

Sunday, April 17, 2016—I Corinthians 4:7: Knowledge Puffeth Up

Introduction

- Between Easter Sunday and us being on vacation it has been four weeks since our last study in I Corinthians. Therefore, I would like to begin with a bit of review.
- I Corinthians 4:5—it is not the Corinthians place to be judging Paul’s stewardship, they need to leave that to the Lord and his timing.
- I Corinthians 4:6—I believe that what Paul is saying is that he has employed figurative language and applied it to himself and Apollos for the purpose of teaching the Corinthians. Notice how the second part of the verse begins, “that ye might learn. . .” In short, Paul is telling the Corinthians that he transferred figurative language onto himself and Apollos for their sakes that they might learn something.
- To identify what Paul is talking about here we need to look for an instance where Paul applied figurative language to himself and Apollos for the purpose of instructing the Corinthians to think soberly. The following passage comes to mind:
 - I Corinthians 3:5-8
- *that no one of you be puffed up for one against another*—according to Webster’s 1828 dictionary the English word “puffed” means: “driven out suddenly, as air or breath; **blown up; swelled with air; inflated with vanity or pride**; praised.” The expression “puffed up” is used elsewhere in Paul’s epistles and it never viewed as a good thing.
 - I Corinthians 4:18-19
 - I Corinthians 5:2
 - I Corinthians 8:1
 - I Corinthians 13:4
 - Colossians 2:18
- I Corinthians 4:6—Paul is speaking here about someone being “puffed up for one against another.” It is nothing but pure pride that was causing this sectarianism within the church at Corinth. It is interesting to consider that of the six occurrences of the expression “puffed up” in your KJB five of them occur in the book of I Corinthians.

- Paul utilized figurative language in chapter 3 for the purpose of instructing the Corinthians they should not be “puffed up one against another.” If Paul and Apollos did not function with that kind of pride toward each other the Corinthians should not one toward another.

I Corinthians 4:7

- **For who maketh thee to differ *from another*? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it*?**
- Paul follows up his discussion of their pride one toward another in verse 6 by asking them a series of questions in verse 7. Verse 7 contains three questions.
- *For who maketh thee to differ from another*—the verb “maketh” is in the present tense. The English word “differ” carries the following meanings according to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary*:
 - Literally, to be separate. Hence, to be unlike, dissimilar, distinct or various, in nature, condition, form or qualities; followed by from. Men *differ* from brutes; a statue differs from a picture; wisdom differs from folly.
 - One star differeth from another star in glory. (I Cor. 15:41).
 - To disagree; not to accord; to be of a contrary opinion.
 - To contend; to be at variance; to strive or debate in words; to dispute; to quarrel.
- Given the context in I Corinthians 4, it is clear that Paul has only the most negative aspects of the word “differ” in mind.
 - Acts 11:2—“contended”
 - Jude 1:9—“contending”
- The obvious answer to Paul’s first question that they i.e., the Corinthians are making themselves “to differ from another.” In the context, Paul and Apollos certainly were not the source of the Corinthians’ sectarian spirit, they were.
- *and what hast thou that thou didst not receive*—once gain the verb “hast thou” is in the present tense. One cannot completely rule out that Paul has physical things in mind with his second question in verse 7?
 - I Timothy 6:7

- That being said, given the context Chapter 4, I think his primary concern is spiritual things and the Corinthians' stewardship of those spiritual things. Is there any spiritual understanding that the Corinthians had not gained from either from Paul or Apollos?
- *now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it*—rather than rejoicing in their knowledge of what God was doing in and through them the Corinthians where using the spiritual understanding that they had gained from Paul to glory and boast against each other. In other words, they were acting as though they had always known the information they received from Paul and Apollos.
- I Corinthians 4:18
- I Corinthians 5:2
- I Corinthians 8:1—“Knowledge puffeth up. . .” I believe that mid-Acts Pauline Dispensationalism is the key that unlocks ones understanding of the scriptures. When one comes to understand the word of God rightly divided and the revelation of the mystery committed to the Apostle Paul they have access to the mystery of his will (Eph. 1:9-11) and manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). Along with knowledge of the mystery comes a natural fleshly tendency to be “puffed up” concerning it, act like one has always known it, and look down their nose at those who don’t.
- I Corinthians 4:7—while the Corinthians did not possess a full working knowledge of the mystery (I Cor. 2:6-8) they were glorying in what they had received from Paul as though they had always known it.
- If rightly dividing Grace Believers exceed in Biblical understanding and literacy on the basis of their knowledge of the mystery and God’s dispensational dealings with man they also run the risk of being the most “puffed up” group of people in the entire body of Christ. I say this on the basis of the fact that “knowledge puffeth up” (I Cor. 8:1).
- As a secondary point, I also say it based upon personal experience and outward observation of others.
- Isaiah 5:21
- Isaiah 47:10
- Romans 12:16
- Ephesians 3:9—God’s will is for all men to see “the fellowship of the mystery.” Our knowledge of it and resulting conduct should not be a barrier to entry or a doctrinal club to beat people with.

- I Timothy 2:24-26—loading up your doctrine gun to blast people with who don't understand these truths is out of step with the doctrines of grace. The reality is this; those who don't understand the word rightly divided oppose themselves in their approach and understanding of doctrine and what God is doing. Paul clearly teaches that the way to win these folks and persuade them is via instructing them in meekness.
- I Corinthians 13:4—"Charity . . . vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."
- I Corinthians 4:7—we need to not be like the Corinthians and glory over things that we have received as though we had not.