

what hast thou that thou didst not receive?

by William MacDonald

Transcript

“...what hast thou that thou didst not receive?...” (1 Cor. 4:7)

This is a good question because it reduces us all to size. We do not have anything that we did not receive. We received our physical and mental equipment through birth. What we look like and how brainy we are is something too far beyond our control to justify pride. It is an accident of birth.

All that we know is a result of our education. Others have poured information into our minds. Often when we think we have had an original thought, we find it in a book we first read twenty years ago. Emerson said, “All my best thoughts were stolen by the ancients.”

What about our talents? Some talents definitely run in the family. They are developed by training and by practice. But the point is that they did not originate with us. They were given to us.

Pilate was inflated by the authority he wielded, but the Lord Jesus reminded him, “You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11, NASB).

In short, every breath man draws is a gift from God. That is why Paul goes on to ask in 1 Corinthians 4:7 (Phillips), “If anything has been given to you, why boast of it as if it were something you had achieved yourself?”

And that is why, for instance, Harriet Beecher Stowe refused to take any credit for writing Uncle Tom’s Cabin: “I, the author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin? No, indeed, I could not control the story; it wrote itself. The Lord wrote it, and I was but the humblest instrument in His hand. It all came to me in visions, one after another, and I put them down in words. To Him alone be the praise!”

The constant realization that we have nothing that we did not receive delivers us from boasting and self-congratulation, and leads us to give God the glory for anything good that we are or have done.

So, “let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord” (Jer. 9:23, 24).

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