

“What Do You Have That You Did Not Receive”

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“For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor 4:7)

Read 1 Cor 4:6-7

Paul’s point in verses 6 and 7 is direct and pointed. If what we are as ministers and as people is what we have received from the Lord, why would we compare one with another and why would we boast in the gift given instead of the giver of the gift?

It is important to remember that the Corinthian Church was dividing over people and personalities. The issue was not theology or doctrine, but P-E-O-P-L-E. Yet Paul has clearly shown that people are “merely men” (3:4) and that “neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (3:7). Because this is true, “Let no one boast in men” (3:21).

Whatever we are, we are by the gifting of God and that is an expression of His grace. Consider with me the following passages (Rom 12:3-8, 1 Cor 12:4-11, 1 Pt 4:10, 11).

Rom 12:3-8 “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.”

1 Cor 12:4-11 “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.”

1 Pet 4:10-11 “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

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In reading these passages it becomes apparent that . . .

- God has graciously gifted each individual within the body of Christ
- God assigns who receives what and how they will function within the body
- Gifts are not commodities to be gained or lost, but services to the body of Christ of which we are stewards
- Each individual within the body of Christ has a gift for service
- Each gift is for service to one another
- All gifts are complimentary to each other not in competition against one another

It is for this reason Paul will say, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me (1 Cor 15:10).”

As we come back to this thought in 4:6 and 7, we see the necessity of the question asked, “What do you have that you did not receive?” If we are truly recipients of God’s gracious gifting, why would we boast in ourselves or of others? We have nothing to boast of but Christ. This is why he makes the conclusion he does in 1:31, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.” This is why he says in 2:2, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” Jesus Christ is not an ancillary subject as it relates to this life or the life to come. Jesus Christ is what every letter, word, phrase, sentence, verse, paragraph, chapter, section, book, division, testament is about. Everything is pointing to Him. He is our boast. To spin our wheels turning over the issue of persons and miss *the person* is to miss everything.

Today as we read, study, listen, and learn, let us stay focused on who He is and what He has done for His people. In this is our satisfaction.