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A Faulty View of God's Gifts

4: 6-13

A faulty view of God's gifts DIG: Paul saw evidence of spiritual pride, of one judging whether another believer was a "good" follower of Yeshua. Why do you think this troubled him? Paul believed emissaries should stand in last place. What does that tell you about Paul's attitude toward status and position (particularly compared to how people weigh status and position today)? In contrast to the self-centered message of the Corinthians, what does Paul's life exemplify? In what ways did Paul encourage the Corinthians to imitate him?

REFLECT: Your abilities and talents are gifts from God. As you identify them and begin to use them, what should keep you from thinking about how you should use them? Is there anything wrong with taking credit for your accomplishments? Why or why not? What would you personally be willing to give up to serve Messiah? How can you determine whether your service to ADONAI is Messiah centered or self-centered? How can you give God appropriate credit for the things He has accomplished through you? How can you guard against pride?

Paul finished his address by putting his finger clearly on the Corinthian problem: pride.

Groups within the Corinthian church were not only forming "fan clubs" with the names of leaders such as Paul and Apollos, but they were also developing an attitude of independence and pride among themselves. They were using recognizable names, but practicing their own brand of spirituality. So Paul goes on to apply his argument (4:1-5) directly to the Corinthians and their attitudes. This presented Paul with a genuine dilemma. On the one hand, he needed to reassert his apostolic authority, reminding them that it was his gospel (see the commentary on Romans, to see link click [As - Paul's Gospel](#)) that brought them to faith; but on the other hand, he needed to do that without blunting the force of his argument up to his point, especially his resolve as to the servant role

of **an apostle** (see **Aw** - **God’s Shepherds are Merely His Servants**).

Nevertheless, here, **Paul** goes on to press the argument directly to **them** and **their worldly** attitudes. With rhetoric full of sarcasm, **he** goes for the jugular.¹¹⁴

Now in what I have said here, brothers, I have used myself and Apollos as examples to teach you not to go beyond what the TaNaKh says, proudly taking the side of one leader against another (4:6). Now, **Paul** proceeds to tell **the Corinthians** exactly *why* **he** has been using the **farming (At)**, **construction (Au)**, and **temple** metaphors (**Av**) . . . it was **to teach them. He** had gone from metaphor to metaphor, changing the images as **he** went along, but always intending those metaphors to be applied to **himself and Apollos**. In other words, in case **they** had somehow missed it, **he** now clearly tells **them** that **he** has been carrying on the argument with its various metaphors about **himself and Apollos** so that **they** might *learn* something, and as a result, abandon **their** “fan clubs” and **their** current pride in **worldly men**.

The Corinthians had **gone** far **beyond** biblical respect for **shepherds**, and had developed “fan clubs” that were virtually sects. As is often the case, church leaders like **Paul** and **Apollos** had no part in the fiasco, but were simply used as a focal point for **the Corinthians’** own self pride. In fact, the humble example of **their leaders** had been rejected; therefore, **Paul** had to remind **them** of **his** own humility and that of **Apollos**.

The situation had become personal. **Paul** addresses **his** remarks to an imaginary **Corinthian** and is going to give three reasons to **those** who were against **him** by asking **three questions**.

First: After all, what makes you so special (4:7a)? It is as if **Paul** were saying, “Who in the world do you think **you** are, anyway? Why do **you** think **you** are above other believers in the church? Why do **you** think **your** “fan club” is better than any other? **You** are made of the same stuff as **they** are and have been redeemed by the same **Lord**. **You** are no better; **you** have nothing to **boast** of. What kind of self-delusion is it that allows **you** to put **yourself** in a position to judge another person’s **servant?**”



Second: What do you have that you didn't receive as a gift? The Corinthians needed to understand that everything - absolutely everything - that one "has" is **a gift**. All is of **grace**; nothing is deserved, nothing is earned. As believers we have **received** so much. We have salvation, eternal life, **the Spirit's** presence within us, **His Word, His spiritual gifts, His love**, and countless other blessings for which we have done nothing and can do nothing. So, what did **the Corinthians** have to **boast** about?¹¹⁵

Our time on earth and our energy, intelligence, opportunities, relationships, and resources are all **gifts** from **ADONAI** that **He** has entrusted to our care and management. We are stewards of whatever **God** has given us. This concept of stewardship begins with the recognition that **YHVH** is **the Owner** of everything and everyone on earth. The TaNaKh says:

The earth is ADONAI's, with all that is in it; the world and those who live there (Psalm 24:1). We never really "own" anything during our brief stay on earth. **God** just "loans" everything to us while we are here. It was **the LORD's** property before you arrived, and **He** will lend it to someone else after you die. You just get to enjoy it for a while. And because **YHVH** owns it, we must take care of it the best we can while we are here (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Jx - The Parable of the Bags of Gold**).¹¹⁶

And in case **they** missed it, **Paul** drives the second question home with a **third**, which assumes the answer of "nothing" to the second. **And since in fact it was a gift which you** neither deserved or earned, **why do you boast as if weren't (4:7)?** Here is the most revealing word. **Their boasting** is sure evidence that **they** had missed the gospel of **grace**. Instead of recognizing that everything is **a gift** from **God**, and being filled with gratitude, **they** saw **their gifts** as **their own**, and therefore looked down on **Paul** who seemed to lack so much. **Grace** has a leveling

effect; self-esteem has a self-exhaling effect. **Grace** means humility; **boasting** means that one is above it all.¹¹⁷

Precisely because of **their boasting** reflected such a self-centered attitude, **Paul** turns to sarcasm to help **them** see the folly in **their boasting**. With several short questions, **he** goes straight to the heart of the matter. **His** words are full of biting sarcasm, attacking **their** self-righteous view of **themselves**. **You are filled already? You are rich already?** Feeling satisfied are **you**? Do **you** really have all the spiritual food **you** need? Continuing with the sarcasm, **Paul** suggests that **they** had received **their** crowns from **Messiah** without assistance from **him** or **Apollos**, **“You have become kings, even though we are not (4:8a)?”**

Suddenly, **Paul** changed from sarcasm to reflection: **Well, I wish you really were kings, so that we might share the kingship with you**, but I have to go into the arena and suffer for **the Lord Yeshua (4:8b)!** **Paul wished** that the Messianic Kingdom had truly begun, for then **the Corinthian** believers would have true glory, and would really be reigning with **the Lord** – and with **Paul and Apollos**. But that was not the case. **The Corinthian** believers were not reigning; and as a result, **they** had no cause at all to **boast**.¹¹⁸

For I think God has been placing us apostles on display at the tail of the parade, like men condemned to die in the public arena (4:9a). On the return of a triumphant Roman army, the conquering general staged a splendid **parade** that included not only his armies, but the spoils as well. At **the tail end of the parade** would come a group of prisoners in chains, with the conquered king and his officers prominently displayed for all to see and mock. The prisoners were **condemned to die**, and would be taken to **the arena** to fight wild beasts. In that way they became **a spectacle** for all to see. Since **Paul** will utilize this imagery later (**Second Corinthians 2:14**), also in connection with **his** calling as an **emissary**, it seems likely that this is in view here. In either case, the metaphor is a striking one. For **him**, it truly was “like **Master** . . . like **servant**” (**Matthew 20:26-27**).¹¹⁹

Verses 9-13 can be summarized by **four** words: **spectacles, fools, sufferers,** and **scum**. **Paul** was no fool. **He** didn’t like suffering. **He** wished **the Corinthians** were right in **their** view of **God’s gifts**. But **they** weren’t. **The emissaries** followed the path of **Messiah’s** humiliation (**4:9a**). As **Messiah** marched in a **triumphal procession** to **His** death, so did **they** (**2 Cor 2:14**). As **Messiah** had suffered poverty and **slander**, so did **His servants**, and in **His Spirit they**

endured and responded with **grace (Lk 23:34)**. **The emissaries** lived out the message of the cross. But **the Corinthians** were complacent and secure with **their** “theology of the palace” (**Amos 6:1-7**).¹²⁰

The sarcasm that poured out of **Paul’s** pen is nothing short of breathtaking. Those **worldly** believers at **Corinth** thought **they** were spiritually full, when in reality **they** were only full of **themselves**. **They** thought **they** were rich, when in reality **they** were spiritually poor. **They** thought **they** were **wise**, when all the while **they** acted like spiritual morons. **They** were self-righteous, self-satisfied, and filled with a misplaced sense of **their** own self-worth. **Paul’s** rebuke dripped with sarcasm.¹²¹

Spectacles: We have become a spectacle before the whole universe, angels as well as men (4:9b). The parade of a conquering Roman general above is the **spectacle** to which **Paul** refers. Sarcastically poking at the pride of **the Corinthians**, **he** states that not only is **he** like one of those prisoners, condemned to die in **the arena**, but that **the spectacle** is for **the whole universe** to see. Not just for humans to see, but for **God’s angels** in heaven as well.¹²²

Fools: For Messiah’s sake we are fools according to the standards of **men, but united with the Messiah you are “wise.”** Then renewing the sarcasm **Paul** said: **We are weak, but you are strong (4:10a)!** It was as if **Paul** was saying, “Do you really think the gospel as its **shepherds** are foolish? Are you truly ashamed of being **Yeshua’s servant**? Do you actually want **worldly** glory, **honor** and recognition? **The Corinthians** still loved human “**wisdom**.” **They** were still tempted to look on **God’s shepherds** as mere **babblers**, just as the Athenian **philosophers** had done (**Acts 17:18**). Again, with total sarcasm: **You are honored, but we are dishonored (4:10b)**. This is the crux of the whole matter: **the Corinthians** wanted **the honor** that came **from men**, not **the honor** that came **from God**. **Their** pride that came **from men** reflected a lack of proper perspective, and especially, lack of gratitude.

Sufferers: With these concluding sentences, **Paul** now abandons irony for straight talk. **Till this very moment we go hungry and thirsty, we are dressed in rags, we are treated brutally** (Greek: *kolaphizometha*, meaning a *blow with a fist*), the same way **Yeshua** was **treated (Matthew 26:67)**. **We wander from place to place; we exhaust ourselves working with our own hands for our living**. The fact that **Paul** worked with **his** own hands as a **tentmaker (Acts 18:3)**, would have lowered him in the eyes of many, because the Greeks despised manual labor, thinking it fit only for slaves.

When we are cursed, we keep on blessing; when we are persecuted, we go on putting up with it (4:11-12); when we are slandered, we continue making our appeal. The emissaries genuinely looked upon **themselves** as **Messiah’s** galley slaves and stewards. **Their** concern was to be humble and faithful. They had no time for resentment or jealousy. They understood that **they** were far better off than **their persecutors**. Knowing **they** would be first in **Messiah’s** Kingdom; **they** were perfectly willing to be last in this **world**. This gave **ADONAI** the opportunity to demonstrate **His** power in **their** weakness.¹²³

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise you for making a wonderful home in heaven for all who love **You**. Praise **You** that **You** walk with **Your** children in their trials and problems. When sometimes a pain or problem seems big to us, it is a comfort to remember that problems are really only for a moment compared to the eternal peace and joy we will share with **You** in heaven. **For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18.** Persecution can be thought of as **a blessing** – for it gives an opportunity to **bless/serve You** in a hard time and when it is done with a loving heart- brings a reward (**First Cor 3:13-14**). Thank you that we do not need to seek honor from people, but far more important is to seek to be honored by **You** – our gracious **Father** before whom we bow in humble worship. In **Yeshua’s** holy name and power of **His** resurrection Amen.*

As I read **Paul’s** description of **his** sufferings, I wonder how many of us would be faithful to **Messiah** today if that were the cost. Then I remember that in many parts of **the world** today, there are believers who can identify with what **Paul** experienced.¹²⁴ My wife and I support a brilliant pastor in Africa. He speaks seven languages fluently, and has started twelve churches. He preaches at crusades and leads multitudes to **the Lord**. But he is poor. He and his family undergo many hardships. He has been **slandered** and thrown in jail, beaten up by a group of Muslims and put in the hospital, and presided over the funeral of his best friend who was murdered for his faith. His faith is very humbling to me.

Scum: What was the result? **We are the world’s garbage, the scum of the earth – yes, to this moment (4:13)! The Corinthians** might claim high status, but **Paul** was under no illusion regarding **his** status in this **world**. **Scum** and **garbage** are synonyms, and refer to scraps and layers of filth scoured off of dirty dishes and thrown away. The words are commonly used figuratively of the lowest, most tainted criminals, who were often sacrificed in pagan ceremonies. This is the way **the world** looked at **the emissaries**. They were religious **scum** and **garbage**,

and no better than the criminals like whom they were often treated.

It is not hard for believers to get along in this **world** as long as they keep their head down and the Good News to themselves. But if they preach, teach and live **God's full Word, the world** takes great offense: **All who want to live a godly life united with Messiah Yeshua will be persecuted (Second Timothy 3:12). The world** resents being under the light of truth. Satan is the god of this **world** and the ruler of darkness. His kingdom cannot stand the light of the gospel and will try to persecute and destroy those who stand for it and live it. **The world** will attempt to scour off and throw away anyone who boldly proclaims **the Word**.

We are not **Scum** and **garbage** in the sight of **ADONAI**; nevertheless, we are servants and stewards. Therefore, neither in **the world's** eyes nor in **God's** eyes do we have reason to **boast** in ourselves. That which **the Lord** loves, and that which eventually will bring us our **gold, silver and precious stones (3:12)**, is a humble and obedient spirit. **Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that at the right time he may lift you up (First Peter 5:13)**. Thus, **Paul** ends **his** rebuke of **the Corinthians'** proud, divisive spirit.¹²⁵