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A1205 – January 29, 2012 – 1 Corinthians 4:9-14
Foolishness For Christ's Sake, The Path To Kingship

If you would turn in your Bible to 1 Cor 4. We are in a section that is very strongly opposed to arrogance among Christians. The evidence of their arrogance was their judging Apollos as a superior teacher to Paul. This was a judgment that was being passed before the time because the actual time of this evaluation is the judgment seat of Christ and it was not their's to judge, Christ Himself will judge and He will rank Apollos and Paul according to how well they fulfilled their stewardship of the mysteries of God.

Remember, there will be a ranking of believers in the future kingdom and a lot of this has to do with arrogance vs humility. Humility is the central attribute in the NT. Maybe you recall in the Gospels an argument starting among the disciples concerning which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom. There's the crux of the problem. Remember what the Lord asked them: so, what were you guys discussing along the way? Huh? Oh, well, nothing really. But Jesus knew what they were thinking and so He sat them down and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." See, it's a paradox, it seems absurd, how can I be first if I'm last? But that's what the Lord says. Then, without exception in the NT, the Lord would take a child and He would set the child before all of them and He would take the child in His arms and say, "Whoever receives a child like this in My name receives Me." See, the adult population had a problem, they liked to exclude children, they didn't like the little brats, but Jesus said by effect, if you reject children you're rejecting Me and if you receive children you're receiving Me. A very poignant lesson. He says the exclusion of children manifests an arrogance problem. Yak, yak about who's going to be the greatest. Then he said, "Whoever humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Now here is a strange thing. Usually children are told to

look to adults as an example but here we have the reverse. Here we have adults looking to children as an example.

What? This is strange. What does a little kid have to teach me? Well, in this case they have something very important to teach you. Humility. How can a kid teach me humility? Because “children have little concern about their personal prestige and position in relation to other people.”¹ Adults make much of it. In other words, Jesus is saying if we want to be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, guess what, we have to become like children and not be concerned with personal prestige and position in relation to others.

Now then we would say the conclusion of Jesus’ teaching is this: excluding children is a sign of arrogance because their presence convicts of true humility. And you don’t want to be convicted because you know in your heart of hearts you’re arrogant so you do anything you can to exclude the kids, they’re the source of the conviction. This is a hard saying, who can follow it? That’s what Jesus means by ranking or ordering yourselves.

And Christians who rank other Christians are puffed up, self-righteous, arrogant people who are in desperate need of humility. Now see what Paul says in verse 6, “these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.” It is going beyond the word of God to rank adults as superior to children or one adult as superior to another. This is violence to the word of God. Verse 7, “For who are you to distinguish?” You know, just who do you think you are? Where are you getting the standards you’re using? Whatever they are, they’re not Scriptural standards. And therefore you are the arrogant ones. You’re making stuff up, creating standards, judging according to those standards. And he says, “what do you have that you did not receive?” Since everything you have has been given to you by God’s grace what do you think you’re doing? Every one of you came into this world buck naked; you had nothing, and guess what, you’re going to go out buck naked, you can’t take anything with you. So then everything you have you received is as a grace gift. Then Paul concludes the verse, “But if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? Children for example, in the church meeting, are a gift of God, they are part of the body of Christ, and every part is necessary to proper function. The prime function of little children is to remind us of humility because they don’t rank people, they don’t care about

prestige, they don't care whether they're wearing the latest style of blue jeans or whether they have the perfect nose and all the things that adults sit around and mope about; they are reminders of true humility and what it means to be a member of the body of Christ. Now they were boasting in Apollos as if Paul were some kind of second hand, throwback teacher. And he's rebuking them severely for it. Verse 8, "You are already fully satisfied?" O, you've already have arrived spiritually, have you? You already know all the Bible doctrine? You have progressed beyond the word of God? Oh, is that right! It's irony, pure irony. What a joke. They were still infants, spiritually speaking. They couldn't handle solid teaching of the word of God. But they thought, because of their arrogance, they had already had their fill. "You have already become rich." Oh, you already have plenty of spiritual things do you? You're just so up to speed on the word of God that you can just sit back and coast. Pure irony. They were in poverty, spiritually speaking. And third, "You have become kings without us." You think you are royalty. You think you have moved to the status of royalty independent of the apostolic word of God? You think you are masters of the universe. Oh Paul says, O how "I wish you were kings so that you might reign with us." But you're not! You're not even close to kings, spiritually speaking; you're paupers. And if we are in the kingdom you would not be reigning with us. Apollos and I would be reigning; you would be taking out our garbage.

Now verse 9, and we pick up where we left off last week. Now he wants to give them the picture of what it takes to reign with the apostles in the kingdom. And the short answer is genuine humility. Humility, humbling ourselves by having a right evaluation of ourselves, that we have nothing and are nothing apart from Christ.

First of all Paul says, **For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.** Now before we go into the details let me clarify the argument Paul is making in this verse. He's using more imagery and the imagery here is of Roman triumph in war, especially in the expressions **last of all, as men condemned to death and a spectacle to the world.** There's a scene here where Paul and Apollos are at the very end in a parade, and the whole world is watching them pass by. When the Romans were triumphant in battle the commanding general would return in a splendid parade and they'd be marching down the street, the Roman

general would be out front, then his army, the soldiers, then the war booty and at the very end of the procession, last of all were the war captives. These were men condemned to die in the Roman arena either as gladiators or simply thrown to the beasts as a spectacle for all to see. Now that's the basic imagery Paul has in mind. And therefore Paul is saying God has made us apostles destined to die as a spectacle for all to see.

Now Paul says this is what **I think**. Paul thought long and hard about why God made him and Apollos apostles, and his conclusion is so they would be condemned to death, so they would be martyrs for Christ. This is his probable opinion, meaning he's pretty sure he's right. So Paul didn't have this revealed to him; this is just his opinion after thinking long and hard about it. Why did God make me an apostle? For martyrdom ultimately. He says God made us apostles **last of all**, like captives of war, destined for death. That was the lot of the apostles while the Corinthians went around on a bragimony, acting like kings.

Now we want to think of what it was like to be an apostle, to be last of all. Paul already told us in verse 1 that being an apostle was on par with being a servant and a steward; both humble stations in life, nothing glorious about it. Here he imagines himself as a captive of war, destined for martyrdom. The question is why. Why did Paul think of himself as destined for death?

Answer, he was an apostle and as an apostle his responsibility was to be a good steward of the mysteries of God, meaning he was to dispense of the special revelation he received. In other words, an apostle was not to add or take anything away from the message, his job was simply to relay the message of God. And that is a very humble task that is not a highly thought of task because it requires no originality. Paul's job was not to be original. It was to be faithful to the task of declaring God's message. And then we might add that the message they were proclaiming was very offensive to mankind. What man appreciates being told that he can't know anything apart from God's revelation? That he can't have genuine knowledge until he bows the knee to Jesus Christ? Yet that was the apostolic message. You don't know anything and you can't know anything apart from the word of God, period!

Now if you do have the guts and the humility to preach that message to the world there are going to be two results. First, you are going to make waves. Paul was a wave maker, everywhere he went and preached this message

people lined up on one side or the other and one side started throwing rocks. Either you loved Paul or you hated him. But there is no doubt that a message like you don't know anything apart from the word of God is going to divide people. That message reduces the human intellect down to peanut size, it's very degrading and most people can't handle it. But the foolishness of God is wiser than men. So the first thing this message would do is offend and make waves. The second thing preaching a message like this would do is make you a spectacle. It would get people's attention, what is this person trying to say, you've got to be kidding. So it would put you on center stage because no one else is promoting this radical message. No other religion or philosophy says you can't know anything apart from the revelation of God. That is a very interesting message, we are the Jews and we have our scribes, we are the Greeks and we have our philosophers, and yet you're telling us we don't have knowledge. Indeed that's what we're saying, you have a lot of learning but no knowledge because the paradigm is all wrong. So that is the message and it is going to get attention when you preach it, not only from men but from angels. The angels were very interested in watching the apostles go around preaching that kind of message, that is a very offensive message and they looked at Paul and Apollos and just marveled that two human beings would go out there with no holds barred and preach this offensive, in your face message, knowing that it's not going to get good reviews in the Chicago Tribune. They thought it was really neat that these guys had the guts to tell the truth because most people don't do this. There are not many people in the entire history of the world that have the guts to tell you the truth. The truth is what's offensive. You can say it nicely, you can say it calmly, you can say it clearly, it doesn't matter how you say it, the only thing that matters when it comes to truth is what you're saying and when the person on the other end of the line hears what you're saying a firestorm will immediately erupt. So the two things preaching this message will do is first, make waves and two, put you on center stage of the universe.

So then you can see in verse 9 Paul's reasoning, I thought about why God made us apostles and I can only conclude one thing, ultimately it's so we would die a martyr's death. And I concluded this because the message we're having to go out and preach is so offensive to the natural man, it is just about the most humiliating commentary on man that anyone could ever think of, man knows nothing and is a moron without God's word, and so when we go

around and preach this message we stick out like a sore thumb, we are a spectacle to the world and people get mad and start throwing oranges.

Now then we might comment on this martyrdom they were destined for. We don't really know what happened to many of the apostles, how or where they died, though people float around e-mails claiming that they were all martyred except for the apostle John. We don't really know that. Tradition says that. What we do know is that James the brother of John was beheaded by King Herod Agrippa because that's recorded in Acts 12. Peter we know was martyred by crucifixion since it was predicted by Christ in John 21:18-19. Whether he was crucified in Rome or not, however, is a matter of debate. Eusebius mentions that Peter refused to be crucified as our Lord and was crucified upside down. Paul, tradition says was martyred under Emperor Nero by decapitation at the sword of an imperial headsman. Tradition says that Thomas went to India and was martyred with spears. Matthias it is said was stoned by the Jews. The importance of the martyrdom of the apostles is not so much whether we can untangle each of these men and how they died as to realize that being apostles and preaching of the word of God with humble boldness is what put these men in the spotlight, it put them on the world stage and it created tension between God and Satan in the angelic conflict. Obviously Satan wanted to kill these men, these men were interrupting his program, everywhere they went they preached Christ and Him crucified and people were defecting from Satan's kingdom. So Satan would try to stop the defections by going on the attack.

For example in Acts 12 we see that Satan was heavily influencing King Herod Agrippa to persecute James the brother of John and so he took him and had him beheaded. Now just imagine being beheaded. In the Roman Empire they did it one of two ways. If you were rich you could pay the executioner to make a clean cut, just sever the head from the body with a single swipe. If you were poor it took a little time, it was one chop at a time till the head fell off. Now, how do you like that? Not so much. Well, the Jews loved it so Agrippa decided to do it again and he put Peter in prison but before the day of the beheading the angels were watching this and they got instructions from the Lord to go and break Peter out of jail. So he got rescued.

What you have then is two examples of apostles in the same danger. One is beheaded; the other is not. Now why is that? Why did James get the axe but

Peter didn't? Because God's plan was for James to get the axe at that time and Peter not to get the axe at that time. See, what this is showing is that God is sovereign over history and not Satan. We get the idea sometimes that Satan is really strong, that he can do whatever he wants. That's not true. Sometimes it seems true, but the truth is that God decides when a person dies. Satan may want to try to kill them, he may be doing everything he can to kill them, but if it's not their turn to die God will protect them. So one of the great themes of the book of Acts is to watch how Satan attempts to thwart the guys on center stage, but they stick around until God wants them gone. And the irony of the whole thing is that Satan's attempts to thwart the plan of God are part of the plan of God. So the first significance of martyrdom is it assures you that God is in control of whatsoever comes to pass, not men, not Satan, not natural law.

The second significance of martyrdom is that when it does occur, while Satan thinks he has finally been successful in removing a believer, it actually turns out that the testimony of Jesus Christ spreads. You know, every time a believer is killed more believers get courage to go out and preach the word with courage. As Tertullian observed in the early church, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Satan's attempts to destroy the church all backfire and do nothing but increase the growth of the Church.

So then, Paul says, we've been put on center stage and we're going to die, but this is going to end up for the good. Then in verse 10 Paul picks back up with irony, notice the contrasts, **We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are sensible in Christ; we are weak** and it's implied **for Christ's sake, but you are strong** in Christ; **you are distinguished** in Christ, **but we are without honor** for Christ's sake. Now this is all from the world's point of view. From the world's point of view **we are fools...but you are sensible**. From the world's point of view **we are weak...but you are strong**. From the world's point of view **you are distinguished...but we are without honor**. Now then, which way should we be? Should we be like the Corinthians or should we be like the apostles? The moral imperative is obvious. As far as the world is concerned we ought to be **fools for Christ's sake**, we ought to be weak for Christ's sake, we ought to be without honor for Christ's sake. Now that's a really hard position to hold because we don't want people to think we are fools, we want people to think we are sensible; we don't want people to think we are weak, we want people to think we are

strong; and we don't want people to think of us as without honor but as distinguished citizens. Brethren, those are sinful desires. If you're seeking those things for your own then you are taking them from Christ who is the only one to whom they belong.

Now there's a difference to highlight in v 10, notice **we are fools for Christ, but you are sensible in Christ.** For Christ and in Christ, two different expressions. For Christ is experiential, it means, this is how we live, we live for Christ as if we are fools, as if we are weak, as if we are without honor. The other, in Christ, is positional, it means simply, we are believers, but experientially they were living as sensible, as strong and as distinguished. They were in Christ but they were not living like they were in Christ. Paul and Apollos were living as if they were in Christ, and they were living **for Christ.**

So then we have the fact that all Christians are in Christ but not all Christians live for Christ. Let me explain what's going on here with two examples, both from scholarship. There is a love of worldly accolade among Christians and a spurning of being counter cultural. Let's just accommodate, accommodate, accommodate, by which is meant, reinterpret the Bible to fit whatever the world is saying. For example, the argument over Genesis 1-11. What are we supposed to do with the origins debate? What are we supposed to do with the age of the universe and the age of the earth? Well, you know what science says. Science has proven that the universe is 13.7 billion years old and the earth is 4.6 billion years old. So it would be in our best interest to reinterpret the days of Genesis to fit this time scale. So we have all kinds of strategies to accommodate our reading of Scripture to the so-called proven age of the universe and earth. Why do Christians feel the need to reinterpret Scripture to fit these ages? Intellectual respectability and that is the only reason. In fact, in recent publications the argument of those at Biologos, which is the umbrella for Christian accommodationists started by Francis Collins, is that arguing for a six day, twenty four hour creation and a young earth, does more harm than good, that it's driving people away over something trivial. Oh really, creation and the age of the universe is trivial? Hmm, let me think about that one. What you're saying is that it doesn't matter how God did it, just that God did it? Well, I got all A's in college and I did it by cheating. Does it really not matter how I did it? C'mon, people, think. How you do something defines who you are. So yes, it does matter, it

matters so much that if God used evolution then He's a completely different God than the God of young earth creationism. A completely different God with a different set of attributes. So can we really accommodate just to retain intellectual credibility with the world?

Here's another illustration of the difference. Not long ago someone gave me a book to read titled *The Science of God*. After thumbing through the pages of the book and seeing the same tired arguments I've seen over and over I looked at the cover of the book again, read the title and said, aha, there's the problem, look at the title, *The Science of God*, that is, I have encased God inside of Science. God can be explained in terms of Science. The creator can be explained in terms of the created. That's an accommodation approach. What should the title of the book be? *The God of Science*. Science doesn't explain God, God explains Science. It's exactly the reverse. There is no science without God. The title betrays the accommodation approach; the reversal of the title is the biblical approach.

Now another accommodation approach used to get academic recognition is illustrated by the tension at Dallas Seminary in the last 20 years. Dallas has gone down hill if you didn't know. Tom Constable retired last year and he was the head of the Bible Exposition department. Tom was holding the torch of what you know as Dallas Seminary, those like Charles Ryrie, John Walvoord, Dwight Pentecost, Stanley Toussaint, Bob Lightner, these guys that were solid Modified Dispensationalism over the last 50 years. Those guys are all gone now. They have a few good guys like Roy Zuck who is the editor of the journal that comes out of Dallas, *Bibliotheca Sacra*. But all the other departments were taken over years ago by Progressive Dispensationalists and you're just fooling yourself if you think everything is hunkey dorrey over there. It's not. It's a wreck. I know personally the good guys that came out over the last 5 years. That's how small a number they are, and they all had to come through that Bible Exposition department. Now the school, see, there was a guy named Darrell Bock. Bock graduated around 1979. He was in Jerry Bain's class, sat a few seats away from him. Jerry told me he doesn't know what happened to Darrell. But he came out with a book in 1992 called *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*. And in that book they deny that there are two peoples of God, they say there's only one people of God and they use terms of the church like spiritual Israel. And what this does is it erodes the distinction of the church and Israel, which is the

hallmark of modified Dispensationalism. And once you've wiped out the Israel-Church distinction then you don't have any rapture of the Church, that is all washed down the toilet. And over there at Dallas they don't believe for a minute in the pre-trib rapture. I listened to a radio talk show of two students over there about how it was laughed out of the classroom. Now you can stand in denial but I'm just telling you, I've known about this since 1998, that's 14 years ago. The whole thing is a wreck over there. You say, now why is it a wreck? Why are they doing this? One answer - academic recognition. That's what it's all about, we want to be known as scholars and people who believe in the pre-trib rapture are not recognized as scholars, they are laughed at, they are thrown in with the flat earth society and all the other quacks. So they want academic recognition among the scholarly world, by which we mean, unbelievers.

Now contrast that to Charles Ryrie. I was listening to him about five years ago and he was talking about going over to TCU and he was introduced to the class as a scholar and Ryrie told us, when the professor said that, I basked in the moment too long, a scholar. See, that's the thing, Ryrie was not recognized by the academic world as a scholar, so hearing it he says, I basked in that, I shouldn't have. Here's the deal, no one who ever held to the line of truth was recognized by the world as a scholar. They're laughed at, mocked and run through the mud, but a scholar they are not considered.

That's why I'm not interested in the academic environment. Someone says, well, you ought to write a book or go teach at the seminary. You don't understand. I'm here with you fine people, you were called out by Christ. Paul said in chapter 1, God didn't call out many professors, many politicians, many elite of society, he called out average people. So why should I rush off and try to impress some people who are too big for their shoes when I have the people of Jesus Christ right in front of me. Why would I want to put myself in that environment when I'm not here for that? I'm here for the people that Christ called out; I'm here for the church of Jesus Christ. I don't care about academic recognition.

But the Corinthians did, oh boy, they were strong, they were distinguished, they maintained intellectual respectability with the world. Paul says, the true Christian path, if you walk it, the world is going to think you are a fool, the world is going to consider you weak, the world is going to consider you

without honor. And Paul says praise God because ultimately Christ is the one who is sensible and the world are fools, Christ is the one who is strong, the world is weak, Christ is the one who is distinguished, the world has no honor. So why are you Corinthians wanting to be so much like the world? Why not rather be like Christ?

Now Paul continues, verse 11, **To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; 12and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless, when we are persecuted, we endure; 13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate, we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.** Now look at the apostles and ask if you are walking the Christian life. I don't think we in America have a clue what the Christian life is all about. I'll tell you what it's about. It's about only one thing; Jesus Christ. Oh, but you don't understand, I've got it so hard, yeah, I know, you've only got three flatscreen TV's. It's really rough isn't it? Now, I'll tell you what makes Christianity in America so hard. It's not that difficult to see. Comfort and religious tolerance. Those are the two factors. We have an easy life, we have a strong middle class, we have wealth oozing out everywhere, you make more in a day than most people make in a year. Things are good, you can relax, you can entertain yourself, things are everywhere, and every time a culture has reached that point of decadence it has declined rapidly, it has thought that we don't need God and within 100 years that country is destitute.

The other side is tolerance, religious tolerance or pluralism. Why everybody's got truth in their religion, all religions are equally true! And in that environment if you stand up and tell the truth people get offended very easily. People today are wimps. And if you clarify the truth they'll hate you for it. And therefore most people won't get up and tell you the truth. You know, some people thought I did the wrong thing at that funeral for John Paul; I even got called a heretic, which I consider a compliment. Why did I have to bring up Protestantism and Roman Catholicism? Why that just makes people upset. Well, besides the fact that's what the family wanted, so what. It's the truth. Do you really think people can get saved without hearing the truth? You're kidding yourself. And I'll tell you another thing. Like someone else said in the funeral, are you really a person's friend if you won't tell them the truth? I mean, what is this, some kind of charade. You keep the

truth from your friends? What kind of a friend are you? This is not a game. And I'll tell you another reason I did it. Satan hates clarity. He wants to keep everyone confused. To clarify the lines for people is the only way to get a gospel hearing. Another reason I did it is simply for the love of the truth. Someone has to stand up and be a leader, especially when there are a lot of people ducking and beating around the bush and play footsy. That's not helping the cause of Christ; trying to remain sensible in Christ, trying to remain distinguished in your community, trying to maintain your own selfish honor. And I tell you, if you keep that up, you're life isn't going to amount to a hill of beans. So then I ask you, do you really believe what we teach at this church? Or are you just talking the talk in your private kind of Christian way, being a secret Christian?

Baloney, Paul says, look at us apostles, vv 11-13, **To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty**; they were at Ephesus at the time, so he's describing his circumstances at Ephesus, **we are both hungry and thirsty**, not much to eat, not much to drink, **and we are poorly clothed**, they were wearing rags, **and we are roughly treated** or better, beaten up, it wasn't just words, it was fists bloodying their noses. What did you think; the gospel was going to be welcomed? Ha. **And are homeless**, technically, unsettled, having to stay in other people's homes, they had places to stay but you know how it is being away from home. Verse 12, **and we toil, working with our own hands**. Paul made tents, this was his trade that he learned as a Jewish boy, and since when he came to Christ his father cut him off, he had to at times use his trade to make a living. It was not easy living the Christian life; people don't like you for it.

Then in the middle of verse 12 Paul starts using a figure of speech called oxymoron. An oxymoron is when you have two words back to back that contradict each other. And this is teaching you how to live the Christian life. It all seems very unnatural. What are you going to do for example when someone verbally abuses you, just runs you down, you're going to bless them. Why would I do that? Because that's the Christian thing to do! So he says, **when reviled, we bless. When persecuted** for the Christian faith, what do you do? you **endure it**, you bear up under the pressure. Verse 13, **when slandered** or defamed, **we conciliate** or encourage, **we have become as the scum of the world**, dirty, rotten, stinking people as far as the world is concerned. **the dregs of all things**, until this minute.

Paul says, and yet you guys are kings, you are rich, you have your fill, why you've accommodated to the world and yes, you have maintained your intellectual respectability, you get along just fine with the world, they look up to you as nice, outstanding, distinguished members of the community. But Paul says if you were really living Christ you wouldn't have that reputation, you'd have mine, and you'd be as the scum of the world.

Now then verse 14, **I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.** This is to be taken as firm counsel from a father to his children. It is not to rub it in their face and to shame them but to counsel them to stop being so worldly and start living for Christ. If we are to reign as Kings with Paul and Apollos, we must take the path of Paul and Apollos; the path of being a fool for Christ, being weak in the eyes of the world and being without honor among the esteemed of society.

May we all take heed the life we are living and how we are living it and be challenged to live for Christ and Him crucified and not living for me, me, me.

ⁱ Tom Constable. (2003; 2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Mt 18:3). Galaxie Software.

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