

Alright, well if you have your Bible's open up to 1 Corinthians 4.



So last week we talked a lot about pride and its opposite - gospel humility. And the reason we focused on this theme is because this was Paul's summary cause of the problems he was observing in the Corinthian church. Paul begins chapter 4 by summarizing the reason behind the factions and personality conflicts and personality cults. He says, the root reason you're having so many problems is you are proud. You are puffed up like an inflated appendix full of air about to burst.

And so it's not surprising you are experiencing division because pride produces division. In fact pride wants division.

Now in our passage today Paul is going to confront this factious pride. We see this rare glimpse into Paul where he uses a bit of stinging sarcasm to make a pretty serious point about the root evil of pride. So we'll read the entire section and as we do look for these latent desires behind pride that have been causing so much grief in

the Corinthian church. And we will grab verse 6 from last week for the sake of context.

1 Corinthians 4:6, 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.

1 Corinthians 4:7-14, 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? 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!

For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

So what is Paul saying? Sure we can all agree pride is evil. But let's get more specific on what that evil is. Why is it evil?

- There's a certain desire of pride that makes it evil.
- There's a certain desire of pride that destroys the gospel.

- There's a desire of pride, that merely by wanting this thing, it inflates self so large that Christ is eclipsed.

And this desire is poison. So Paul's doesn't mince words here. He's going to zero in beyond even pride itself to the desire behind pride.

# THE DEADLY DESIRE OF PRIDE

1. Pride wants to take credit for distinction

So Paul's looking at this bunch and he says, you want to know what the problem is here. It's your desire. It's your desire to take credit for the ways in which you have distinguished yourself above those around you.

We talked last week about one of the very root expressions of pride is comparison. Pride is extinguished if you remove the ability to compare. Who wants to be the world record holder for shotput on the dark side of the moon?

So we know that pride EXPRESSES itself in comparison but if you deconstruct comparison you will discover latent in every act of comparison is this desire to take credit for those things that set you

apart from others. Not only am I better than you, but I am the one who made myself better than you. There is something fundamentally better about me which is why I have these distinguishing features.

And it's this desire to TAKE CREDIT for distinction that Paul is confronting.

Now there are two ways of translating verse 7. The ESV says, "For who sees anything different in you?" That's the first way. In my ears this is a little awkward in the wording. What does he mean?

I can see it better through analogy. Imagine looking at an army of carpenter ants at work. And you are just happily watching them do their various jobs and then someone walks up to you and says, "Do you see anything different in these ants?" That's the idea. "Who sees anything different in you."

We are all just humans. We are all the same. You don't look at ants and go, wow, that ant is amazing and that ant is so lame. Oh wow, that ant has a 1mm abdomen and that ant is stuck with the .88mm version. All the other ants must laugh at him. They are just ants.

Well we are just humans. We all have the same basic limitations. We can't breathe underwater. We can't fly. Our brains can't do square roots of large numbers very easily. Who sees anything different of any real material significance. The differences are so minor and so inconsequential and so incredibly nuanced. Is that really worth being prideful over?

That's what Paul is saying, "Who sees any differences here worth noting? I certainly don't. God certainly doesn't" So that's one way it could be translated. Now there's actually a little ambiguity in the

Greek here so another acceptable translations here which the NIV and others use is "Who makes you different from one another?"

So if this is the way it's translated the idea would be more, sure you have differences and sure there are legitimate distinctions but can you really take credit for those distinctions? Who made you different one from another. Doesn't that credit belong to God and not you?

So it's either, make a case for why you are different. Aren't the differences laughably minor. Or if you can demonstrate that you are objectively different, who made you that way? Didn't God do it?

So, STOP taking credit. Since these differences aren't significant and even if they were significant you didn't do anything make yourself different, stop COMPARING.

This makes perfect logical sense but as we know sin cares very little for logic. Pride finds a million ways to circumvent logic. We are just constantly looking for things that set us apart from others. This is where racism and sexism comes from. Objectively, it is the most insane thing in the world to take credit for something the DNA given to you produced. Certainly if there was one thing you objectively say you had ZERO reason to be proud of it would be that. And yet daily we can find ways to be proud of it.

- If you have skin that tans easily, your heart finds a way to be proud of it.
- If you are tall,
- if you have thick hair,
- if you have a beautiful smile,
- if you have straight white teeth,
- if you have clean complexion,
- if you have beautiful eyes,

- if you have a perfectly shaped nose or ears or whatever, your heart works and squirms and finds a way to be proud of it.

And it makes zero sense. You had as much to do with the shape and size of your frame as the texture of the moon. But does that stop us from boasting?

Now our boasting gets 100 times worse when we actually believe we have something to do with it. I mean there's no way we could make a case that our hard work gave us our eye color but there other things we could point to that feel like the result of our efforts.

- I am more intelligent. And I earned it. I disciplined myself, memorized more, concentrated harder, sacrificed more, I think more critically than you do. That's not DNA. That's me.
- I am more intuitive with people. And I am that way because I actually am tuned in to the human condition.
- I am more in touch with the Spirit than you. I am that way because I have surrendered. I am the one who does this.
- I am more considerate than you
- I am more athletic. I worked hard for that Olympic gold.
- I am more observant than you
- I am more open minded than you
- I am more musical
- I am more aware of the needs of others
- I am more diverse and broad
- I am more selfless and others oriented.

We love things we can point to where we feel like we did something to make us better. Paul in this passage is saying the big mistake is **TAKING CREDIT** for the distinctions. Thinking that self is to be credited because self is the cause. So I, myself am better than that person over there because this self produced more, caused more, did more, was the agent of more of this thing that makes me

superior.

One of the tests you can run on yourself to see just how much you believe that your superior traits are a result of your own effort is to listen to your heart when someone says something like this,

"Man, if only I could only play the piano as easily as you do. I have to really work at it, but for you it just comes so easy. I could never do that."

If someone says that to me, my heart turns incredible hulk green with rage. Hey watch your assumptions buddy. Do you know how hard I worked at that? Stop crediting my genetics man, that was me! Now I can see how you could make that mistake. Because I put in so much hard work, it looks like I'm a natural, but believe me, the credit is to be placed squarely on my exceptional strength of determination and strong character.

Paul is trying to get them to reason, okay, let's just say, for the sake of argument that it was you. Let's just say for the sake of argument that you are objectively better than the other person, which by the way is a HUGE gimme. HUGE. You might think you are better...I think I'm really observant and I'm always surprised at how bad my wife is at assessing that characteristic in me.

Paul says, let's just assume that 100 people would look at you and this poor dumb soul over there and 100 out of 100 would agree. Truly, your intellect is superior to that person.

Paul says, what do you have that wasn't given to you. Everything you have is a gift of God. What part of your existence did you choose?

- You didn't choose your IQ.
- You didn't choose your family.
- You didn't choose the pool of people out of which your friends came.
- You didn't choose how tall you would be or your physical advantages.
- You didn't choose how much money your parents had.
- You didn't choose the educational climate into which you were born.
- You didn't choose the country into which you would be born.
- You didn't choose the century in which you were born.
- You didn't choose your race. Suppose you were born on a mountaintop in Bhutan in the twelfth century? Suppose you born in the 14th century into a family whose mother and father died of the bubonic plague? Do you think that would change anything? Suppose you were born in the slums of Calcutta in the 21st century as part of the untouchable class being raised Hindu without a prayer of a chance of being educated.

You didn't work hard for what you have; you worked hard with what you have. And even that. Where does that working hard come from? Who trained you in your formative years long before you had a choice? Did you choose that Who taught you to value working hard? What part of your working hard is your personality that was a pure gift?

So what again are you taking credit for? Why again do you get to take credit for these distinctions that set you above your fellow man?

1 Corinthians 4:7, 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?

So pride wants to take credit for distinction... but it gets even more insidious. Pride wants to deserve distinction.

# THE DEADLY DESIRE OF PRIDE

1. Pride wants to take credit for distinction
2. Pride wants to deserve distinction

The first point deals with trying to correct the factual error. You can't take credit for your distinction because it was a gift. You have your

facts wrong. This second point deals with the attitude that comes out of believing the factual error. If you take credit for your distinction then this attitude of deserving is sure to follow. You earned it therefore you DESERVE it.

Paul is saying, "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!"

Now Paul is getting really sarcastic. And I think his sarcasm is centered around this attitude of being deserving of privilege. This point comes from the imagery itself. What does his use of the imagery of a king draw forth? How is this imagery related to the attitude of deserving?

Everybody knows that feeling of disgust that is associated with a king who is pompous, arrogant, puffed up, who takes full advantage of his position of king and just struts around believing and insisting that everyone recognizes him as superior. Everybody who has to endure that stench has one thought in their mind: you didn't do anything to get that position. The only thing you did was get born. You don't deserve that position. You were GIVEN it.

And there's nothing wrong with being king. Someone has to be. And the king should be treated like a king. The king by virtue of his position gets servants and the best food and the best linens. And he should. He's king. The problem is not that he has the stuff, it's acting like you deserve it, it's acting like you did something. It's a gift.

And that is exactly what Paul is saying. What advantage do you have? What sets you above your fellow man? It is a gift. You don't deserve that. You didn't even earn it. You were given it. So don't act

like you deserve it.

What do we deserve as Christians. I think the best passage in the Bible that illustrates our position before God is in Luke 17. We actually read this passage in our Bible reading group this week. Jesus here really just confronts any attitude of being entitled. He compares us to slaves or servants. And slaves don't deserve anything.

Luke 17:7-10, "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

If that feels beneath you, then you are very likely taking credit for the gifts God has given to you. Let's just all say, we never outgrow being a slave for Jesus Christ. He is a wonderful master. Our master died for us. But let's never forget our position and where our blessing comes from. We are slaves. We are servants. He owns us. And whatever he tells us to do, we do.

It is so easy to think we have outgrown slavery to Christ. This idea that we deserve something creeps upon us very slowly.

- You know I've put in my time.
- I'm kind of done driving junk cars.
- I'm kind of above those kinds of people.
- I deserve a certain standard of living
- And pretty soon it is way beneath you to live where you first lived. I mean that would be degrading.
- I actually DESERVE to live where I live, drive what I drive, be respected the way I am respected, I don't have to do that kind of work anymore, I don't have to be involved in those types of menial activities any longer.

NO. Paul says, that's messed up. And Paul makes this point through some pretty dripping sarcasm

Oh, Corinthians, please Pardon me. I forget who I am talking to. Would you please forgive me. This whole issue of taking credit for your talents and abilities and being deserving of special privilege. I hope you realize I was talking about the fact that MOST people are given all their gifts. Obviously that doesn't apply to you.

Look at you. You are self made kings. What am I doing trying to teach you anything. You need to teach me. Wow, you really shot past me. Corinthians, you are amazing. Somehow you became a king without me. What was your screaming path to success?

- Us apostles, we are sentenced to death.
- We are the butt of people's jokes
- We are labeled fools and idiots.
- We are weak.
- We are disrespected.
- We have no material comforts. Regularly without food. Are clothes are thrift store clothes. We don't even have a guaranteed place to stay. He actually just uses the word homeless. When you think of the apostle Paul you don't think of a homeless person, but that's how he thought of himself. Why? Because he didn't have a home.

That's tough.

- We do manual labor and have blisters.
- We are persecuted.
- We are slandered
- We are the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

But of course, you are kings. so you deserve to be...

- ridicule free
- wise
- strong
- honored
- well-dressed
- good food
- nice homes
- sweat free
- blessed
- easy
- white collared

Corinthians, what's the secret? Do you see how that shames them?

Should you rise above your father in the faith? Should you rise above Jesus. Should your fame, wealth, comfort, respect, recognition be greater than Jesus himself.

And here is the message to the Corinthians which is the exact message we need to hear, the life of the Christian is dishonor and suffering. And the reason the life of the Christian is suffering is not because we are trying to prove something, it's quite simply the words of Jesus, if they persecuted me they will persecute you. We are walking along side Jesus, suffering along side of Jesus, sacrificing for Jesus.

If we happen to be blessed, it is gift, pure gift. PURE, PURE gift, NOT a reason for boasting and certainly not anything we earned. Humility is a completely different approach.

I don't deserve the way I look. I don't deserve my parents, my education, anything.

Humility goes further: "God please, please, please spare me from what I deserve! If God gave me what I deserve, I'd be utterly lost. Oh God, the last thing I want is what I deserve!"

Everything you give me God is mercy, mercy, mercy, grace. That's all I can see. It's not beating yourself up saying, "Whoa is me, I deserve nothing. That's a reverse form of pride. Humility is that which receives life as a gift." It stands in the shower and just marvels. Can you believe this? Hot water falling on me. I didn't have to pump it. I can have as much as I want. Right out of the tap it's clean. I can actually just drink it. It costs pennies to heat it and I just dial it in to the perfect temperature. 99.9 percent of history wouldn't have even dreamed of it because it sounded far, far to exotic to even dream of? God I don't deserve this but I just receive it as such a wonderful gift from a loving father?

Humility is thankful. But more than just generically thankful, "I am thankful I'm fortunate." And unbeliever can say that, even though it makes zero sense. Thankful to whom? Thankful to fate? Thankful to random chaos? No, a believer looks straight to throne of grace and says, "God of heaven, you are so merciful to me. Thank you! Just deep, a deep thank you.

Every day is a surprise. I wake up again to more gifts! A good gift, you're surprised. It's better than you thought. You didn't know it was

coming. It's absolutely free. It's undeserved. A gift! You look at everything that way.

I couldn't possibly even begin to merit the good things God has given me, my health, my mind, my friends. What do have, it's all mercy! Even in the midst of affliction a believer should be able to say, "God you are so merciful. Look at how you have shaped my perspective to see this suffering from your eyes. God I have hope. I don't deserve hope.

So we are deconstructing the pride of comparison and looking at these deadly desires. Pride wants to take credit for distinction. It wants to deserve distinction. And we come to the very nucleus. It can't get any more central, any more nefarious, any more evil than this final desire, this core desire.

## THE DEADLY DESIRE OF PRIDE

1. Pride wants to take credit for distinction
2. Pride wants to deserve distinction
3. Pride wants to be honored for distinction

Now we can illustrate this easily. So we are in the Olympics right: imagine you could objectively prove that you were the cause of your amazing athletic ability. Everyone on earth was given some level of

genetic gifting but you started out with every conceivable disadvantage. You actually started below average and worked your way up to the Olympic level.

And let's go further and say that on an objective level everyone agreed that you deserve the title best freestyle skier in the world and everyone agreed you were the cause of it.

But what if nobody cared. Nobody celebrated it. Nobody appreciated just how much effort you put in. Nobody said wow. You never stole those surprised, admiring eyes, "Oh, wow, there's the gold medal winner. I'm standing in the very presence of the greatest of all times." What if nobody cared you were the best. Wouldn't that just strip all the joy away?

The only distinctions we care about are those distinctions that pull out of people's mouths the WOW and the WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE TO BE HIM, and the HE is UNBELIEVABLE and the IF I COULD LIVE ONE DAY IN HIS SHOES. We ultimately want to be admired, extolled, praised. Pride wants to be HONORED for these distinctions. We want to be worshiped.

And this is what it makes it simultaneously seem on the one hand so innocent and on the other hand the most terrific evil in the universe. It feels innocent because it feels good; in many ways it feels absolutely right. What's so bad about making the world about me? That actually sounds like a pretty good idea. As a matter of fact, I've been trying to do that now for a really long time. The natural man does not see pride as evil. Very few unbelievers will talk about the evil of pride, in fact, as we pointed out last week, they see it the other way around - the problem is lack of pride. And yet for Christians it is the CHIEF evil.

How could we be so different, so completely opposite on what the evil of the world is. Really the question we are asking is what's so bad about pride?

Do you remember the story of Nebuchadnezzar? It's one of the greatest passages in the Bible in illustrating the evil of pride. If you remember the story, Nebuchadnezzar is in his palace and presumably he's at the tail end of his 40 year career and he's surveying the work of his hands. And he says,

In Daniel 4:30 Nebuchadnezzar said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"

And immediately, the text actually makes the point - while the words were still in his mouth, God intervenes and causes him to go mad. He reduces his IQ to that of a donkey and he goes crazy. And the text is set up in such a way to let you know that it was the words that were in his mouth that were so offensive to God.

Now let's think about that. Why were those words so offensive?

Because really they don't seem that evil? I am not a great student of history but one thing I do know is that Nebuchadnezzar was by any standard a fabulous ruler. He defeated the Egyptians; he defeated the Assyrians at Carcamesh. He was one of the greatest political leaders in history. Didn't he do it? What's so bad about saying that?

Not only was he a great military commander and politician; he was a great builder. The gardens throughout the city of Babylon and the building, building, building that he accomplished makes the mind spin. The Ishtar gate at Babylon became one of the seven wonders

of the ancient world. He built up the walls of Babylon so thick that they would conduct chariot races around the 56 mile perimeter. The walls enclosed 200 square miles. That is impressive. He looked around and said, "Didn't I earn this?" It's like an executive of a company looking at his company and saying, "Man, look at this company I built." It's like a guy on the cusp of his retirement looking at the computer screen and seeing 7 digits and thinking, man, look at the wealth that I built.

That was Nebby. Look at this kingdom I built. And didn't he? What's so bad about saying that?

Here's what's so bad. Saying, what's wrong with pride is like saying what's wrong with plagiarism.

Imagine an anonymous book written. And that book soars to the top of the NYT best sellers list. And nobody knows who wrote it. It gets praised by every critical journal in the country. People who read it weep and rejoice. It unifies entire sections of the country. The publisher has an account with 50 million dollars in it just waiting for the author to step forward and take it.

And what if I just stepped in and said, "You know that was me. And the press rushes in like a vacuum and the photos snap and the money gets swished into my bank account and the interviews start rolling out. All the sudden you see me on evening talk shows and Good Morning America and the praise just rolls out.

What have I done? Now imagine that you were the one who actually wrote the book. How would you feel? You would be livid. You would be incensed with rage. You would be outraged. Why? Because you would say, "You've robbed me of my due, you stole from me, you

took credit for something you never did, you took glory away from me and applied it to yourself. The author owns the work. The author has control over his work.

You see gospel humility says, "Listen man, everything is Gods. 100 percent. We cannot do a singlet thing.

## **Communion**

We are going to prepare our hearts for communion this morning through a time of confession. This year's theme for our church is gospel priorities, reach up, reach in, reach out. This is the reach up part. God we are reaching up to you right now in confession. God we have done evil. We have taken credit. We walk around like arrogant kings thinking we deserve something.