says, you have a very incorrect expectation of what it means to follow Christ.

There are too many who even today think that if they walk with God all should be well. If they obey God their businesses will prosper.

If they have their daily devotions and otherwise live like a Christian then God will see to it that their bodies are healthy, their children are happy, and they have enough to live on.

They think that now they have accepted God, it's his job to make certain they are supported in a manner to which they've grown accustomed.

Yes, they may get sick but God will make certain they get better.  
True, they may lose their job, but God will certainly find them another one.

And conversely when their businesses do prosper, and they and their children are healthy, and they are approved by others they are certain these are signs of God's approval.

Or as one author put it: "When society seems relatively stable, when there is no war on the horizon, when most people in our culture have enough to eat, and when the general mood is hedonistic and success-oriented, untaught Christians adopt their own form of triumphalism. They point out that God is their Father, he is the great King, and therefore they argue they should all live as princes and princesses." (Carson I Cor 105)

But the Bible says that if we follow Christ there will be times, maybe many times, maybe all the time when there will be deprivation and even suffering and probably humiliation.  
Until Jesus comes we live on the east side of the Jordan, we have not yet crossed into the promised land.

If you preach the cross you will not be popular.  
If you teach that we are desperately in need of a Savior and only Jesus is that Savior - you will not be appreciated.

If you live a life of holiness you will run counter to your culture even the culture of too many Christians.

If we are not experiencing anything of what it means to suffer for Jesus - it may be because we have not taken Jesus' stance in the world.  
If we stood against injustice as he did or if we cared enough for hell-bound people that we were willing to challenge their assumptions and risk their disfavor maybe we would experience something of what Jesus experienced.

Paul is not masochistic nor does he have a martyr's complex.  
He is not suggesting that we should look for ways to suffer.  
Nor does he suggest that suffering is necessarily a sign of God's favor.



In this passage what I think he is saying is that the Corinthians and many of us have our sense of values all turned around.

We think God's favor is evidenced in material and emotional success.  
We are convinced we deserve the good things of life now.

And so we pick those leaders and those churches and those ministries and those philosophies of life that reflect those measures of success.

I think the Corinthians were embarrassed by Paul.

Here was a man who spoke of weakness and foolishness and dishonor.

Their kind of spiritual would have advance men to set up the publicity before he got there.

There would be press conferences and attractive musicians to draw the crowd.

There would be successful people: the wealthy, the educated, the athlete to endorse the program.

Their kind of spiritual leader would be clever, handsome, humorous and speak to popular issues to grab people's attention and win their allegiance.

He would speak to relieve problems not produce godliness.

He would speak to immediate solutions to immediate problems not to a knowledge of God.

He would speak to answers now, success now, not a life of patient prayer, dependent on God.

Our idea of a successful leader is one who draws crowds, makes things happen, gets programs going, develops organizations, builds building and raises budgets.

We want our churches to have the look of success.

Our speech must be filled with superlatives about how good things are going and what is being achieved.

People want to be part of what is happening.

"Success breeds success" we are told.

We are tempted to market, to advertise, to put a positive spin on everything that is happening.

We have to have great vision to conquer the world or at least our world.

And we must have great plans to change the culture.

We will boycott, we will legislate, we will elect, we will do whatever it takes to put our views in power.

Rush Limbaugh is our hero, not Jesus.

He's proud, he's brash, he's powerful and he's successful.

No, Rush Limbaugh is not the enemy. But for Christians to take his style and tactics is fighting in Saul's armor.

No, I'm not saying we shouldn't engage the culture.

But I am saying let's remember God's word when he says in 2 Corinthians,

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, the weapons we fight with have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God..."

And what are those weapons?

More publicity, celebrity endorsements, manipulation and coercion, emotional soup-kitchens, success seminars?

No. According to God, in Ephesians 6, it is truth, righteousness, faith, the Word of God and prayer.

God has called us to prayer and humility and the preaching and teaching and living out of the foolishness of the cross -

an absolute dependence on Jesus as evidenced in dependent prayer.

When we start judging success by the same standards as the world then we want leaders who will take charge, win, and conquer the way the world does.

Then we start judging churches by whether they have the look and feel of success about them

Then we start judging Christianity and even God by whether it and he give us what we want when we want it.

Paul says you divide from one another because of your pride and because of your false expectations of what following Christ means.

Instead we are to humble ourselves before our Lord and each other and we are to take up our cross daily, putting self-interest to death and following Jesus.