

Deflating the Puffed Up Church

by C.J. Mahaney

C.J. Mahaney's sermon addresses the dangers of pride in the church and emphasizes the transformative power of grace in fostering humility.

Duration: 45:57

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 4:6-13

Topics: "Pride"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by reading from 1 Corinthians chapter 4, emphasizing the importance of not going beyond what is written in the Bible and not being prideful. He highlights the idea that everything we have is a gift from God and we should not boast as if we did not receive it. The speaker then brings up the concept of grace and how it produces humility and prepares us for suffering. He encourages believers to have humility before God and in serving the gospel, and to expect hardship and suffering as part of God's plan for their lives.

Transcript

Please turn in your Bibles to 1st Corinthians chapter 4, 1st Corinthians chapter 4, and I will begin reading in verse 6. I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another, for who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich. Without us you have become kings.

And would that you did reign so that we might share the rule with you. For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all like men sentenced to death because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst.

We are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless and we labor working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure.

When slandered, we entreat. We have become and are still like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. Let's pray.

Father, I am so grateful that as I stand here feeling so weak and inadequate and yet so desirous of serving your people effectively, I am so grateful that I can look away from myself, that I can look outside of myself, that I can look up and behold the throne of grace. I am so grateful that I can call upon you to grant me grace, to grant each grace here. Grace, grace to hear.

Grace to perceive. Grace to comprehend the content of this passage. I pray for the experience of transforming grace for everyone present.

I pray that our consideration of this passage and our application of this passage would result in transformation, all by your grace, only because of the cross, and all for your glory, I pray and I thank you. In Jesus' name, Amen. Ted L. Nancy has authored, to my knowledge, two books.

The first was titled Letters from a Nut, and the second was titled More Letters from a Nut. Both of these books are a compilation of his correspondence with a wide variety of individuals and corporations. On the inside jacket of More Letters from a Nut, we read the following.

From the bizarre to the outright loony, here are requests, compliments, and inquiries to corporations, government officials, correctional facilities, celebrities, and other assorted folks. The following is a letter written by Mr. Nancy to the Coca-Cola Company. Mr. Nancy writes, Dear Coca-Cola, I have a beverage called Kyat Doke.

That would be spelled K-I-E-T-D-O-K-E. I have a beverage called Kyat Doke. Will it interfere with your beverage, Diet Coke? The taste is not similar at all.

Exclamation point, exclamation point, in parentheses. Mine tastes like Pepsi. I sell my Kyat Doke to mostly construction workers who love it.

One guy said, This sure doesn't taste like Coca-Cola. Let me know so I can continue to sell my soda. Thanks.

By the way, do you use caramel in your soda? Just checking. Thanks. Mr. Nancy received the following official letter from the Coca-Cola Company.

Dear Mr. Nancy, thank you for your letter of October 25th, inquiring whether you may continue using the trademark Kyat Doke in capital letters in association with a beverage. As the owner of a federal registration for the famous trademark Diet Coke, we cannot consent to your use of Kyat Doke in association with a beverage. We believe Kyat Doke is confusingly similar to our trademark Diet Coke and are concerned an appreciable number of consumers will believe that the Coca-Cola Company endorses your product.

As a result, we must insist that you immediately take action to discontinue use of Kyat Doke. If you are willing to immediately cease and desist using Kyat Doke and agree not to use any product name or trademark similar to the trademarks of the Coca-Cola Company in association with beverages in the future, please sign the spaces provided and return this letter to me. If you would like to discuss this, I may be reached at the numbers below.

If we have not received this signed statement within 15 days of the date of this letter, we will assume that you did not agree to these terms. Sincerely, the Trademark Council. Mr. Nancy responded, I have decided that I will not sell my Kyat Doke beverage anymore.

The product is discontinued. I'm taking my \$700 out of the bank and my 11 cans of Kyat Doke that are left and bringing them home. They are in my room now.

I now realize it was a poorly thought out idea. It was stupid. I mean, if you went to 7-Eleven and saw in the cooler Dr. Pepper, Orange Crush, Wink, and Kyat Doke, would you choose Kyat Doke? I don't think so.

The idea was bad. Who was I to think that someone would choose Kyat Doke? I'm embarrassed over what I now consider to be a terrible idea. So, let this letter stand as my admission that I have ceased and desisted.

There will be no more Kyat Doke on the market. I'm sorry I bothered you. I'm sorry I wasted your time.

And please look out for my new beverage, Pyat Depsy, with the familiar slogan, it tastes nothing like Coke. Now, it would appear that the Coca-Cola company did not perceive the humorous intent of Mr. Nancy when they received and read his letter. They didn't get it.

And therefore, they responded with a official, formal, legal document. And it's possible the Corinthians may not have perceived Paul's intent as they initially read this paragraph. At first glance, they might have been confused.

For in this paragraph, Paul intentionally employs sarcasm and irony in order to address the pride that was so prevalent in the Corinthian church. They were a proud church. And their pride wasn't subtle.

It was pronounced. Paul describes them in verse 6 as puffed up. And in these verses, Paul confronts their arrogance.

He confronts their arrogance directly. He confronts their arrogance passionately. And he confronts their arrogance without any subtlety.

When we initially read this passage just a few moments ago, did you discern? Did you hear? Did you feel the emotion present in this passage, the sarcasm, the irony present throughout this passage? Motivated by a fatherly care for this church, his words, his words were designed to have a soul-deflating effect upon their puffed-up hearts. And as we overhear Paul confronting them, we might we might be surprised to discover how often we bear a striking resemblance to the Corinthians. As we listen in on Paul's confrontation with the Corinthians, we might suddenly realize that God is speaking to us.

So let's pay careful attention to these words. Let's allow these words to have their divinely designed, pride-deflating, grace- Paul is nearing the end of an extended argument that began in chapter 1. He has been repeatedly reminding the Corinthians about the content and the centrality of the gospel and warning them about the influence and the effect of human wisdom. The Corinthians were genuinely converted.

They were indeed genuinely converted, but the gospel was no longer functionally central in their lives. They believed the gospel, but they weren't applying the gospel to their self-assessment or their view of the Christian life. Actually, their lives contradicted the gospel.

It is possible to believe the gospel and yet live in contradiction to the gospel. And so in this passage, Paul draws their attention to the implications of the gospel for how they view themselves and how they conduct themselves. An accurate understanding of the grace of God as revealed in and through the gospel should have a discernible and observable effect on our lives.

And in this passage, Paul reveals two effects of grace. Two effects of grace. Number one, grace produces humility.

Grace produces humility. Verses 6 and 7. In verse 6, Paul explains why he has been using the previous analogies about himself and Apollos. This was all for their benefit and to restrain them from going beyond what is written in sacred scripture.

Human wisdom was taking them beyond what is written in sacred scripture and this knowledge puffed up. And Paul expects them to stay within the limits prescribed by scripture. His purpose that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

He is addressing their pride in persons, their arrogance and ambition as expressed by their exclusive deference to a certain leader. And then in verse 7, Paul deploys a series of questions in order to deflate this puffed up church. He attempts to deflate their puffed up perspective of themselves with a series of theologically informed rhetorical questions.

The most recent issue of Leadership magazine, there is an article titled Question Marks by Gordon MacDonald and he writes the following. In his book Odyssey, John Scully describes how Stephen Jobs, the founder of Apple Computer, repeatedly sought to recruit him from his position at Pepsi Cola to become president of Apple. Each time Scully declined.

But Jobs, Scully says, would not give up. And then came a night when the two men were on the balcony of a New York City condo and Jobs again asked, are you going to come to Apple? Scully writes that he told Jobs that he couldn't because the financial package wasn't right and Jobs countered that more money would not be a problem. Scully remained unconvinced.

And then Jobs, obviously exasperated, fired a laser-like question. John, do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world? Scully comments, it was as if someone reached up and delivered a stiff blow to my stomach. The question was a monstrous one, one for which I had no answer.

It simply knocked the wind out of me. Soon after, he was packing his bags and making the move west. It wasn't the first time that a string of words with a question mark at the end has changed everything for somebody.

It wasn't the first time that a string of words with a question mark at the end has changed everything for somebody. A well-crafted question changed Mr. Scully's life. Right question can make all the difference, certainly did in John Scully's life.

Well, in verse 7, we have divinely inspired questions. Divinely inspired questions, divinely designed questions for the proud of heart. Divinely inspired and designed questions for those who are puffed up.

They are divinely inspired and designed to knock the wind out of the puffed-up Corinthians and any puffed-up members of Covenant Life Church this morning. They are graciously provided by God for soul

transforming effect and so let's allow each of them to have their appropriate humbling effect upon our souls. Question 1, for who sees anything different in you? Who sees anything different in you or for who makes you different from anyone else? What makes you Corinthians, what makes you different from others? Their proud identification with a particular leader, their proud assessment of their own spirituality reveals a serious and erroneous perspective as to how they have become Christians and why they are Christians.

Who? Who has made them different from any other Christian or non-Christian? They have no basis. They have no basis for being puffed up. They have no grounds for self-exaltation since any and all differences that exist in the Corinthians are attributable to God and to God alone.

Turn with me to chapter 1 verse 18 where Paul makes it clear that God saved them. And then in chapter 1 verses 27 and 28, God chose them. And in chapter 2 verse 10 we read these things God has revealed to us.

God revealed to them the mystery of the gospel. And in chapter 1 verse 30, He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Everything, everything distinctive about them is attributable to God alone and to grace alone.

Why are they different? Who made them different? Well, the answer is obvious, but apparently not obvious to the Corinthians. Not obvious to the Corinthians due to the blinding effect of pride in their hearts. If you are a Christian, what explanation is there for your conversion, your love for the Savior, the presence of some or any degree of godly character in your life, your devotion to the local church, the transformation of your life? Listen, your conversion story is no different than their conversion story.

Who made you different? Why are you different? Well, for every Christian, for every Christian, for every Christian, the answer is the same. God graciously chose me. God graciously revealed the gospel to me.

God graciously saved me. God is the source of my life. That's the answer or the right series of answers for every Christian.

And this question and these answers, they are intended to have a humbling effect upon the soul of a Christian. But notice there's another question Paul deploys to, in effect, knock the wind out of the puffed-up Corinthians. Second question, what do you have that you did not receive? What do you have that you did not receive? The obvious answer that obviously wasn't obvious to the Corinthians was, since nothing originates with them, since nothing is inherently theirs, how can they be arrogant and boastful? Paul's question is, in effect, an invitation for them to consider the source and the effect of grace, the grace that they have received because of the Savior's substitutionary death on the cross for their sins.

Normally when we come across this word receive in Scripture, we are being reminded of grace. When you observe and read the word receive, normally we are being reminded of grace. And so his second question addresses the root issue of pride, pride in their spirituality, pride in their gifts, pride in certain leaders.

And the appropriate response to this question would be, in effect, heart and perspective altering for the Corinthians. This question and the appropriate answer to this question can have a heart and perspective altering effect upon us as well. What do you have that you did not receive? In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Gordon Fee makes the following insightful observation about this question.

He writes, this is an invitation to experience one of those rare unguarded moments of real honesty, where in the presence of the eternal God, one recognizes that everything absolutely one has is a gift. Let's experience one of those rare moments together in the presence of the eternal God. Let's this moment realize and acknowledge that everything, absolutely everything that we have is a gift.

Everything we have, absolutely everything we have is a gift and everything we have, absolutely everything we have is a gift we don't deserve. Each one of these gifts are an expression of God's amazing grace toward those who are not only undeserving, but actually ill deserving. And as we, as we look around, as we look around our lives, these gifts, they're everywhere.

They are everywhere. And the list of these gifts in our lives appears to be endless. And they are all from God.

And they are all because of grace. And they are all the result of the cross. Are you, are you skilled in a certain area? If you are, God gave you that skill.

Are you knowledgeable in or of a particular area that if you are, God gave you that mental capacity. He gave you a mind with a capacity for that particular area or that particular specialty. And that was a gift.

It was an expression of His grace. Have you, have you achieved, have you attained a certain role or permission? If you have, if you have, if you have, listen, God gave you that opportunity. God blessed you with that role or position as a gift.

God ultimately promoted you. And if you're thinking, hey man, okay, I'll concede that, but I worked hard in the process. Oh, I'm sure you did.

I'm sure you did. But do you realize this morning that the strength to work hard and the health to sustain hard work did not originate within you, but those were a gift from God as well? Listen, whatever you're gifting, whatever your skill, whatever your ability, it has been given to you by God and it is a gift from God. So whether it's intellectual or athletic or mechanical or artistic, or you just fill in the blank, whatever the gifting present in your life, and there is gifting present in everyone's life here, it has been given to you by God and it is a gift from God.

So what do you have that you did not receive? There's only one right answer to this question. Only one right answer to this question for everyone who is asked this question. What do you have that you did not receive? I have nothing that I haven't received as a gift, as an expression of his grace.

And that answer, nothing, should have a humbling effect upon our souls. As you are no doubt aware, my historical hero is Charles Spurgeon. And this past week, there was a box on my desk with a note on top of the box.

It was a gift. And there was no way I was prepared for this gift. There's no way I could have predicted this particular gift for inside the box was this, but inside this was an actual note written by my historical hero, Charles Spurgeon.

The next page is an affidavit of originality. Tears filled my eyes. I looked, I stared, I thought of my historical hero writing this note and that the last pen to visit this paper would have been a pen held in his hand, and how kind it was of this individual to somehow obtain this and to give this to me.

It is a gift I will treasure, and it is a gift I will look forward to passing along as yet another reminder of the difference this man's life and example have made in my ministry. And if Mr. Spurgeon were present this morning, this is what I think he would say to us at this very moment in this sermon. Now, obviously, if he were present, he would be preaching.

But since he isn't present, I have invited him to speak to us through the following words. Oh, believer, learn to reject pride seeing that you have no ground for it. Whatever you are, you have nothing to make you proud.

The more you have, the more you are in debt to God, and you should not be proud of that which renders you a debtor. Consider your origin. Look back to what you were.

Consider what you will have been, but for divine grace. He invites us to consider. Let's do it for just a moment.

Consider what you will have been. Consider what you would have been, but for divine grace. Go ahead, just for a moment.

Think about it. Allow those very thoughts to humble your soul and to fill your soul with fresh gratefulness. What would I have been? What a frightening reality.

And then he states, look upon yourself as you are now. So not only look back, but now, consider now. Look upon yourself as you are now.

Doesn't your conscience reproach you? Don't your 1,000 wandering stand before you and tell you that you are unworthy to be called his son or daughter? And if he made you anything, aren't you taught thereby that it is grace which has made you to differ? Great believer, you would have been a great sinner if God had not made you to differ. Oh, you who are valiant for truth, that you would have been as valiant for error if grace not laid hold of you. Therefore, don't be proud.

Though you have a large estate, a wide domain of grace, once you did not have a single thing to call your own except your sin and misery. Oh, strange infatuation that you who have borrowed everything should think of exalting yourself. What do you have that you didn't receive? I have nothing.

Okay, right answer, final question. If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Well, logically, this is the next question. Because once you answer nothing to the second question, once you recognize you've received everything as a gift of grace, well, it reveals what proud fools we are when we boast.

And their boasting is sure evidence that they are proud and that they are ignorant of grace because they are different only because of God's grace and all they have received is all because of grace and because of the effect of the cross. So how can they boast about that which they did not earn and were unworthy to receive? David Garland writes in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, one cannot boast about being a worthy recipient of grace. One cannot boast about being a worthy recipient of grace.

Well, one cannot and one should not, but the Corinthians were. The Corinthians were boasting about their superior spirituality and their superior gifting. But because we have received it all and not earned it all, we should really be humbled by it all, should we not? And we shouldn't boast at all.

There should be the absence of any boasting before God about what one has received as a gift from God. There's only one form of boasting that is appropriate in the presence of God and that would be boasting in the Lord, that would be exalting His grace. That's the only boasting that is appropriate and that is actually commanded in the presence of God.

The Corinthian church, the Corinthian church was a prosperous church. This geographical area at the time was prosperous, not unlike and very similar to the Washington, D.C. area. The city of Corinth was financially prosperous and this church was blessed by God.

In chapter 1, verse 7, no need to turn there, Paul says to them that they are not lacking in any spiritual gift. They were unusually gifted. They were unusually blessed by God.

Paul writes to no other church and says to them that they are not lacking any spiritual gift. So they are in an unusually prosperous context and they are an unusually blessed church and they are experiencing the test of prosperity. There are two tests identified in scripture, the test of adversity and the test of prosperity.

And for the Corinthians, it was the test of prosperity. They were experiencing prosperity as a gift from God and prosperity is not only a gift from God, prosperity is a test from God. The Corinthians were experiencing the test of prosperity and the Corinthians were failing.

They were failing. They were failing the test of prosperity. See, the greater the prosperity, greater the prosperity one experiences, the more the temptation to pride, the more one is tempted to pride.

Pride is a common sin among those who have been prospered, among those who are prospering, among those who have prospered, among those who have been blessed by God with the gift of prosperity. Corinthians had been blessed by God and they were failing this test of prosperity. Following warning to the children of Israel found in Deuteronomy 8 was quite relevant to the Corinthians, I believe it remains relevant to us at Covenant Life Church this morning.

God says to his people, take care, take care, lest you forget the Lord your God, lest when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord your God. Beware, beware, lest you say in your heart, my power, my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this well. You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he, it is he who gives you the power to get wealth.

See these divinely inspired questions in chapter 4, verse 7, they are gifts from God. They are gifts from God to protect us from pride. They are gifts from God for the promotion of humility.

They are gifts from God to equip us so that we might pass the test of prosperity, because these are particularly relevant to those who are experiencing prosperity, spiritual prosperity, relational prosperity, financial prosperity. These questions protect us from forgetting, from forgetting that we are different only because of the grace of God, and that all we have received from God is a gift from God, and only because of the cross. This is the effect of grace.

Grace produces humility. Number two, grace prepares us for suffering. Grace prepares us for suffering, verses 8 through 13.

Grace prepares us for suffering, but I don't think the Corinthians were prepared for this paragraph, because these words are just full of irony as he addresses their erroneous view of themselves and their

spirituality. The Corinthians, they consider themselves as already having arrived spiritually. So you will notice twice in verse 8, Already you have all you want.

Already you have become rich. In their estimation, they have all they want, they're rich, and they have become no less than kings. The Corinthian church really had only one category for themselves, the already.

And in this paragraph, Paul introduces them to a new category, a category they weren't familiar with, the category not yet. Not yet. Paul's perspective of the Christian life and the perspective of all the New Testament writers has been described by theologians as the already, but not yet.

The already, but not yet. That's the nature of the Christian life in a fallen world, the already, but not yet. So yes, already there is the miracle of regeneration.

Already there is the forgiveness of sins. Already there is the empowering of the Spirit for sanctification and service. And already that list just goes on and on and on.

Because of the Savior's substitutionary sacrifice on the cross, there are already many blessings that are immediately available. But, in a fallen world, and prior to the Savior's return, there is much, there is much that is not yet. Much that awaits the age to come.

Much that awaits a new heavens and a new earth. For the reality of sin remains. Suffering has not been alleviated.

And death, though conquered by the Savior, has not ended. Death will eventually come calling for each of us. Corinthians had only one category for themselves.

The already. They had arrived spiritually, so sin was minimized and ignored in their midst. They had supernatural experience, so ethics were unimportant.

And they abounded in spiritual gifts, so love was not a priority. Paul refuses to conform to their erroneous definition of spirituality. Instead, he redefines spirituality for them.

He describes for them the call to die. To die to self. To die to self-interest.

He defines for them spirituality as a call to sacrificial service in the advance of the Gospel. And he introduces them to the harsh reality of hardship and suffering because of the Gospel. They were kings.

Note the contrast. They were kings. He was sentenced to death.

They were wise. He was a fool. They were strong, in their own erroneous estimation.

He was weak. They were prosperous in pursuing the approval of the culture. Approval and applause of the world.

He was persecuted. He was suffering. The Corinthians are assuming that their spirituality, their abundant gifting, their prosperous state, and their experience of God's blessing was proof positive, was confirmation of God's approval and their superiority.

Paul draws his attention, their attention rather, to his suffering for the sake of the Gospel as a much more reliable measure of true spirituality and faithfulness to the Gospel as a much more reliable measure of true

spirituality and hardship and suffering which cannot be avoided in relation to the Gospel as a much more reliable measure of true spirituality. Again, to quote David Garland in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, he writes in relation to this paragraph, the Christian life is not a fast track to glory but a slow, arduous path that takes one through suffering. The suffering so visible in the lives of the Apostles is not some tedious detour for an elite volunteer corps but the main highway for all Christians.

By contrasting the cross-centered lifestyles of the Apostles with the Corinthians' vainglory, Paul hopes to supplant their egotism with the wisdom of the cross. And so in verses 9-13, he contrasts their supposed spirituality with his hardship and suffering because the Corinthian definition of spirituality did not include hardship and suffering for the sake of the Gospel. They had created a theology of glory and Paul in this passage confronts them with the theology of the cross applied to the life of Paul.

The Corinthians despised this description of Paul and they despised his view of the Christian life. Listen, the very things they despised him for are what they should have been aspiring to. And please don't misunderstand, Paul is by no means glorifying suffering, but he is defining true spirituality for the Christians and that involves hardship and suffering because we live in a fallen world and we live in a fallen world that is largely opposed to the Gospel and if we identify with the Gospel we will appear weak and foolish to this world and we will inevitably be opposed to some degree by this world and to differing degrees we will all suffer for the Gospel and to differing degrees we will all suffer as part of God's purpose and plan for our lives.

How we respond to suffering and in suffering reveals either the grace of humility or the presence of pride and false spirituality because the genuinely humble, they aren't surprised when they suffer. The genuinely humble are surprised when they do not suffer more. Genuinely humble understand that what we receive from God is more than we deserve and the genuinely humble know that whatever suffering we experience is less than we deserve.

And the genuinely humble have some understanding of the purpose of God in and through suffering. Not so the proud. No, the proud react sinfully to suffering and they complain about suffering as if some injustice has taken place.

But the Christian life is not a fast track to glory but a slow, arduous path that takes one through suffering and grace prepares us for suffering so that we are not surprised by hardship and suffering and so that we can glorify God when we suffer. See, if one applies the questions and appropriate answers of verse 7 to one's heart and life, well, it will have a transforming effect when one encounters the suffering described in verses 9 through 13. What a text.

What a passage. This passage wonderfully addresses us at two levels. It addresses our ambitions and it addresses our expectations.

God is addressing our ambitions in verse 7. What are your ambitions in this life? Would the cultivation of humility before God and in the service of the gospel and the context of the local church be your ambition and passion? And what are your expectations in this life? God is addressing our expectations in verses 9 or 8 through 13. Do you expect hardship? Do you expect suffering? Expect hardship in the service of the gospel and suffering because of the gospel as just part of God's plan and purpose for your life? Well, if you apply verse 7 to your ambitions and verses 8 through 13 to your expectations, you will experience the effects of grace. For grace produces humility and grace prepares us for suffering.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/22/SID22310.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/cj-mahaney/deflating-the-puffed-up-church/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net