

Lake Cities Community Church
October 24, 2010
Pastor Craig Schill
Series: 1st Corinthians

Division: Part IV
“Feasting on Humble Pie”
1 Cor 4:1-21

As Kryptonite was to superman, so pride is to Christianity. Pride renders an otherwise supernatural Christianity powerless and impotent. And sadly I found a generous portion of pride among the student body at Dallas Theological Seminary when I was a student there. Let me say that certainly not all are like this – there are many humble gracious students at the school. But on the other hand there are also many *arrogant students training for full-time vocational Christian ministry*. You see, DTS is a global seminary, attracting the best and brightest students from all over the world. And the problem is that many students know they are the best.

When we moved to Dallas in 2002, one of the biggest surprises for me was to discover how many churches were either lukewarm or downright hostile toward seminary students - because of their arrogance. I had people tell me that DTS students had reputation of coming into a church with a “know-it-all” attitude, quick to offer advice and slow to take any themselves. I was told that seminary students resented being asked to serve in the nursery or in behind the scenes ministry. They preferred the spotlight. After all... they were studying at the Harvard of evangelical seminaries.

I remember being so surprised by this and thinking it should be just the opposite. And then I felt hurt when the stereotype was applied to me and I wanted to say, “You don’t

know me. Don't judge me by that standard!" It was like the pride of the seminary student generated a prideful response in-kind from the churches. Each side judging the other.

Pride is a major problem for us Christians. It is something we all struggle with to various degrees as it is the natural bent of our sinful nature, but also because it is the main message we hear from the world. Muhammad Ali said, "I guess my greatest weakness is that I don't realize how great I am." And that is the message of the world - of motivational speakers children's movies and books: "Your problem is not that you think too little of yourself, but that you don't think enough of yourself." And so it is no wonder that we all struggle with pride. It has the appearance of wisdom, yet is the kryptonite of Christianity.

Turn with me now to 1 Corinthians chapter four. We are finishing today the first major section of 1st Corinthians wherein Paul has been exposing to the Corinthians the reasons for their division and strife. You might recall that we have looked at three previous reasons. Their misunderstanding of the message of the gospel, their misunderstanding of true wisdom, and their misunderstanding of the nature of ministry. Today we look at the climax of chapters 1-4 - their misunderstanding of Christian character; which was basically this - they believed, like the world still believes today, that pride is a positive character trait. That is the misunderstanding Paul is going to correct.

Pride & Judgment 4:1-5

As we move through this passage, I will point out **four different principles of pride**. Let's begin with verses 1-5 where Paul transitions from his previous argument to the current one. He had just argued (you will remember from last week) that true ministers are not exalted celebrities but humble servants. He restates this in verse one: **Let a man**

regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (4:1).

But now he changes images to that of a household, a family and tells us what *kind of* servants we are – stewards! A “steward” was simply someone hired by the homeowner to take care of the household business.

I was at music lessons the other day sitting in a room with other parents waiting, and entered into a conversation with a woman at the table who turned out to be the Nanny of two kids. She told me what a great job it was: “The mother makes it so easy for me as she sets out the kid’s schedules and provides everything they need.” Paul tells us that we are nannies of the gospel. It is not our gospel, but God’s! However we have significant responsibilities for it.

And our measure of success, as a steward, is (verse two) found in whether are not we are faithful or trustworthy to the responsibilities assigned to us. If the mother told the Nanny to pick up the two girls at 3:00pm and have them to music lessons from 4-6pm, and then to a birthday party at 6:30 – but the Nanny felt it would have been a good day to get her nails done, and didn’t pick the kids up until 4:30 and then took them shopping at the mall instead of music lessons – she would have failed as a steward!

In this context of this passage, which is about their pride and arrogance, the first principle we take from this passage is that: *The only antidote to pride is to believe and to live in the reality that we are only servants and stewards.* That is all we are; servants and stewards. Nothing more and nothing less.

Admittedly this was a hard message for Paul to sell to the Corinthians because it is hard to tell gifted and successful people, like those in the city of Corinth, that they were only servants and stewards. Not figuratively, but literally. Corinth was famous for its

networking. If you acquired the right sponsor you would immediately become upwardly mobile, and this was what everyone wanted. NO one aspired to be a servant. Corinth was an extremely wealthy, progressive and hip city that oozed with pride. Paul's teaching required them to give up their pride and confidence in the things of the world. It required a complete change of values and thinking. He was asking them to reframe the way they looked at success and the purpose of life.

And so I thought to myself, "I am so glad this is not an issue for us here at Lake Cities! We are nothing like the prosperous church in Corinth. We are a small church of regular people, of modest means, sitting on mismatched chairs in a rented room. We do not have big programs or a big budget. It must be only the wealthy, successful, large churches that struggle with pride, right?" Of course not! The nasty thing about pride, it can take root anywhere. Pride is not correlated to size or influence. There are many mega churches that have humbly godly leaders and there are many small churches that are stubborn and prideful. What is the only solution to pride? *To believe and live in the reality that you are a servant – nothing more and nothing less.* I pray we never take pride in any stage of our church plant. Not in being small and if God grows us, not in being large. There is no room for pride if we are just servants a stewards.

Paul Being Judged (3-5)

The second principle about pride (that we see now in verses 3-5) is that it leads to judgmentalism. In verses three and four Paul says, "it is a small thing that I may be examined by you...but the one who examines me is the Lord" (3-4). The NIV uses the word "judged," it is a word of close scrutiny and questioning. The Corinthians were judging Paul

as inadequate, irrelevant and unnecessary. Because when you are prideful, you think you are superior to others, and you judge them. Judging is what prideful people do. Emotional people cry, angry people yell, deceitful people lie and prideful people judge.

But Paul is able to say, “not a big deal.” Their judgmental spirit is to Paul a “small thing.” He doesn’t lose sleep over it. It rolls off his back. Why? Because he knows his ultimate accountability is the Lord. He truly believes he is only a steward accountable to God. It is only God’s performance review that matters.

Therefore, Paul says, **do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God. (5)** God will come and on that day, He will show what is right and wrong. In your arrogance you have taken on the role of God.

This is perhaps the most practical part of our sermon today because many of you know what it feels like to be judged. To feel the painful sting of someone’s words condemning you for a decision or opinion. Given that we are at the end of October, Maybe you have been judged because you allow your kids to trick-or-treat on Halloween, and well-meaning friends have rebuked you. Or maybe have been judged by others because you have decided not to have your kids participate in Halloween. It can work both ways can’t it? Both hurt. Maybe you have been judged for reading the wrong kind of books, wearing the wrong kind of clothes or listening to the wrong kind of music. A few years ago Tammy and I were judged by someone because Hayden took violin lessons. The person felt it was an inappropriate luxury for a family in seminary. That judgmentalism hurt.

But Paul reminds us that if you are a steward of God's household, it is only God's opinion that matters. Don't worry so much about what other people think and say about you. Count it to be a "small thing." And when you, in your pride, are tempted to elucidate your enlightened opinion about how someone should or should not live their life, raise their children, spend their money... DON'T. Don't take over God's responsibilities; that is not your role. You are a household servant, not the master. Now, over the next two weeks we will see that there are some instances when we are to judge - but most of the time in matters of judgment and opinion, keep yours to yourself.

Pride: We have arrived vs. We have not arrived (6-13)

The third observation about pride gets at its very nature. I will say it this way. *Prideful people feel to some degree that "they have arrived"*. I love my GPS because after the journey from point A to point B it says, "Arriving at destination on right." The journey is over and we are here! A prideful person feels that they have arrived at their emotional and/or spiritual destination. And from that position of superiority they judge others. But Paul argues here, in his most scathing rebuke, dripping with sarcasm, that they are greatly mistaken. They think they have arrived, but they have not!

1Cor. 4:7 For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? 1Cor. 4:8 You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. 1Cor. 4:9 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. 1Cor. 4:10 We

are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

The Corinthians saw themselves as superior, rich, powerful, wise, strong and distinguished. They, therefore, did not need Paul or anyone else speaking into their lives. When you feel you have arrived, you are not teachable.

And so if you and I ever begin to feel that we have arrived in some area of our life - pride is getting a foothold. In reflecting on this, I thought of three things that might cause us to feel this way: age, education and position. As people get older, they can become more prideful because they feel their life experience gives them the right to boast and judge others. Instead of humble wisdom, they have prideful certainty. Education, likewise can bring pride, because the more you know the easier it is to feel superior to people who don't know what you do. Then, positions lead to pride. CEOs, politicians, star athletes, and of course pastors can be very arrogant because of their "elevated positions."

Maybe I was surprised by all the pride in the student body at DTS, because I didn't find that pride in the faculty and staff I met before classes began. One reason we decided on that school was because of the humility of the late Dr. Harold Hoehner. The pastor who married us set up a meeting with Dr. Hoehner when we came out for a campus visit in 2005. I didn't know Dr. Hoehner at the time, and the pastor told me it was a great privilege to meet him as he was one of the best Greek scholars in the world. He held a PhD from Cambridge University and sat on many boards and associations, in addition to leading the NT Department. I looked up Dr. Hoehner on the web site and his picture was severe and professional. I was intimidated. I didn't know any Greek. I wasn't even in a fraternity in College.

But Dr. Hoehner was the most humble gracious man we could have ever met. He took us out to lunch in his late model station wagon, and then brought us to his home to show us his kitchen remodel project and to meet his wife. He was joyful, encouraging and much more interested in our story than he was in talking about himself or even the seminary. Dr. Hoehner had age, education and position – he had every opportunity to be prideful and superior, yet he understood and lived in the reality that he was just one of many servant and stewards of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was being faithful to what God had entrusted to him.

In verses 9-13 Paul reminds the Corinthians, what he has already taught - that it is in the humble, weak and foolish things through which God works and receives Glory. By way of example, Paul and the apostles are: last of all, condemned to death, fools for Christ, without honor, hungry, poorly clothed, roughly treated, without a permanent home, working hard, verbally abused, persecuted and slandered. Yet they are the godly ones, blessing their abusers, reconciling with those who hurt them and enduring difficulty. It is like this cartoon I found in Leadership Magazine, “Cothes torn, spat upon, bruises, and scars, shrieking cries, constant harassment... yeah, I’ve suffered for the Lord. You in the nursery next week?”

Because pride comes naturally, godliness needs an Example (14-21)

The final principle of pride comes in verses 14-21. Because pride comes naturally, Paul ends on a practical note teaching us that *“Godliness need an example.”* He says, [1Cor. 4:14](#) I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

1Cor. 4:15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet *you would not have many fathers*, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 1Cor. 4:16 Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. But because Paul can't come right away he is sending Timothy (verse 17) who will also be an example to them. They need a godly example to counteract verse 18 – the fact that they are arrogant, and verse 19 – they are arrogant! Conclusion: 1Cor. 4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. 1Cor. 4:21 What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

Paul did not have the opportunity to spend three years with Jesus like the other disciples. But he did not miss Jesus' model which is that spiritual growth comes from God, through life-on-life relationships. God's plan for you and I is to be following godly people who are a little father down the path than we are. Paul is setting up his authority as the Corinthians spiritual father intentionally, not only regarding their problem with pride, but for every other topic he is getting ready to address – sexual immorality, lawsuits, marriage, legalism and more.

For you and I, while reading Bible is fine, coming to Sunday School is important and listening to Chuck Swindoll on the radio can be inspiring; for us to really grow we need spiritual mentors. Godly men and women, like Paul, who have the freedom to say, "Hey – How are you really doing? I'm worried about you! Are you OK?" You need that person who can either, as Paul says, bring gentleness, or bring the rod. Do you have that kind of person in your life? If not – seek that person out.

Paul is trying to get the Corinthian church to agree with his argument: That pride is not a virtue, but a vice. He has provided to them the keys to correctly understand Christian

character – that we are at the core servants and stewards. I am going to have the ushers now pass out a certification pledge card. If you have, like the Corinthians, mistakenly thought you were in charge of things, or that pride was actually a virtue - on this card you can acknowledge before God your humility and commitment to unity in the church. Let's read the certification together.

I hereby certify that I am

ONLY

**A SERVANT of Jesus Christ &
A STEWARD of the Gospel**

Nothing more. Nothing less. And therefore before God I pledge by His grace to not boast or count myself superior to anyone, whether by my age, education or positions of influence or any other factor. I pledge not to judge others for differences of opinions, but rather to be humble and teachable; learning from the spiritual mentors God provides. I pledge this so that together, along with my brothers and sisters in Christ, we might build a unified church without division, of one mind and purpose upon the precious foundation of Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 4:1-21)

I do so pledge:
