Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Humility and Conceit
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:6-13
Code: 1821

Now we believe that the handbook for life and time and eternity is the word of God and so we want to look at it and see what it is that God has to say to us. The writers of the Bible were inspired by God and what they wrote is the very word of God. And so we study it verse by verse. And we find ourselves in this wonderful letter to the Corinthians written by the apostle Paul. The Corinthian church which he himself had been so very much a part of. He wrote back to them dealing with the man problems that had developed. The Corinthians had fallen into sin. That sin had manifested itself in many, many ways and as a result of that there were problems all throughout the church. And the letter is written to deal with those problems.

Notice would you Chapter 4, verses 6-13. I'm going to read it to you. Follow as I read. "And these things brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes that you might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written. That no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another and what hast thou that thou didst not receive. Now if thou didst receive it why dost thou glory as if thou hast not received it. Now you're full. Now you're rich. You've reigned as kings without us. I wish you did reign that we also might reign with you. For I think that God has set forth us the apostles last as it were appointed to death for we are made a spectacle unto the world and 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 honorable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst and are naked and are buffeted and have no certain dwelling place and labor working with our own hands. Being reviled we bless, being persecuted we endure it, being defamed we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."

Now in this most poignant text of Scripture. The apostle Paul is dealing with one theme. And that one theme is humility. It isn't easy at first to look at the passage and understand it, but I trust when we're done, you'll understand it thoroughly. Paul is talking about humility. As a servant of God and as a teacher of the church he recognized that humility was a necessary and vital part of his own life as it was a necessary and vital part of the life of every Christian. And so humility is really the essence of this text. By way of introduction just this thought throughout history, God's redemptive history, God's choicest leaders have always been humble men.

You can go as far back as Abraham, for example, in Genesis Chapter 18, in verse 27 and it says Abraham answered and said, "Now I behold have ventured to speak to the Lord although I am but

dust and ashes." A recognition of his own humility in comparison with God. Jacob in Genesis 32:10 says, "I am unworthy of all the loving kindness and of all the faithfulness which thou hast shown to thy servant." A sense of unworthiness. Moses in Exodus 3:11 said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt." Gideon given the command of the armies of Israel at a strategic time in Judges 6:15, said "Oh Lord, how shall I deliver Israel. Behold my family is the least in Manasseh and I am the youngest in my house."

John the Baptist, in Matthew Chapter 3, in verse 14, was invited by our Lord Jesus Christ to baptize the Lord and John said, "I have need to be baptized of thee and thou comest to me?" In John 1:27, He said, "He it is who comes after me who is preferred before me who is shoe latchet I am not worthy to loose." Tremendous sense of humility. Peter, it says in Luke 5:8, fell at Jesus' knees and said, "depart from me for I am sinful man oh Lord." The apostle Paul said the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, "you know the manner of my ministry among you. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, many tears and trials."

In 2 Corinthians Chapter 3 in verse 5, Paul says not as though we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God. In Ephesians 3:8, Paul that marvelous servant of God said, "unto me who am the least of all saints is the grace given that I should preach." Always God's choicest people have known humility. Pride and fruitfulness are incompatible. The supreme example of humility in the Scriptures and in all of history is our Lord Jesus Christ. We don't often think of Him in that way, but I remember the words of our Lord in Matthew 11:29 when He said, "for I am meek and lowly in heart."

And I remember the definition of His incarnation given by the apostle Paul in Chapter 2 of Philippians in verse 7 where he says, "He humbled himself." For the very God of the universe to allow himself to come to the level of human life that he did and to be spit upon and mocked and scourged and beaten and rejected and crucified is indeed humiliation. You can see the humility of Jesus Christ in the fact that He took on human nature. In the fact that He was born in a stable. In the fact that He had nothing life. That He was homeless, poor, dependent, partaking in our weaknesses, submitting to the law that He became a servant. That He was associated with sinners and despised people. That He refused honor from men. That He wouldn't be a king when they wanted to make Him one. That He washed feet. That He obeyed the Father. That He submitted to suffering reproach, mockery and even death.

God's choice people have always been humble. Humility is the channel to fruitfulness. Paul said in 2 Corinthians Chapter 12 "When I am weak, then I am," what, "strong." What he meant was when I recognized that in myself I can do nothing it is just then that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Now the reason I introduced this with the subject of pride is because that is precisely the problems the Corinthians had manifest. They had a pride problem. They were boasters. In fact, throughout 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, these two letters, their pride is

mentioned again and again. They gloried, they were puffed up, they boasted, they were vain. This is a real problem.

Now if you know anything about the Bible and you've studied it for any time at all, you know that really the basis of all sin is pride, isn't it? Because all sin is rebellion against God and rebellion against God amounts to me setting my will against His will, and that's a proud act. The Corinthians were proud. Their pride had manifested itself in first of all their love of human wisdom. Remember the first problem they had was the problem of division. And the reason the church was divided and didn't know unity, didn't know the blessed kind of unity that even we know, the reason was because they were polarized over philosophical issues.

And one group would say well, we're the ones that believe this politically or philosophically. And the other one, we're the ones that believe this politically and philosophically even though they agreed on the tenants of the Christian faith, they so disagreed philosophically that it became a splitting and a factioning element. And it also became a basis for pride because as soon as they would identify with one little group and they would say this is my group and this is what I agree with and we're better than you, and so pride was a factor.

In addition to exalting human wisdom, they had exalted human teachers, remember? They had taken good men, godly men, Paul, Apollos, Peter, and they said we are of Paul. And another group, we are of Apollos. Another group we're of Peter. And they were identifying around these men. And of course, the thing that resulted from that was pride. We're the Paul group and we're better than Apollos and Paul's better than Peter and Peter's group we're better than the Apollos group and so forth. The apostles didn't feel this way, but the people had come to be very proud about the group it had identified with in terms of the teacher.

So pride was manifesting itself terribly in these exaltations of human wisdom and human leadership and it needed sternly to be dealt with. And Paul deals with pride in Chapter 4, verses 6-13. They were exalting human leaders and it became an issue of pride. You know, you can see how that can happen can't you? Maybe you have a class and you say well, you know, the teacher of class is so and so. And boy he's the best teacher. And you go to such and such a class, not in the same league. And pretty soon what happens, you rally around that teacher and you get to the place where your honoring of that teacher goes beyond what it ought to be and pretty soon it becomes a basis for looking down or criticizing another. That can happen in the church. I imagine it can happen here. Somebody could say I go to Grace Community Church.

You go to Grace Community Church? Oh too bad. Guess everybody can't win, got to have some losers. My pastor is John MacArthur. And then, you know, you can become boastful and proud about that and then has ceased to be loyalty and it has started to be sin. There's no place for that. That just fractions the body of Christ. We're not here trying to set ourselves up as the only church.

We praise God for every other godly man and every other godly ministry in this country and in this world where Jesus Christ is lifted up and exalted.

We're not to be set one against the other and we're least of all to make that an issue of pride. But you know Satan can take even a good thing and so perverted, isn't that what he does with things, pervert them? And so pervert it that what really would be loyalty to a good thing can turn into a pride issue and conceit and arrogance result. That's what he's dealing with here. And what happens when people begin to get proud is everything starts falling apart, because humility is the basis of God's operation. Now in this passage, I'm going to show you two points.

Paul simply contrasts two things. You have a little outline to follow if you'd like. He contrasts the Corinthians conceit with the apostles humility or abasement. He says you Corinthians are proud and that is wrong. And then he sets up the apostles as examples of humility to show them what really should be their attitude. And he uses some words to kind of help us get through his argument a little bit. And I gave you some numbers you can jot the words down, the key words, as we go.

Let's look first of all at the Corinthians conceit. And here is the issue of pride. The first word that he uses to speak of it is puffed up. Puffed up, verse 6, "And these things brethren," and referring back when he says these things, to everything he said since Chapter 3, verse 5, when he began to discuss himself and Apollos. "These things brethren I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos." In other words, I've been giving you principles. I've been giving you principles of behavior in the church. Principles of not over-exalting your leaders. Principles of realizing that your preacher isn't somebody to be lifted up and exalted and given all kinds of honor to. He's just a slave. He's just a third level under-rower in a galley. Remember how we went into that last time?

Not somebody to be exalted, so keep your perspective. There's no since in exalting one over the other. They're all just servants of God and there's no sense in pitting one against the other, he said in Chapter 3, verse 22. They're all yours anyway. Why not enjoy all of them? All of the godly men, all of the godly teachers. And so he's been dealing with this issue all the way through. I've been giving you principles, but all the way through you'll notice that he has made those principles very concrete because he has used himself and Apollos as examples. Back in Chapter 3, verse 5 he talks about Paul and Apollos. Those were his examples.

He comes to verse 22, Paul, Apollos, and Cephus. He continues to use a human concrete, substantial example so they'll understand the principle. Verse 6 then says this, "All the things that I've been saying to you, I have used an illustration of myself and Apollos to make them clear. Now we all know about teaching that if you're going to teach effectively it helps to have a concrete objective illustration. And so he says I have used myself and Apollos as examples to teach you many principles. And this is what I have done. I have used these illustrations of myself and Apollos for your sakes that you might learn in us not to think above that which is written. "That no one of you be

puffed up for one against the other." There's our term puffed up.

Now the Corinthians had a problem with being puffed up. Paul says now all the way long, I've been using myself and Apollos as illustrations of the fact that ministers are simply slaves. Ministers are simply servants. Ministers are simply stewards. They're not anybody to be elevated. They're not anybody to be honored. They're not anybody to be lifted up. They're just servants of God. If they serve totally and completely in absolute obedience that's just doing what they should have done. There's no honor for that, but if they don't serve that way, they will be chastised.

That's why James 3:1 says "stop being so many teachers for theirs is the greater condemnation." And so Paul says, We have used ourselves as illustrations of what a servant is, of what a minister is so you'll quit exalting ministers. So that you notice this phrase in verse 6, so that you will learn from us not to exceed what is written. In other words, don't go further than Scripture allows you to go in esteeming men of God. Now we know that the Bible says that we are to esteem those who teach us and who rule over us greatly for their work sake. And we know the Bible says that a faithful elder who labors in the word and doctrine is to be doubly honored. And we know that we are to love those who have the rule over us and to honor them for their ministry. We know all of these things, but only within the bounds of Scripture. We are to only honor them as faithful slaves, as faithful servants, as trustworthy stewards. Nothing more.

And he says, I don't want you to go beyond what Scripture allows in esteeming these men. You've turned it into a cult where instead of people identifying with Christ and with the body of Christ, everybody is polarized to an individual. Believe me people, Satan would love to do this. One of the great tools that Satan could use to just fraction even the church that's committed to the word of God is to get all the Christians to identify with certain teaching. He needs to take the best of all. That's the way God intended it. So he says don't go beyond what is written.

Scripture has a lot to say about humility. Has a lot to say about pride and it has a lot to say about estimating ministers. Don't go passed what Scripture says. Incidentally people, there's a very, very solid principle to be used in application plenty of times. Here is the rule of faith in life right here. Don't go beyond it. This is it. What the Bible allows and permits that honors God. And especially in the area of pride and esteem. Look at Romans 12, verse 3.

It says there, "For I say," Romans 12:3, "through the grace given to me, to every man that is among you," he's talking to everybody. Now what am I saying? Not to think more highly than you ought to think. In other words, God has set certain limits on esteem. Just leave it there and here he has reference to ourselves. I look at John MacArthur and the Bible says don't think more of you than you ought to think. Well, that really leaves it down there. Because as Paul said, I'm the chief of sinners. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think.

Don't think more highly of somebody else than you ought to think. Remember we're all simply sinners. Paul says "I am what I am by," what, "the grace of God." I deserve nothing. I earn nothing. I have no merit on my own, if I'm anything. Even here he says in 12:3, "What I say, I say through the grace given to me and I need to remember that." No place for pride. No place for lifting up others. But he says, I'm the least of all the apostles. And you may say now wait a minute, the least of all the apostles? Yes, he says who before persecuted the church, was a blasphemer, persecutor, injurious, but I obtained mercy, he said. God was gracious. God put me in the ministry enabling me to preach, but I'm the least of all. I am the chief of sinners, he says.

That's a humble estimate. Contrast that with the attitude of the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians Chapter 4. He says, "Stop going beyond what Scripture allows. No one of you should be being puffed up one against the other." And it's a present tense. Stop being puffed up. The whole idea is to be set aside. The present tense emphasizes that the Corinthians are never at any time to act in this fashion. Stop being puffed up. The word puffed up is very vivid. It's like a frog just before it croaks, you know. It just kind of swells up. Don't be puffed up. The followers of Apollos were exalting themselves over the followers of Paul and the ones of Peter over Paul and Apollos and on and on it was going.

And you know what happens people? This is interesting, what starts out as love for a teacher, and that's going to happen, and loyalty to a teacher and gratitude to a teacher can turn to hostility to other teachers. So that you can't accept anyone else. I met some people on one occasion who started to study with a certain person and they said "Well, he's the only person that we listen to." And I said, "Did you realize that that's wrong?" And of course, they were very critical of everybody else. The results were very disastrous when they got into a certain ministry situation. They destroyed that whole thing. Very, very disastrous when what is love and gratitude and loyalty to somebody who really helped you becomes pride, conceit and you result in knocking other people.

Let me give you an illustration of how this could happen. In the 11thChapter of Numbers in the Old Testament, and this is very vivid. To put it mildly at the time that Israel was being led out of Egypt to the promised land, the great hero of Israel was Moses. And what a great man he was. And, of course, everybody identified with Moses. I mean, you know, Moses was the leader and there wasn't anybody like Moses. Moses was where it was at, beginning, end, and middle. Incidentally, the 11th Chapter of Numbers is an interesting chapter. I remember when I was a kid being told that this was one of the Chapters in the Bible where baseball was mentioned. The other one is Genesis 1 in the big inning.

But Numbers 11...Numbers 11 if you'll notice in verse 32 it talks about somebody who had ten homers. But anyway, Numbers 11:26...heard a lot of groaning there. Numbers 11:26 talks about a situation that occurred when the children of Israel were in the wilderness. Two of the people in the camp, one was named Eldad and the other Medad and the spirit rested on them. And they began to

prophesy. The end of verse 26 says "they prophesied in the camp." Well, there ran a young man and he told Moses. He runs to Moses and he said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said my Lord Moses forbid them. Stop them from doing that." "Moses said unto them, enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them?"

Do you see the point? Don't be jealous for me. I wish everybody was a prophet. Well, what happened here was a great illustration of loyalty to one man becoming hostility to another one. This happens in the church. It's a tragic thing. The Corinthians had a problem. They were puffed up. They had frog throats, gloating, boasting, arrogant. In fact, he speaks about this in repeated terms in 1 Corinthians. In Chapter 4, verse 18 he says some of you are puffed up. In Chapter 4, verse 19, he says, "I'll come to you shortly if the Lord will and will know not the speech of them who are puffed up, but the power."

In Chapter 5, verse 2, "you are puffed up." Verse 6, "your glorying is not good." Chapter 8, verse 1, "knowledge puffs up," they had a lot of knowledge and knowledge makes conceited where there is no love to temper it. 1 Corinthians 13:4, "love suffers long and is kind, envies not, loves vaunteth not itself is not puffed up." And they were accused in 2 Corinthians 12:20 of being conceited. They had a problem and pride is always destructive. Pride splits, tears a congregation's unity because pride means I'm for me and that is destructive. As long as we love and share and minister to one another there will be blessing.

So Christians may rejoice in their leaders, love them, be loyal to them, be grateful to them, but when it gets to the place where you find that love and that gratitude and that loyalty becoming the reason to criticize other godly men, then it has ceased being loyalty and it has become pride. There's a second word, 1 Corinthians 4 in our list and that is the word glorying. Verse 7, and here Paul directs three questions to them, three with very self-evident answers to try to nail their pride. "For who makes thee to differ from another?" That's the first question.

Literally it means, who made you better than anyone else? The verb deikronoa, to regard someone as superior. So who made you superior? Who made you better than anybody? The obvious answer is nobody. Who makes you superior? What makes you think you're better than anybody else? What right do you have to say well, I'm in this group. I'm better than somebody in that group. That whole thing is strictly conceit and it only involves your own imagination. You invented it. You're not any better than anybody else.

Just because your teacher happens to be so and so doesn't mean you're better than someone else. Just because you happen to have a certain ministry doesn't mean you're better than someone else. Who made you any superior? Second question, "and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?"

That's a good question. Think about this, what do you have that you didn't get from somebody else? Nothing, absolutely nothing. You were born. You had nothing to do with that. You were a gift. You didn't even choose to whom you were born. You had nothing to say about it. You say but once I got here man, I had a lot to say about where I am now. I'm a self-made man. Spontaneous, generated robot. You're not a self-made man.

Well, I've made my own success. Well, listen, what happens if you with all your intellect and your abilities were born in the middle of an aboriginal tribe in New Guinea? You'd be making mud pies like everybody else. Who decided you'd be here? Who put you here? And who made sure that your faculties were maintained till you get to the university and become something? Or who gave you the opportunity? Or who lifted you up? The Bible says it is "God that gives thee power to get wealth." The Bible says "every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights."

Whatever you have friends, you've received it from somewhere else. And spiritually speaking I think is the issue with the Corinthians. What do you have that you didn't get? Salvation? Did you earn that? Can you earn salvation? Can anybody earn salvation? "By the deeds of the law shall," what, "no flesh be justified. You're saved by faith, grace, that not of works. It is not of yourself. It is a what? Gift of God. You didn't get that. You say well, look at my talents and abilities. Where'd you get those? Where'd you get your spiritual gifts Corinthians? "You come behind in no gift," Chapter 1, verse 7 says. You are enriched by Him in all things so that you have all knowledge and all honor. Where'd you get that? It's the Spirit that gives severally to every man as He wills, right? You didn't earn that.

One day the Lord threw me out of a car, skidded me down a highway, I went 110 yards on my southern hemisphere. I came out of that thing, stood up, walked off the highway, and the Lord spoke to my heart and said I want you in the ministry. It was kind of like the Damascus Road. It's kind of like what Paul was saying here. In 1 Corinthians 9, he says, "If I had chosen to be a minister it might be something, but I didn't have a thing to say about it." God gave me the abilities, the gifts to do it.

What do I have that I didn't receive? I don't have anything. So whatever God may use of me is because He gave it to me. And even further, do you know that even the teachers that you have are gifts of God to you? How could you be proud about a gift you didn't earn? Ephesians Chapter 4 and verse 8 he says, "And He gave gifts unto men." And then in verse 11 it says what those gifts were. He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some teaching pastors. All those were gifted men given to the church. I'm a gift given to you. Jerry's a gift given to you. Fred, Jimmy, we're all just gifts given to you. All the elders, teachers, all the people who teach your children, they're gifts of God given to you. No reason for boasting. You didn't deserve any of us.

And we didn't deserve to be called, that's God's plan. All of us should respond with loyalty not pride. In 1 Peter he tells us, all of us, that God has given us all the things we have and all we need to do is

take care of it. "Every man has received the gift, so minister the same one to another as good stewards." You're just a steward of what God has given you. So he says to the Corinthians, what do you have that you didn't get? And the answer is nothing. Well, if you're not any different and you're not superior and you don't have anything that you didn't get, question 3, if you did receive it, if it was a gift, why do you glory as if you didn't receive it?

In other words, why are you boasting as if you earned it. The answer to that is don't know. Guess there isn't a whole lot of reasons. There's only one reason for boasting, that's all. Just one reason, pride. You have no ground to think you're better than anybody else. You have no ground to think that because of what you can do you're superior. No ground to think you earned anything, it's all a gift of God. What is there to boast about? What Paul does is he just...he strips all the excuses bare and he leaves them with a whole problem of facing their pride. There is no other alternative. By the time they're through with verse 7, they've got to admit it. They aren't any better than anyone else so there's no basis for pride there. They don't have anything that they deserve to earn, so there's nothing there. And they're only boasting out of their own mind and that's sin. They're finished.

But by this time, the steam's coming out of his ears and he's starting to get hot. Paul could get hot, you know that. We've seen him many times in his letters when he's really fuming. When we get to verse 8, he gets sarcastic. And you know what sarcasm is. That's saying the opposite of what you mean. That's when your wife comes out in the morning and she looks like she just, you know, like an explosion in a mattress factory with coils and this and she walks out and you take one look at her and you say boy are you beautiful. You see, that's sarcasm. You mean the very opposite of what you said. Or when you're at your office or your work or something and somebody's really messing up and you say oh you're really doing a great job on that. That's saying the opposite of what you mean, that's sarcasm.

So Paul here says the opposite of what he means in verse 8. He is sarcastic. "Now you are full. You are rich. You have reigned as kings. Boy aren't you something." Boy that's really hard. That's really, you know, scathing. And the first word he uses is full. He said, they're puffed up glorying and now to unmask their conceit he starts to use sarcasm. He says, "you're full." The word is used of food. It is a word that means to be satiated. It means to be satisfied. Oh you're satisfied. What do you need? You've got it all. Man, you've knocked it all off. You win. You have no wants, no lacks, just the opposite of Matthew 5:6 where our Lord said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled."

Here were some people who didn't hunger and thirst after righteousness, they already had it. They thought. You are full, what do you need? And notice the word at the beginning of verse 8, now. Already, you've arrived folks, you're in the millennium already and without us. You went right on in. You got it all. Everything has come to pass. Isn't it wonderful. You've already been glorified and perfected and you went right on by us, how nice. Philippians 3:12, Paul says, "Not as though I have

attained, but I still press toward the mark. Or the prize of the high calling of God in Christ."

The second word he uses is rich. You are rich. Plouteoin the Greek. It's an errisen. It means to become rich. And the implication is you become rich on your own. You've become rich on your own. Isn't that wonderful. You're loaded. You've got everything you need. You don't need me. You don't need anybody. You're right there. You've got it all. You're full, everything is great. Well, that's sarcastic. That's like Revelation 3, remember the message to the church at Laodicea when our Lord said this, "you say I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing and know not that you're wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." There's nobody as destitute as the man who thinks he has it all, did you know that?

They were full. They were rich. And then this one is too much, "you have reigned as kings, you're already in the millennium." You're on your thrones. How nice. Sarcastic "and you did it," look at verse 8, "without us." You didn't need us. You went right on into kingdom without us. Here we are struggling around, suffering, being abused, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and you've just gone right on in reigning as kinds. Sarcasm. You left your teachers far behind. And then he stops the sarcasm in the middle of verse 8 and you notice it says, "I would to God," in the King James. The word ophelonin the Greek is probably not that strong. It probably should say I wish. I wish you did reign and that we also might reign with you.

I wish you did reign. You know why? Because if you were reigning, we'd be reigning and the kingdom would be here and that'd be great. I wish it was the millennium he says. I wish we all were there. The facts aren't that way. Corinthians' conceit really despicable isn't it? Suffering Paul, bleeding for the cause of Christ, enduring pain and mockery and persecution and here were these conceited Corinthians, they had it all licked. Paul turns then to the apostles humility in verse 9. This is very simple to understand now that you understand the flow of the passage.

The apostles abasement, humility in verses 9-13. Notice what he says. There are four terms that he uses to describe. We'll just pull four out. First of all, the term is spectacle. He says "we're spectacles for I think that God has set forth us the apostles last it were appointed to death for we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men." He says you people are really something. You're the heroes, we're the criminals. He chosen a very vivid picture. When a Roman General won a victory they had a precession, they called it Triumph, capital T. And what they did was the Roman General would come into the city and he would parade his victorious army through the streets and in would come the army. With all falderal and all the pomp and the whole bit. They would come parading into the city. He would demonstrate his Triumph and his achievement by showing off his troops.

Way at the end of the line of troops there would be a little band of captives. They would probably be the best of the captives. They would be all chained together. They were sentenced to death. And

they would die in the arena when they would fight the beasts. Following the great Triumph, the people would move to the arena. In would come the little captives. At the end of everything, they would fight and be consumed by the beasts. History tells us that there was a common phrase, Te Morituri Salutamus, We who are about to die salute you.

And in would come the captives and they would die. And Paul says the word spectacle and that's what it refers to. We are the spectacles. You are the great Generals, you Corinthians, conquering everything parading with all the falderal, showing off your trophies and we're the little group of chained captives who have to go and die. Boy that's sharp language isn't it? You've arrived. You're the heroes, we're the spectacles. You flaunt your pride, your privileges. You reckon your achievements and we just serve and die.

He says "God's set us forth," and that literally means to publicly exhibit us. God has publicly exhibited us the apostles, the last thing, the little band of captives at the end appointed to death. We become a spectacle. We march into the arena of the world and men and angels gather and watch us die. That's our place. Moffett translated this, "God means us apostles to come in at the very end like doomed gladiators in the arena." And that's true the apostles took the last place. In Mark Chapter 9, the disciples were having an argument. They had a lot of arguments. Usually over the same subject. They were arguing about something and the Lord said what have you fellows been talking about?

And it was clam up time. Boing, you know, nobody said a sound because they had been arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom. And so the Lord said, I have a principle I'd like to share with you. "Whoever would be first in the kingdom shall be last and the servant of all." And then He took a little child and He brought the little child in the middle of the circle of disciples and He scooped the little child in His arms and He says, "now when you learn to serve a little child like this, you'll know what it is to serve me and to serve me is to my Father."

And He taught the lesson that is so basic that to be exalted in the kingdom is to be humbled in this life. The crown only comes after the cross. That's the principle. And it's true in Matthew 19, the Bible says that ultimately the apostles, the twelve are going to reign in God's kingdom on earth, the millennial kingdom, they're going to reign on twelve thrones aren't they? And so they're last in this world. They're the spectacle. They're the criminals. They died. They were spit on. They were mocked, they were beaten, they were pounded, they were shipwrecked. All the things they went through, but in the kingdom they're going to be on the thrones. That's God's principles.

He says they were appointed to death and they suffered in the face of the world humbly. There's a second word. Look at it, verse 10. "We are fools for Christ sake, but you are wise," sarcasm again. "We are weak, but you are strong. You're honorable, but we are despised." Boy the sarcasm there. We go through the world and what does the world think of us? They think we're fools. And they did in Chapter 17 of Acts in verse 18 the Athenians who were the brilliant people, the Athenians who had

all the philosophies, the Athenians who knew everything in terms of solution to man's problem, they heard Paul and they said what does this babbler know?

And Paul said in 1 Corinthians earlier that "the preaching of the cross is to the world," what, "foolishness." They think we're fools. Back in Acts Chapter 5, Peter and John preached and the Sanhedrin said what do these people know. They're hicks from Galilee. They're not even from uptown, Jerusalem. And then the apostles were considered weak. Paul said he had a thorn in the flesh. That his body was constantly infirm. You read 2 Corinthians 11:23 and all the things he endured. The pain, weariness, watchings, hunger, thirst, shipwrecked, being stoned, being beaten with rods, all of the things that he endured he was weak and he was a beaten man physically so many, many times. And then he was despised.

Remember he went into Lystra and Iconium and Derbe and Antioch and Pisidia and in those towns he as thrown out of town. He was stoned and left for dead. He was chased all over Macedonia. That's how the world treated them, but you Corinthians, why you're wise and strong and honored. Sarcasm, sarcasm. Third term that might help us to define the apostles humility is sufferers. They suffered. They not only were considered fools by the world, but they were sufferers. Verse 11, "Even unto this present hour," and that phrase means boy if there's a kingdom we haven't seen it. If it's been coronation day we missed it because right up until now "we hunger, we thirst, we are naked, we are buffeted" and the word buffeted in the Greek means beating with the fists. It's not the word for official scourging. It's a word for just beating somebody up.

"We've been beaten up. We have no home, no dwelling place. We labor working with our own hands." And of course, to a Greek working with your hands was dishonorable. That's why they had slaves. So Paul says we have taken the lowest level of society, adapted it as our way of life. We work with our hands. And to this present hour we hunger, thirst, naked, beaten and have no home. This our lot. But you're rich and full and you're reigning as kings. Sarcasm. Such despicable pride. The apostles had nothing, they were vagabonds without homes. Like Jesus said, "if you're going to follow me, you know this the foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has no where to lay His head," Matthew 8.

They suffered. How did they respond to that suffering? Verse 12, "Being reviled, we bless, being persecuted, we endure it. Being defamed we beseeched." In other words, they met defamation of character with kindness. They met persecution with endurance. They met slander with blessing. Humble men voluntary humility to accept the place that God had given them. Knowing that though they were last in the world, they would be first in God's kingdom. Here were the Corinthians puffed up, glorying, thinking they were full, rich, and reigning. And here were the apostles, spectacles, fools, sufferers, and one more term, filth.

Hard to imagine verse 13 says, "we are made as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things unto this day." Nothing's changed. If you've gone into the kingdom, something's wrong. We're still doing the same things, feeling the same things. Filth is an interesting word. It actually refers to the dirt that is scraped off of some filthy thing and then left to be deposited somewhere. We are the filth. We are that which is left after the cleaning has taken place. And the offscouring, that's exactly what it sounds like. When you take a scouring pad and clean the crust off burned food off your pan or whatever it is and what's left is the offscouring. What is wiped off when the object has been clean. That's us. We're nothing. We are filth in the eyes of the world. We are the offscouring of society. We take a place in society that is mocked and rejected because we boldly preach Christ. You see?

It's easy to get along in the world if you don't speak the truth. But boy when you start hitting the world with the truth, you're going to get a reaction because the world doesn't want to hear. And since Satan is the god of this world, the prince of the age, he's got the system to the place where it won't tolerate the word of truth. And somebody who boldly proclaims the word of truth is going to be set apart. And they're going to be considered as filth and offscouring. There's no place for exalting ourselves people. We are in this world as pilgrims. Man we are on a journey.

Somebody said to me the other day, some Christian came by in a fantastic car, you know. And somebody said to them nice car for a pilgrim. That was an interesting statement. I'm not saying what kind of car you ought to get, but I'm just saying that we need to keep the perspective of a pilgrim. And it's in this world if we are seeking to be elevated and we are worried about exaltation and we are worried about honors then we have missed the whole concept of apostolic humility and setting ourselves in the world to love men and to serve men and to go as far as we can to be to them what we need to be and to be gentle among men and to do good to all men, but at the same time, never compromising the truth, realizing that in some cases that failure to compromise the truth will result in persecution.

So they were the filth, they were the offscouring. The pride of the Corinthians is absolutely absurd just as pride is in any life. And when you read it like this and you see their boasting seems so good because they were boasting in good teachers. They weren't boasting in themselves so much. They were boasting in this good man Paul. And you'd almost think that's all right, but that's how subtle Satan is when he takes a good thing twists it into a pride issue and then Paul unmasks it as something very vial.

Satan is very deceptive. God wants humble servants. God only uses humble servants. When you're tempted to covet a reputation, when you're tempted to covet influence, when you're tempted to be honored by the world, to be elevated by the church, you've fallen into pride. Now listen to this, the world may honor you for things done. The world may elevate you. The church may honor you. The church may elevate you, if that's in God's will and some men honor you that's fine. If you're seeking God's glory and that comes as a benefit, but if you're seeking that, that's pride.

The Roman language, you know, and the Greek language had no word for humility. Had a word for pride, alazoneia, for one. Had no word for humility. You know why? They had no conception of that. It was nothing even to be thought of that a man would be humble. Christianity and the Old Testament Judaism really invented that word. Because humility comes with a proper perspective of God in Christ. If you don't have God in Christ and all you can do is compare yourself with other people, there's grounds for thinking you're better. Don't be desirous of vain glory.

Peter put it this way. Simply, "be clothed with humility." And beloved where there will be humility there will be unity in the church. Do you know that? Philippians 2, Paul says, "I want you to be of the same mind of one accord, having the same love." How? How can we have a church this big? How can we have a church of, what, 4,000 people to come on Sunday morning in total in all of the...how can we have a church and no unity? We can't all run around saying what do you think about this? I want to match up with you. You know, it'd be like taking 4,000 pianos and trying to tune them to each other. It'd be impossible.

How can we have unity? The only real way we can ever have unity is to all be so tuned to God that in humility we submit to Him and in submitting to one God, we shall equally submit to one another. Humility is the only thing that brings unity. He says be one mind, one accord, all these things. How? The next statement, "let each of you prefer others better than themselves. Let this mind be in you which is also in Christ Jesus who humbled Himself." Humility brings unity. In Corinth there was pride, so there was what? Division. And when the church is divided its testimony is destroyed. May God give us a unified testimony in the world and the community. May He do it because there's humility in every life to His glory. Let's pray.

We acknowledge, Father, this morning Your truth in the word and how thankful we are for the good time we have as we share together in it each Lord's day. Father, may our humility be legitimate not false. May we understand so much who You are and who Christ is that we can only see ourselves as sinners saved by grace, nothing more. Recipients of gifts deserving nothing. Father, we thank You for this word to us from Your word. Somehow take it out of our minds, translate it into our pattern of life that we may, as Micah said, walk humbly before God. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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