

In Galatians 6:3, the great Apostle had written, “If any man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” The Galatian passage does not mean that this individual man is a nobody who has deceived himself into thinking he is something. No it means, There is no man who is anything and therefore a man is deceived and puffed up if he thinks he is somebody. It is as if Paul had said, “Here is this little creature, made out of dust, who has nothing of his own, but puffed up with a sense of his own importance, trying to make something of himself, distancing himself from others, glorying in himself.

Paul is saying in more detail the same thing here in I Corinthians 4. Pride is the great enemy of your soul, and it is a deadly enemy of the ministry of the Gospel. The same disease was epidemic in Corinth that was also found among the Galatians. Men presumed they could improve on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The result was the same: strife and factionalism, men separating themselves from others on the basis of some fancied superiority—then others separating from them because of their fancied superiority—I am better than you because you think you are better than me, but I am better than you because I don’t think I am better than you. You know how the drill goes. The heart of man is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

They gloried in men, and forgot that men are nothing: Psalm 62:9 Surely men of low degree *are* vanity, *and* men of high degree *are* a lie: to be laid in the balance, they *are* altogether *lighter* than vanity. It is this truth that Paul is building on in the passage in I Cor. 4:6-21. But let us look at the words:

Vs. 7: Why are you different from someone else? This is a fundamental question that each man needs to ask himself, and to let the Bible answer it for him. You differ from someone else because of the gifts of God—and there is no other reason. Let me enumerate the things about you that you had no choice about: Who your parents were. What your birthdate was [change it by 5 centuries and imagine your life]; What your race was; What the place of your birth was [change that by three thousand miles in any direction]; What your sex was. The way your mind was wired: what are your weaknesses and strengths, when the DNA came together in that first cell in your mother’s body—there are ten thousand things that could be said.

Why do you glory, as though you had not received it? As if you were not given these gifts for God’s glory and purposes, and not for you to glory over another. You and I are called to use our gifts and our abilities for the service of one another, not so that we can glory and despise others. The key is thankfulness. The proud heart is never a thankful heart. The proud man thinks that he deserves this or that. This is the reason that Haman was filled with wrath, when he went out of the palace and Mordecai did not do obeisance to him. Haman thought that this Jew that was in the king’s gate owed him proper reverence and respect, and he hated Mordecai when he did not receive it. As Hamlet said, “Use every man after his deserts, and who shall escape whipping.”

Verse 8 and much that follows is ironic. “How full, how satiated you are.” You have pushed back from the banquet, and you are satisfied—there is no hunger in your soul. You are rich. There is no poorness of spirit, but great riches of spirit. You thank God that you are not like other men. You have need of nothing. You are masters, kings of the realm. You think you control all you see. I wish you did, in the kingdom of God, for if you are glorified in the kingdom of God, then we will all reign together, me with you.

Vs. 9-13. You ought to consider the apostles: these men who had walked with Christ and had known Him. Surely this should give some human glory. But the apostles had none. Instead, God appointed them to walk the earth as walking dead men, a spectacle to the world. Paul draws an ironic contrast between the apostles, appointed by Christ, and the proud teachers of Corinth. We are fools: you glory in our wisdom, we are made fools so we might be truly wise; We are reviled: pierced through with the wicked words of the ungod-

ly; we are not praised by men, but defamed and suffer the most outrageous things. Made fun of, our reputations destroyed.

In all of these things, the apostles carried about with them the remembrance of the Cross of Christ. They did not revile; they did not answer back; they did not avenge sharp words with sharp words, but blessed their enemies and suffered the persecution. They prayed for their persecutors.

They were made as the filth and off-scouring of the earth. Filth is that which is rinsed away; the other is that which is scraped off. Both words allude to a curious practice in the ancient world. When there was a pestilence or other impurity in a city, a man or men would be appointed for the purpose of cleansing the city. The men of the city would take the appointed man or men around through all the city, so that they would be exposed to all the evil, whether of disease or morals, and then they would sacrifice them as an expiation to the gods, thinking that the city would be cleansed of the evil. In this some of the true gospel lived on as a remnant among them, but had become a horrible idolatry. They only dimly saw that sacrifice could cleanse them from evil, but they had the wrong offering, and they had the wrong evil in mind. But Paul seems to be referring to that here, for that is the word that he uses. These sacrifices were chosen from among the lowest of society, as expendable.

Vs. 14. Paul's purpose in writing these things was not to bring shame upon them, but to warn them of the great danger they were in, for pride is the very sin that caused the fall of the angels and cast Lucifer out of heaven. A father doesn't reproof his son for the purpose of abasing him, but for the purpose of amending him. This is the reason that reproofs are to be private and tender, for they are not designed to bring shame and to defame a person in his honor, but to correct a wrong.

Paul's design was to correct the thinking of the Corinthians as to the marks of the true minister. Jesus said that if we would be great in His kingdom, we would become servants of all. This becomes clearer in the work of the apostles, who carried the reproach of the cross of Christ everywhere they went. They carried it inwardly in the sorrow and abasement they felt because of sin; they carried it outwardly, not in signs and symbols, but in the persecutions and humiliation they bore gladly for the sake of the Gospel.

Vs. 15. Paul contrasts two words here. Teacher and Father. The word for teacher is that of a slave that was appointed as a guardian for a child, to guide them, instruct them, lead them, correct them, and when of the right age, to take them to school and guard over them. This is the same word that is used of Paul in Gal., speaking of the law: the law was our teacher, or school-master, to lead us to Christ. A father's anxiety and care is different from that of a slave.

You have many instructors in Christ. Does Paul allude here to the childishness he accused them of earlier—that they were babes in Christ, needing pedagogues? Is he urging them to grow up.

What is a father in Christ? Jesus forbade us to call men our fathers upon the earth, and yet Paul takes that term for himself here. This term has been so abused by Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy, that something needs to be said. We have one Father in heaven, who created and cares for us, giving us meat and drink, protecting us, and loving us.. Hence, no man, properly so called is a father, for no man can create anything. Physically, we are called fathers because we are in the image of God and can produce an offspring according to the will and purpose of God. But we cannot make something from nothing; neither can we do anything without the concurrence of our Heavenly Father.

In the same way, true ministers show that they are fathers in a creaturely sense when they depend upon God alone, are willing to suffer for Christ, and put the care of the flock above their own desires and glory. How many true fathers are there in the church today. We have many slaves who want to have some rule over the flock, and they are useful, but how many are willing to spend and be spent for the good of the church?

Paul had a special relation to the church at Corinth, because he was the one who first brought the gospel to them, and in a sense had begotten them as children of God in Jesus Christ.

Vs. 16-7: Be followers of me. Not in the sense that he had reproved above, in the sense of party strife and bickering; but be followers of me in my love for all the church, for the abasement that I know, for the humbleness of spirit that would draw you all to me, and not push you away. I am sending Timothy to you, to teach you again the way a true teacher ought to be.

Vs. 18-21. Appearance, or reality. Is the substance of the Gospel there, or just the appearance? Pride is willing to rest in the appearance, and much is done to keep the fabric of appearance carefully stitched together. This is sufficient for a great many men, for many are willing to have a form of godliness, and a form of knowledge. They are willing to appear to be Godly, and willing to appear to have knowledge, but the substance is not there.

The kingdom of God is in power, not in word. The Gospel is called a kingdom, because the purpose of the Gospel is for our sins to be forgiven and God reign in us. Is the power of God working in your life? What is the result of the message that you receive in your own life? Is there power, or just the appearance of power. Does Christ dwell in your heart by faith, or do you just profess.

At Corinth, they trusted in their eloquence, persuasiveness, and methods. Paul says the power is in Christ alone, not in your organizational prowess and the brilliance of your human efforts. Do you worship, or do you appear to worship; do you love God, or do you appear to love God. The emphasis that Paul puts here is upon the difference between doing something and professing to do something. James put it another way, “Be ye doers of the words, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

I will come, if the Lord will. Paul lived in the knowledge that the disposition of his life was in the hand of God. Unlike the false teachers at Corinth, he did not boast in his ability to get things done, but he boasted in the power of the hand of Christ, the head of the church. There is no boasting here by Paul, as if he were master of his own actions.

How shall I come; knowing how Paul thinks, he is not speaking of a disposition that he put on as he willed, but “how shall the Lord send me to you?” What is the medicine that I will be called upon to dispense? Paul himself did not know the manner and form of the message that he would be called to deliver, for such things were not in his hands. Paul does not have his own message, for he belongs to Christ.

So what will it be. There are really three scenarios: 1. God will send no minister to you. If this is true, then you are abandoned of God, rejected and desolate. Will it be said of you, “Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone. 2. God will send one with a rod to chasten you, that you might be partakers of His holiness. 3. God will rejoice over you and bless you and the fruit of humility, submission, and righteousness will be manifest in your heart and life—not in the appearance only of these things, but in the reality.

May God bless you.