

## IF YOU MUST BOAST ...

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 4:6-13

**Read:** Matthew 5:1-12

- 1: In regard to pride
  - Be a fool
  - Be a servant
  - Don't pride one person over another
- 2: Pride has no basis
  - Who made you what you are?
  - What do you have God didn't give?
- 3: If only you were right
  - Already rich / kings / greater even, than the apostles?
  - Their basic underlying problem

**And so:** *Boast only in the Lord!*

### 1 Co 4:6-13 rev

Dear Congregation

You laugh sometimes, don't you, when you think back to the things you used to boast about when you were younger – how many comics you had, how good your best marble was, who had the best yo-yo? Now you catch people younger than you at it sometimes, when you know the things they're arguing about are basically the same thing.

And then you catch yourself at it again – my Holden is better than your Ford – my Sony is better than your Panasonic. We can spend hours fighting those battles.

And over the past months we've seen the Corinthian version of those arguments – Paul is better than Apollos, Apollos is better than Peter.

But today we find the remedy to all that here in this passage – if you must boast about something, boast in the Lord.

### Point 1

You see from these verses that applying that approach to the Corinthian situation meant not taking pride in one person over another, and instead, *giving glory to God instead of people.*

The problem was that in the very act of fighting for their particular champion, and maybe even winning

that fight, the Corinthians were losing the war. The kingdom of God involves righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. It's about love, unity, and maturity in Jesus Christ. You don't achieve those kinds of things by fighting each other, setting up your champion against their champion. You might even win your little skirmish, only to find that in the process you've lost the war.

There's a picture of that in 'The Lord of the Rings' movie. Representatives from the different races in Middle Earth have come together to decide what to do with the evil ring of power. There's the potential for them to work together to overcome the forces of evil. But they start to fight about what needs to be done, voices rise, swords are drawn – and in the background you hear evil laughter. One of them might even win this little skirmish and be free to do whatever they want with the ring – but the war against evil would have already been lost.

And in our skirmishes too, in our families, in the church, in the wider Christian community, we fight and Satan laughs - we sometimes even win our little fight only to discover that the cost has been far greater than the victory.

And so there's a few hints here about how to fight the overall war against evil.

The first one is to *put importance in the right place* – and the right place is where God puts it.

Do you think you're pretty smart, pretty clever, getting ahead, maybe at the expense of others? Do the people you hang around with think that too? Does our culture reflect that back at you as well?

Well that may be so, but what does God think? We've seen a couple of times in the earlier chapters already that the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God, and God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom. Better to be a fool as the world sees it and wise in God's eyes, than wise as the world sees it but in God's eyes, a fool.

And so it says here, don't go beyond what's written in God's word. We can build on what the Bible teaches and apply it to the different areas of life. But what happens when we accept ideas we've picked up from somewhere that go completely against the Bible? Then we've strayed off the track completely.

The Corinthians had held on to the wisdom of their day and age and tried to marry it with the gospel, but it didn't work. They had to let the other ideas go. And we have to do the same.

The second hint is to ***remember that Christians are servants***. Even Christian leaders are servants – serving God and serving others.

It's something public servants need to remember too. It was a message the council where we lived in Sydney needed to hear when they were sacked by the State Government a few years ago. The Manly Daily mentioned 'areas of concern involving property decisions, councillor behaviour and the treatment of council staff.' Politicians need to remember that they don't fill their positions firstly for their own gain and reputation, but for the service of others.

And neither do we serve as Christians for personal gain or reputation. The example of the Apostles wasn't to look out for their own reputation. Working for the gospel is a team effort. We're all servants together, serving God, serving others.

The final hint is to ***not take pride in one person over against another***. It was the basic Corinthian problem – getting behind one leader at the expense of another – stacking them up against each other. But as the leaders themselves had to remind them, this wasn't a competition. It was a team effort. They were all on the same side.

In fact pride gets a mention 6 times in this letter. The word here only gets used once in the whole of the rest of the New Testament. The Corinthians had a basic problem with pride. It literally means 'puffed up'. They were full of their own importance, and projected that onto the apostles as well.

And too often we suffer the same problem as well. But instead of boasting about ourselves or others we should give glory to God. Psalm 115 in the Book of Worship gives us the solution to the problem of pride, 'Not to us be glory given but to him who reigns above, glory to the God of heaven for his faithfulness and love!'

## Point 2

And *there are good reasons for us not to get overly proud* about ourselves or others.

Maybe there *are* things about us that cause us to stand out above others. Maybe we're especially good looking, have a great figure, maybe we're tall, strong, have a great tan, are especially healthy. Or maybe we're especially good at something, our job, making money, we have some talent, some artistic ability. Maybe there are special things about us that people notice. But a couple of good questions are, 'Who made us that way? What good thing do we have that God hasn't given us?'

Did we make ourselves this way? Maybe we help a bit – we eat the right food, we stay fit, we work hard, we practice the things we're good at. But did we make ourselves that way? And of course we didn't – it's something God has done for us. It's all a gift from him.

In fact these things don't even necessarily mean anything. Looks are only skin deep. It's the deeper things about a person that really matter. Look at King Saul. He was the kind of king the people wanted – like the kings of the nations around them, big and strong, head and shoulders taller than everyone else – but he turned out to be a dismal failure.

And for that matter, abilities can be used for evil as well as good. In fact, the first people in the bible to be described as especially talented in something are the wicked line of Cain.

The things about us that set us apart from others aren't something to be proud of, something to make us think we're better than anyone else. But they *are* a good reason for us to praise and thank God. He deserves all the credit. Without him, we're nothing. But he makes us something.

Ultimately we owe everything to God's grace. He has made us in his likeness. He's given us the ability to be something more than the animals. He's given each of us the strong points and abilities that we have – and made us what we are.

As well as that, in Jesus Christ he's saved us from our sin. We have an eternal future worth looking forward to only because of God's gift to us of salvation.

And he's given us the Holy Spirit, so that by his power we can actually do things that he considers good. All credit belongs to God.

A proud man once asked a humble farmer why he didn't hold his head up more in the world. He said about himself, 'I bow my head to neither God nor man!' The farmer answered, 'You see that field of grain? Only the heads of grain that are empty stand upright. The well-filled ones bow low!'

So when you're about to say something this week that implies that you're worth more than someone else, or that they're worth more than you, bite your tongue and think again. When you catch yourself thinking you're more valuable than others because of something about you – like the way you look or something you can do, challenge that lie. In all these things the only one we can boast about is God. He's the one who has made us what we are. He's the one who has given us what we have.

### **Point 3**

And because of the way the Corinthians thought about themselves, Paul says, ***'If only it were true. If only you were as good as you think you are.'*** They were looking in their spiritual warehouse and seeing the treasures they'd collected. They thought they were rich, kings even. By that standard, they were even far ahead of the apostles themselves.

The problem was they were looking in the wrong warehouse. They were looking in the warehouse of things that get destroyed when Jesus returns. They should have looked in the warehouse of things that survive God's judgement fire. And that warehouse wasn't doing so well. There was plenty of empty floorspace, and plenty of shelves, but not much on them. Going by that warehouse they were poor.

The problem is the world doesn't see things the way God does. It doesn't measure things by the same standard. You can be rich by the world's standard, but poverty stricken by God's. Or you can be living hand-to-mouth by the world's standard, but be rich by God's.

The beatitudes bring that out. Who are the kinds of people who are rich by the standard of the kingdom of heaven? And it's the poor in spirit, mourners, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, peacemakers, those persecuted for righteousness and insulted. Are these people going to be rich by the world's standards? They might be, but not necessarily. But are they rich by the standard of the kingdom of heaven? And they are, the kingdom is theirs. Will they be rich when Jesus returns? Definitely! They're the ones who inherit the earth. They'll see God. They'll be called sons of God.

And it seems that in all of this there's a pointer as to what *the Corinthian's basic underlying problem* was – the problem all their other problems stemmed from. They thought the age to come was already here. They thought the blessings of eternity were already theirs – things that won't be ours until Jesus comes back. They thought they'd already inherited the new earth in practice – that the kingdom of heaven had already come in fullness. Some people call it 'over-realised eschatology'. 'Eschatology' referring to end times. And 'over-realised' meaning that you think you're further down the road than you really are.

The only glitch in believing that, though, was that *the apostles obviously weren't there yet*, even though Jesus had handpicked them to represent him before the world. They were fools for Christ, weak, dishonoured, often hungry, often mistreated, homeless, hardworking – and all for the sake of the gospel. When they were cursed, persecuted, or slandered, they blessed, endured, and answered kindly. They were the scum of the earth – useless by the standards of the world, a waste of time – like men condemned to die in the Coliseum.

And isn't that the way our society still tends to see the work of the gospel? Economic rationalism values things in terms of how much money it makes. Things that don't make money don't have a place. And so we see things like public health and education suffer. And then what about mission and ministry? They don't benefit society in ways that you can measure in dollars. How do you measure in dollars the

value of saving souls and raising people to maturity in the love and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Which then affects the way we think too. Don't we sometimes catch ourselves thinking that our faith has to have a practical, everyday outcome to show for it - or else it's something to be embarrassed about? But what we need to realise again is that it's not the gospel that has the problem here, it's how our society measures success that's the problem. You simply can't measure everything of value in dollars.

### **Conc**

And so, what are the things that you're inclined to boast about?

Is it how good-looking you are? How popular? How much money you make?

Or how good you are at some sport, or study, or work?

Or is it, how great and loving and faithful and caring and providing God is? If we must boast, let's boast in the Lord.

Spurgeon once wrote, 'There are many people who would not kill a mouse without publicizing it. Samson killed a lion and said nothing about it. Say much of what the Lord has done for you. Say little of what you have done for the Lord. Don't speak a self-glorifying sentence.'

And William Carey, the well-known missionary to India, said on his deathbed to a fellow missionary who had said a lot about the things Carey had achieved, "When I am gone, speak less of Dr. Carey and more of Dr. Carey's Saviour."