



Daily Bible Habit

I Corinthians

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Focus Points...*For I Corinthians 4*

Stop And Consider...

- * How arrogant leaders can threaten and destroy a church;

Look...

- * At Paul's unquenchable passion to bring the Corinthians to a humble understanding of God's wisdom in Christ;

Listen...

- * To Paul's pastoral heart which did not write such strong words of warning to shame them, but to warn them of the danger to their faith (cf. 4:14).

Prayer:

Lord, You have brought Your church through toil, tribulation and untold persecution. Unfortunately, the greatest threat to the Church is often from within. Enable my reading of Paul's Letters to the Corinthians to give me a humility that overcomes any pompous arrogance or pride I may have. In Your name I pray. Amen.

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Commentary:

We are servants of Christ, "entrusted with the secret things of God!" (4:1).

In Chapter four of First Corinthians, Paul continued his emphasis on the secret wisdom of God. This "secret" was really no secret at all. Instead, God in His wisdom revealed the greatest secret of grace to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

Verse two marks a slight shift in Paul's discourse. "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (NIV). Apparently there are some Corinthians who doubted or distrusted Paul. They may have believed Paul was holding back on giving them all the wisdom of God. Because of their own selfish motives, they suspected Paul's motives and teaching.

Paul recognized that these so-called "wise ones" at Corinth had ulterior motives. Their teaching was simply a way to show off, to gain popularity, and to manipulate others. This would not be a rare phenomenon in Paul's world, even as it is not uncommon in our own culture.

Paul warned the Christians in Colossae about such self-aggrandizing, boastful, self-serving "wise guys."

“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his spiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head (i.e. Jesus)” Colossians 2:18-10 (NIV).

The ultimate concern Paul had in Corinth, as in Colossae, was simple. He did not want Christians led astray by these wise guys who had already “lost connection” with Jesus. The greater danger is that they would cause others to lose connection—faith—too.

How did the Corinthian leaders lose connection with the Head? By going far beyond what God had revealed in His Word. They twisted, bent and taught wise sounding speculations about God’s Word. “Do not go beyond what is written!” Paul warned them (4:6). We, too, must heed Paul’s warning. We must never go beyond what God’s Word teaches.

There are several places where Paul detailed his suffering and hardship for the Gospel. Two of the most detailed ones are in his letters to the Corinthians. In I Corinthians 4:9ff, as in II Corinthians 11:16ff., Paul described his suffering. His purpose in describing his ministry was not to brag.

Far be it for Paul to reflect the same foolish arrogance back to the Corinthians! Instead, Paul’s purpose was to urge them to “imitate” his example and that of those who assisted him (4:16).

Paul knew that the Corinthian problem would not be fixed simply by writing a letter. So he sent his most competent, able companion, Timothy, to straighten them out. Timothy was charged to:

“remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church” (4:17 [NIV]).

Paul’s *First Letter to Timothy* was written to encourage Timothy as he ministered to difficult churches such as that in Corinth.

Unlike the arrogant, hypocritical Corinthian leaders, Paul practiced what he preached. He lived the wisdom that he taught. Paul’s warning, begun in 4:14, concludes with an ultimatum.

“But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have” (4:19 [NIV]).

When Paul arrived, he would confront those haughty, big-mouthed, puffed-up, self-absorbed, godless morons. The only question that remained was this: would Paul have to use the “whip” (that is, be forceful and direct as he was with the Galatians), or will the erring recognize their error so Paul (and Timothy) can gently encourage and exhort them?

Either way, Paul insisted that the integrity of the Kingdom must be maintained...with the full power of God's Word available to him. Unlike idle, foolish worldly wisdom, God's wisdom is powerful. "The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" Paul reminded them (4:20).

The Kingdom was not about talk, it was about action. Paul would not hesitate to act...regardless of the personal consequences. Whether he needed to whip them into shape or gently persuade them didn't matter. Paul would be sure that they would see the power of God's Word, repent and believe. As in Rome, Paul was not "ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16 [NIV]).

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, You gave the Word of God by inspiration. Every word, every thought, every truth in Scripture is from You. Help me learn to read, study and understand Your Word without addition or subtraction. Help me understand the "secret" of Your wisdom fully revealed in the Gospel. Enable me with humility to share with others the remarkable things which "no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen" except through Jesus Christ. In His name I pray, Amen.

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