

SOME QUICK OBSERVATIONS

(a) Puffed up

This word is used 3 times in these 21 verses: v6, 18, 19. It points to the fact that this is a problem with the Corinthians and Paul is addressing it, in the wider context of dealing with the problem of factions in the church. The word 'puff up' means to blow, to inflate. They were blowing their own trumpets, being inflated with a false sense of self-importance.

(b) Irony

In this passage, especially vv8-13, Paul uses irony (even sarcasm) to contrast his real condition versus the imagined condition of the Corinthian Christians. It is the first time irony is being employed in this epistle. We need to note its use, so that we can interpret the passage rightly.

(c) Reason

He did not employ irony to embarrass and humiliate the Corinthian Christians. Rather, it was out of his deep love for them that he employed this unusual method, in order to warn them of the dangers that they will fall into, if they continue down this path.

FOCUS ON VERSES 1-5

(1) How should we view preachers and teachers of the Word?

➤ *They are servants of Christ. The word 'servant' is huperetes, which means under-rowers. It normally refers to service of a lowly kind, service with the hands, and one that takes orders from a higher master, executing them without questions. Viewing the word itself, someone who is a huperetes is one whom people will disdain and ignore. However, when we remember that they are huperetes of Christ, then the picture changes. Preachers and teachers are not great in themselves, but they represent and serve a great Saviour. This is how we should view them.*

➤ *Stewards of the mysteries of God. The word 'steward' is made up of two words: house and arrange. This is therefore someone has the task of making arrangements in the house. Campbell Morgan translates this word 'oikanomos' as housewife, with the task to feed the family, keep the family comfortable, tidy, warm. The steward is hence someone placed in complete control of a household, supervising the property, field, vineyards, finances,*

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food and other servants on behalf of the master. In relation to the master, he is a slave. In relation to other slaves, he is an overseer. Cf. Luke 12:42-48. What does he dispense? The mysteries of God!

In other words, a steward is one who dispenses to the family of God the gospel revealed by God and he supervises the family according to the wishes of the master. This is how we should view them.

Other use of 'stewards' in the New Testament:

Titus 1:7 ~ For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money.

1 Peter 4:10 ~ As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

Elders are stewards and all Christians are stewards. In other words, we are all charged with certain responsibilities, with the gifts and calling we are given, and we are to carry out our responsibilities with the authority of Christ.

Application: We do not exalt them, neither do we disdain them; but we honour them in the Lord.

- (2) What is their chief responsibility? What does this mean for the life and service of the church?

Their chief responsibility is to be faithful / trustworthy. This means they are always carrying out their work, whether the master is around to see or not.

This is what we should aspire to as preachers and teachers of the Word, and this is what we should be demanding from our preachers and teachers. The concern is not success, influence, size of church, degrees, books published, invitations to minister, etc. The concern is faithfulness, being reliable, and trustworthy, to do what the Master has entrusted to him.

- (3) Who is their ultimate evaluator, and why? How should this simple truth affect us?

Not the members of the church, not the people of the world, not even the preacher/teacher himself, but the Lord. The reason is because the Lord is the Master and it is to Him that we are accountable ultimately. Another reason is because only the Lord can see the motives of the heart, whether what was done was done for His glory or self-glory, and whether the desire is right and good though the execution falls short.

As members: we could give feedback, but we must never condemn Christ's servants. To the Master, they stand or fall.

As servants of Christ: we must check our heart's motives and carry out self-examination, so that we can serve Christ better. But we need to remember that a clear conscience need not mean Christ's approval.

It is a good principle to live our life and serve our Master with the Day in view. Let that Day control and determine what we do and how we do.

FOCUS ON VERSES 6-13

- (1) What, do you think, is Paul seeking to convey in **verse 8**?

In verse 8, Paul says this: You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us – and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!

He is employing irony to show them how ridiculous is their claim. They claim to have eaten till they could eat no more spiritually, satiated, fully satisfied. They don't need any more feeding! They claim to be so rich that they can't get any richer, to have reached the pinnacle of their Christian Life that they are now, even now, reigning as kings! In other words, they are claiming that they have reached their goal already, here on earth!

This reminds us of the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:17-18, to the church @ Laodicea ~ Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your

nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.

Christians and churches can be so blinded, so self-deluded, to think that they are in the best possible state now, that there is no need for any more progress to be made. This self-satisfaction is highly dangerous spiritually!!

Paul said he wished what they imagined to be true. In other words, he is telling them, it is far from true!!!

(2) What was and is the condition of the apostles as they minister in this world?

Verse 9: Picture of a victorious king or general returning to the city after battle. He rides on a horse, followed by his soldiers, the spoils, and finally the defeated captives. This last group are condemned to die, and will soon be thrown into the arena to fight with lions or one another, for the watching pleasures of the people. Paul says that the apostles belong to this last group, and he says something else more shocking: God has made them to be so!

Verse 10: Fools is the word 'moros' from which we get the word 'moron'. As far as the world is concerned, the apostles are moronic!

Verse 11-2: They are weak, dishonoured, hunger, thirst, poorly clothed, beatn, persecuted, defamed.

Verse 13: They are viewed as the filth, the offscouring of all things. This is a word to describe what is left in the frying pan after all the frying and cooking. These things stick to the pan, it is hard to remove, it is irritating, and when you remove them, you throw them away. They are of no value whatsoever. This is how the world views them!

Hebrews 13:12-14 say this of Jesus our Lord ~ Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.

Isaiah 53:3 says this of Jesus our Lord ~ He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

The apostles - their current conditions and how they were treated --- how similar to how Jesus was treated when He was here on earth! Indeed, this is and has always been how saints and servants of God were treated all throughout history - see Hebrews 11:35-38.

What a sharp contrast then is the supposed, imagined condition of the Corinthian Christians!!

- (3) What is the message Paul wants to convey in these 8 verses?

Their supposed wellness, and their obsession for worldly wisdom in order to move further in this supposed greatness and wellness, is totally out of character with the gospel, with Christ, and with Christ's people down through the ages! Realise this, and hence forsake the foolish pursuit!!

FOCUS ON VERSES 14-21

- (1) What's the purpose of Paul in writing these things to the Corinthian Christians?
It is to warn them, not to shame them.

- (2) What's the purpose of Paul in sending Timothy to the Corinthian Christians?
It is to show/remind them of how Paul conducts himself with them and with Christians everywhere, so that they could 'better' imitate him. In short, it is to encourage them.

- (3) How did Paul become the father of these Corinthian Christians? Can the same be said of you today?

Paul was the instrument God used to bring these people to faith in Christ. In this sense therefore, he is their father. He was intimately involved in their conversion. He was careful to say that it was "in Christ Jesus he has begotten them through the gospel." It was in Christ, it was through the gospel. He preached the gospel and it was by the grace of Christ and the power of Christ that he became their spiritual father. The process involved many pains and sacrifices on Paul's part. Our challenge is whether we are willing to suffer these pains and sacrifices, so that we can be an instrument in Christ's hands to bring others to faith in Him.

- (4) As a father of these Christians, what else did Paul do?

- *He calls them to imitate him. Children naturally imitate their fathers, and so as their spiritual fathers, he calls them to imitate him.*

What changes must be made in your life so that you can say these words safely?

Today, we are all very fearful of saying this to others, but in truth, our lives ought to be such that it can be safely copied by others. Hence, rather than retreat and cop out, we ought to face up to this question: What needs to change in my life so that I could safely say to another Christian, "Imitate me!"

- *He disciplines them by confronting them. When there is a problem, one could ignore it, pretend it doesn't exist, sweep it under the carpet. Or one could cut off all communication and refuse to talk. Paul did neither here. He confronted them, told them the truth but did it in love.*

How is this a reflection of the methods of Christ?

Christ came into our world and told us our sins, and then proceeded to deal with it. He did not ignore our sins, nor did He cut off communication with us.

- (5) In **verse 21**, Paul asked the Corinthian Christians to choose between two options. What are they? Why does he do this?

He wants them to choose how they want to be treated by him. This is another way of telling them to respond. They have heard what he has said. They must now respond. How will they respond?

Paul is not contented to just state the facts. He wants them to respond.

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

- (a) Message
In these 21 verses, Paul talks about the right way to view ministers of the gospel, their over-realised eschatology which is wrong and ridiculous, and urged

them to imitate him, reminding them of his special relationship with them. He is doing all these because he is dealing with a deeper problem of pride in them. This pride and the obsession with worldly wisdom are the reasons for the faction in the church.

(b) Method

To help them, we see that Paul was personal, Paul works on their relationship, Paul loves them. This remains the apostolic and hence Biblical method of how to help people spiritual. It must be personal, it demands love and it happens in the context of a relationship.

We also see that Paul is not contented to just deal with the problem of faction, but he goes deep to deal with their pride, their wrong views of leaders, and their foolish obsession with worldly wisdom. He is not content to just deal with the symptoms, but he wants to deal with the root issues. This is how we should proceed in dealing with our own spiritual issues as well as helping our fellow Christians in dealing with their spiritual issues.

APPENDIX A

1 Corinthians 4 (English Standard Version)

¹This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ²Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. ³But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

⁶I 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. ⁷For 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?

⁸Already 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! ⁹For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to

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death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. ¹⁰We 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. ¹¹To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹²and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

¹⁴I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. ¹⁵For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ¹⁶I urge you, then, be imitators of me. ¹⁷That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. ¹⁸Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. ¹⁹But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. ²¹What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?