

# Fools of Pride or Fools for Christ?

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Pastor E. Keith Hassell

1 Corinthians 4:6-21 (NKJV) “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. <sup>7</sup> For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*? <sup>8</sup> You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! <sup>9</sup> For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. <sup>10</sup> We *are* fools for Christ’s sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored! <sup>11</sup> To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. <sup>12</sup> And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. <sup>14</sup> I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you*. <sup>15</sup> For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> Therefore I urge you, imitate me. <sup>17</sup> For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup> Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. <sup>19</sup> But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God *is* not in word but in power. <sup>21</sup> What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”

Pride makes fools of us all. Humble obedience to the Gospel will make us fools for Christ. We will either be fools of pride or fools for Christ. Fools of pride are considered wise in this age but fools in the age to come. Fools for Christ are seen as fools by this world but will be counted as the wise in the age to come. So, whose fool will you be?

How do we become fools of pride? First, when we think of ourselves more highly than we ought. We esteem ourselves beyond what God has written in His Word. We forget that God is the Owner and Master and that we are His servants, stewards, and ministers. When we forget this we exalt ourselves above our brothers and sisters, treat them as inferior believing that we are more spiritual and mature. Our pride makes us unteachable and arrogant.

Paul sought to dismantle the pride that had crept into the church at Corinth. He used himself and the other apostles as examples of humility. While the Corinthian believers esteemed ease, comfort, prominence, and blessing in the Christian life, the apostles were being treated as the scum of the earth. While believers at Corinth were competing for the most prestigious positions, the apostles were considered as misfits by the world. Paul used his example of humility to expose their spirit of pride. Paul knew that a church can never accomplish God’s work in the earth as long as everyone is puffed up with pride.

Second, we are fools of pride when we forget that God is the One who gives us everything we have. Whatever gifts, anointing, position, fame, popularity, intelligence, wisdom, knowledge, understanding, power, strength, money, education, possessions, and wealth we have, it all comes

from the Lord. Usually God brings things to us through other people. The reality is, whatever we possess we have received. Paul asks, *“And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”* When we remember that everything we have comes from God, it humbles our pride and silences our boasting.

Third, we are fools of pride when we adopt the wrong measure of success. Paul uses sarcasm to expose the false standards of success that produced pride: *“You are full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we might reign with you!”* The believers at Corinth assumed that their contentment, wealth, and position was God's confirmation of their spiritual success. Actually the opposite could be true! (See Revelation 3:17). Through sarcasm Paul makes the point that if success is measured by the standards used by the Corinthian believers, then Paul and the other apostles are failures and are in need of their help!

Fools for Christ, on the other hand, are God's display to the world. Paul says, *“For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men”* (2 Corinthians 11:22-30). Paul uses the imagery of prisoners condemned to die in a Roman arena to figuratively illustrate God's portion for the apostles. They are paraded before the world as a spectacle to be ridiculed, spit upon, whipped, and beaten before being subjected to a cruel game-like execution for the entertainment of the crowd--the usual grand finale of Roman arena events.

Why does the world consider those who follow Christ to be fools? Because living for Christ defies the pride and wisdom of this world. Consider how Paul describes the way he is viewed and treated by the world because of his commitment to Jesus Christ: We are fools for Christ's sake; we are weak; we are dishonored; to the present hour we both hunger and thirst; we are poorly clothed; we are beaten; we are homeless; we labor, working with our hands; we bless those who revile us; we endure those who persecute us; we entreat those who defame us; we are made as the filth of the world—the offscouring of all things. Obviously, living for Christ will not make us seem wise in the eyes of the world! So we must choose whose fool we will be.

If you discover that you have become a fool of pride, Paul gives you steps to overcome your pride:

1. Heed godly warnings (verse 14). Although Paul scolded the Corinthian believers for their pride, his rebuke was motivated by genuine love and concern. It was in their best interest to heed the warning and repent.
2. Recognize spiritual fathers (verse 15). Paul founded the church in Corinth and therefore claimed a special fatherly or apostolic role in the life of the people. Teachers come and go but spiritual fathers are committed to the long term welfare of the child.
3. Imitate spiritual fathers (verse 16). Rather than build their lives around traveling ministries, Paul urges the Corinthian believers to imitate the life he has lived out before them.
4. Receive delegated authority (verse 17). God's ministers are limited by time and space. They overcome this through delegation. Those who received Jesus received the Father who sent him. When we reject those delegated by leadership, we reject the leadership that appointed them. Paul sent Timothy in his place to teach and show the people how they were to conduct themselves in the issues discussed. Humble yourself and receive delegated authority and God will use them in your life.
5. Don't respond to correction with stubborn pride (verse 18). We must learn to love correction. Those who do not will receive severe correction.
6. Don't follow empty words but follow the example of a godly life (verses 19-20). Many talk a good talk but don't walk the walk. Why follow someone who sounds good but is a bad example? Pattern your life after those whose life demonstrates the power of Christ at work within them. Don't follow charisma. Follow character: *“For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power”*.

Remember, God will punish the fools of pride and reward those who became fools for Christ's sake. Paul said, "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" The same can be said of Christ's coming. We must take seriously the Lord's return. How we respond to the Lord in His absence will determine our level of genuine submission and the Lord's response to us when He returns. The choice is ours. Will we be fools of pride or fools for Christ?