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A1204 – January 22, 2012 – 1 Corinthians 4:6-10

Do Not Go Beyond Scripture

Last week we dealt with the 1 Corinthians 4:1-5. The problem at Corinth, one of them at least because they had a number of problems, Paul is addressing is their dividing among themselves around certain teachers, some around Paul, some around Apollos, some around Peter and quarrelling with one another. But Paul is taking up in particular the crowd that had ranked Apollos above himself and he is correcting them by telling them how they ought to think about himself and Apollos. As verse 1 says, “Let a man look upon us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” That first word, servants, meant under rowers, those who rowed from the lower galley of the great Roman ships. These were men who were slaves and had to follow the orders of the captain or get thrown overboard and become fish food. Not a very high station in life. The second word here is stewards and the steward was to manage his master’s possessions. Another subservient station. And both of these images were to get the Corinthians to realize that Paul and Apollos were humble men of lowly station in life and not to be exalted. Their job was to serve Christ and dispense of the revelation of God, period!

“Moreover,” verse 2, “in this connection, it is required of stewards that each be found faithful. 3And to me it is a trivial thing that I may be examined by you,” says Paul, “or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.” Since the steward was to care for the master’s possessions then the only one whose assessment mattered was the master’s. Other people’s evaluations didn’t count, not even the assessment of the steward himself. And therefore the Corinthians evaluation of Apollos as a better teacher than Paul was inconsequential to Paul. He really didn’t take this evaluation seriously. Paul said he came to them as weak and that he determined to know nothing among them except Christ and Him crucified. And in 2:15 he said that the spiritual man is examined by no one, that is, Paul said it doesn’t matter what you people say about me, the only standard I live by is the word

of God. That's the attitude of the spiritual man and Paul is a spiritual man. Therefore the only evaluation Paul cared about was what does Jesus Christ think about my stewardship? What does Christ think about how well I have dispensed of His revelation? How well have I fulfilled my stewardship?

And the reason that question is exclusively Jesus Christ's to answer is simply because there are too many parameters involved for any human being to give an accurate estimate of how someone else or even themselves are fulfilling their stewardship. Therefore don't worry about what other people think, just go live the Christian life and further, stop fretting about did I have the right motive here and did I have the right motive there. When we go to the judgment seat of Christ the Lord will bring to light all our motives and then each of us will receive appropriate praise from God Himself.

If we all had this attitude and didn't worry what people thought I think we'd serve the Lord much more faithfully than we do. This kind of attitude creates what I call humble boldness; humble because we realize whatever assets we have, whatever natural talents, whatever spiritual gifts, they have all been given to us by the Lord and therefore there is no room left for arrogance. And boldness, that's not the opposite of humility, Jesus Christ was both humble and bold. All boldness means is you don't sit around worrying about what people think, you don't let it bother you when people put pressure on you or say you didn't perform as well as I thought you should. So what, I'm only concerned to please My master, the Lord Jesus Christ, so bug off.

So the Corinthian's ranking Apollos above Paul, evidenced their passing judgment before the time. A right and privilege that was not theirs. And while the rankings themselves were trivial to Paul because he was a spiritual man, what was not trivial was that the fact they were still fleshly. And this fleshly behavior betrayed a deeper attraction to the world system coincident with a failure to learn a fundamental lesson; *do not go beyond what is written*, do not step outside the bounds of Scripture. Anytime anyone in Scripture has done that they have gotten in a lot of trouble.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Turn to Gen 3. Here's the first time we know of anyone going beyond Scriptural bounds. And I'm hoping these examples will help us grasp the serious nature of what the Corinthian's were doing. There are a lot of scholars who say that what Paul says in verse 6

about going beyond Scripture is simply unintelligible. Some of them say the five Greek words there are a scribal gloss and they leave them out altogether. I'm hoping to show that is not the case. There are examples of going beyond Scripture and Gen 3 is one such account. The Fall of man. In verse 1 we have the confrontation. "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?" So he casts doubt on the word of God, "has God said?" Verse 2, "The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" The question is, is that what God said? Did God say, you shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die? If we go back to 2:16 we see what God said and we can put that alongside what the woman said God said. Verse 16, "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die." Now is that what the woman said God said? No it's not. There are several differences and we could do a careful dissection that shows that at places she subtracts from what God says and in other places she adds to what God says. That's the point of going beyond Scripture, you have in some way added or taken away from the Scripture. Now if you have done that what have you ultimately done? You've brought in an outside standard, you've brought in something that is not the word of God, and you've brought in some other authority, some other standard, so that's what it means to go beyond Scripture.

Alright, let's go to a second example, 1 Sam 15. This is Saul. Saul was the first human king of Israel. God was the king but the nation was in rebellion against God and so they said, we want a king like all the other nations. Saul was the guy like all the other nations. So now they've got to raise an army and fight their battles and as the king Saul is the leader of the army. Verse 1, "Then Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you as king over His people, over Israel; now therefore, listen to the words of the LORD." That's very important to listen to what the Lord says, He's very specific, He doesn't mince words. Verse 2, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish Amalek *for* what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. ³Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman,

child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” This is one of those places where the ethics of common grace are suspended and the ethics of final judgment ensue, what we call the ethics of Holy War and you can find the rules for engagement for Holy War in Deuteronomy 20. It’s destruction of every living thing. Understand that’s the word of God. Verse 7, “So Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah as you go to Shur, which is east of Egypt. ⁸He captured Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.” So he obeyed *most* of the military order, except he took the king alive. Verse 9, “But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were not willing to destroy them utterly; but everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.” Okay, so we have a few minor rebellions here. No big deal right. I mean, Saul spared the good stuff, that stuff could be used, there’s no use destroying it, everything that was worthless he destroyed. Then the Lord comes to Samuel. Samuel’s the prophet. The prophet always confronts the king with the word of God. And what does the Lord tell Samuel? Verse 11, “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me and has not carried out My commands.” And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the LORD all night.” Samuel actually liked the guy. This was hard for him. But verse 13, “Samuel came to Saul,” and here’s the confrontation, prophet vs king. And watch king Saul, he’s slick. “And Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the LORD! I have carried out the command of the LORD.” I’m so spiritual, I did the word of God, I’ve been so faithful. Sounds very spiritual until the next verse, in one short clause Samuel cuts to the heart of the issue. Verse 14, “But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” What’s that I hear Saul? Sheep, the bleating of the sheep, the expensive ones, O, is that right? So now Saul has to come up with an excuse to cover his sin, like we all do, go into some cover up scheme. Verse 15, Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.” Oh such a spiritual thing, it’s for sacrifice, we want to give all the wonderful things to the Lord, it’s for God, it’s all for God. Excuse me, but what does that have to do with the command of God? God said exterminate it. Saul’s trying to do a right thing a wrong way? It doesn’t work like that. God’s the general. He said destroy it. There’s another prime example of someone who tries to help the word of God out. I’m going to do a good thing here. No you’re not; you don’t know what

you're talking about. So here's another case of someone going beyond Scripture. And if you go beyond Scripture you're going to end up blowing it. God doesn't need your help and He's not interested in your great thought.

But apparently the Corinthians, let's go back now, the Corinthians had succeeded the word of God, now they were beyond that, I mean, boy, the word of God is basic, we've got that knocked out, now let's help God out a bit. I mean, there's more to life than the word of God, there are other good ideas out there. I'm sure it's not going to hurt a thing if we bring some of those ideas in over here alongside the word of God. What's the big deal? Well, I think we've shown two places; Eve in the Garden and Saul and the bleating sheep that it is a big deal. You don't do that. You stay right with the word of God, period! You don't go to the right or to the left, you don't add or subtract, you stay right on the track.

Verse 6, **Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes.** What things? The imagery of servants and stewards from verse 1. Paul says I applied that imagery to myself and Apollos to teach you a lesson. And I really hope you learn this lesson. You know, if I and Apollos are apostles and our evaluation of ourselves is that ultimately we're nothing more than servants and stewards, then obviously you are also underneath the word of God and should never go beyond it. Our whole mission in Corinth was to be good stewards of the word of God. That's all we're about, we don't go beyond Scripture, we don't go around making up standards, we don't go around saying, well, you know, the word of God doesn't touch on that subject so what I think is this, blah, blah, blah...or you know, the world has some pretty good ideas and we could really help maintain the integrity of the word of God by bringing in some of the world's ideas.

Paul said we didn't do that. We are stewards and our job is to serve Christ and dispense of the word of God. The only rank we hold is as under rowers. We hold a humble, humble rank. Christ is the one who pulls rank. But you characters, what is wrong with you people, you people are way outside the boundaries of Scripture ranking Apollos above me. Where are you getting these standards? Obviously you're getting them from outside the word of God because the only one who has the standards to measure the servants of God is God Himself. Where they were getting the standards was from the local

universities in Corinth and Athens. The standards for rhetoric in the university were the techniques of sophistry, these were slick techniques, persuasive devices for convincing people and evidently the Corinthians thought that Apollos was more in line with the standards of rhetoric of the day. He was something of a Christian sophist. And that impressed the Corinthians over and above Paul.

So now we have a problem. The Corinthians have brought in outside standards of the world. So to correct that Paul says I'm applying these figures of a servant and a steward **so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written**, there's your first purpose clause, you'll see that there are two, **so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written** and **so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other**. So two purpose clauses. The first one we've dealt with. People wrangle about what is Paul talking about **what is written**? Is he talking about the whole OT? Is he talking about the passages he's quoted in chapter 1, 2 and 3 of this letter? What is he talking about? Probably what Paul is talking about is the entire OT. The NT was in the process of being written and there wasn't much written yet and even the few books that were written probably were not at Corinth. But what they did have was two leaders of the local synagogue convert to Christianity, Crispus and Sosthenes, and they had the OT Scriptures so I suppose that's what he's talking about, not exceeding the principles of stewardship from the OT, which when you do so results in the final purpose clause, **so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other**. And you'll notice the word **arrogant** or "puffed up," there's no question the Corinthians were arrogant. Paul's going to call them arrogant again in verse 18, verse 19, 5:2; 8:1 and 13:4. So they were arrogant and it should be obvious how they are arrogant because every time you go beyond Scripture, that is arrogance; that's saying the word of God is not sufficient, God didn't address this so I with my immense brain am going to fill in what's missing. Okay Mr Arrogant, okay Mr Know it All. If you're so smart then why are you acting like an immature little baby and rising up for one **against the other**. In this context, rising up for Apollos against Paul. That's the **one against the other** at the end of the verse; it's the Apollos faction against the Paul faction or the pitting of Apollos against Paul.

Where is that coming from? What standards are you using? They're not Scriptural standards. Verse 7, **Who are you to distinguish?** That's how it should be translated, **Who are you to distinguish** between me and Apollos? Just who do you think you are? Well, who they think they are is spiritual giants, but Paul's cutting them down to size. **What do you have that you did not receive?** Well, what did they have? There's a list at the end of chapter 3. Verse 21, "So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you." That's everything that's anything. It all belongs to you. Verse 22, "whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, ²³and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God." But where did they get all that stuff? God gave it to them. So then Paul asks at the end of verse 7, **And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?** See, they were boasting in Apollos over Paul. But if God gave them both Apollos and Paul and Apollos and Paul were nothing more than God's stewards then why were they boasting in Apollos over Paul who were both gifts of God to the church at Corinth?

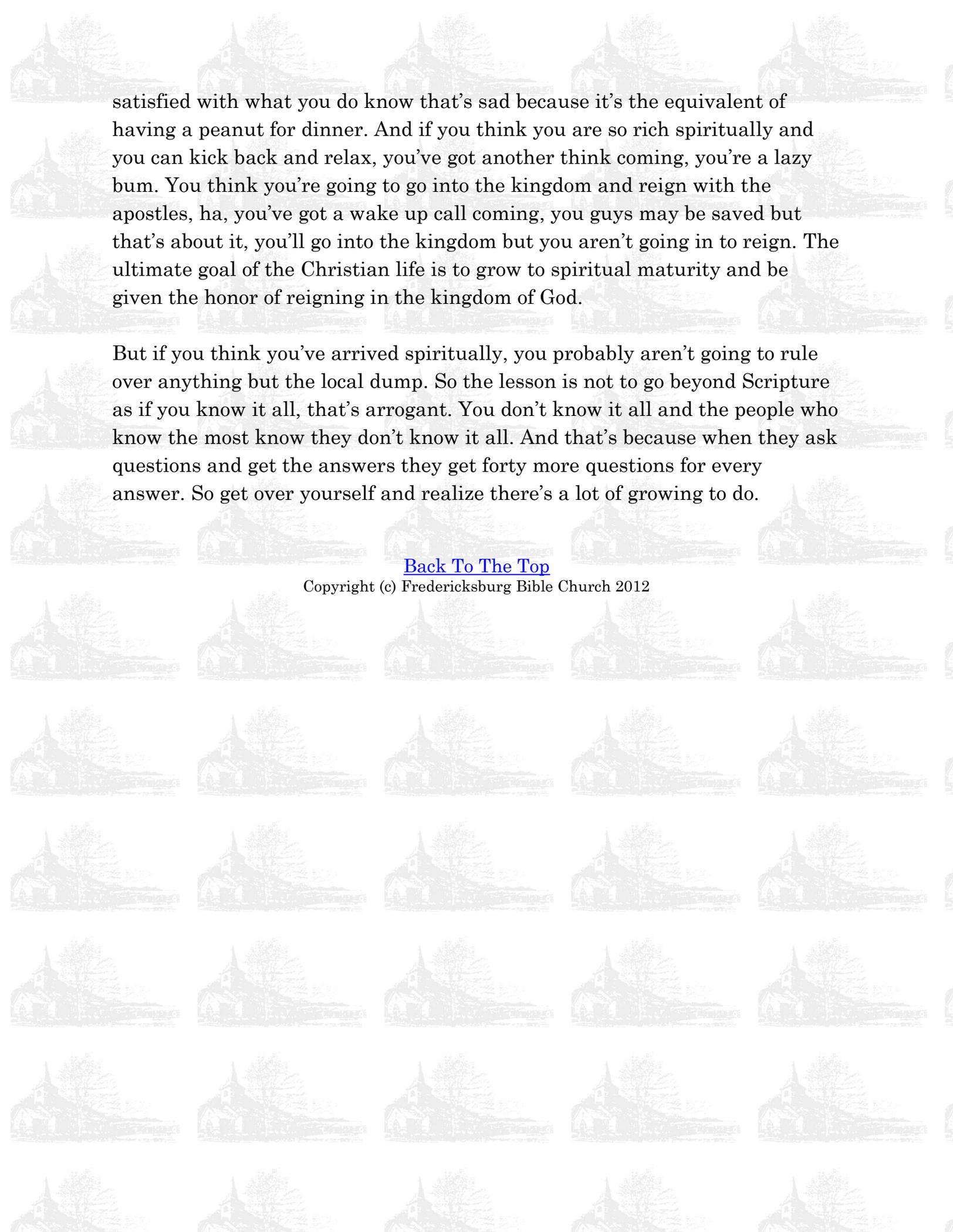
See, this gets into the ranking of believers and it goes on and on and on in the Church and it's sin, sin, sin. You don't know how well a believer is carrying out his stewardship. You don't know how well a believer is exercising his spiritual gift. You don't know all those things because you're in no position to know. You see me what, two, three hours a week, I may be a real jerk the other 165 hours. Or you may think I'm a jerk here but I'm a real nice guy the other 165. And further, it's not yours to judge. It's Christ's to judge. All judgment has been given to the Son. And He's going to judge me; He's going to judge you on how well you fulfilled your stewardships.

But Paul is really slamming them in verse 7. These are pungent, stinging, questions. Who do you think you are? The God of the universe? Get over yourselves you arrogant people. Verse 8, and here he really gets after them, boy if you could see this in the original, this is good stuff. **You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you.** Let's deal with these in turn because this is a figure of speech called irony, verbal irony. In other words, the opposite is truly the case. So we're looking at things from the standpoint of the Corinthians but the irony of the situation is they are 100% wrong about themselves. But, then

again, that's arrogance isn't it. Arrogant people have an overly-inflated view of themselves. So here it is and we'll deal with these in turn. **You are already filled.** Or better, **Already you are fully satisfied.** The Greek word translated "filled" or "fully satisfied" is used only one other time in the NT, Acts 27:38, and it's a food word, you know, when you eat and you are fully satisfied, except in this context it's spiritual food. And here's what he's saying, "You think you already have all the spiritual food you need." These people thought they had the Bible knocked out. Ha. What a joke. Paul already told them, when I was with you we never even got out of the milk. And you people think you have all the word of God you need? Gimme a break, you guys don't have a clue about first base. These are just like those Christians today that say, boy, you better be careful getting so much of the word of God down there at the Bible church, that's dangerous, you might get spiritually phat. No, the real danger is you might be spiritually slim. That's the real problem. Maybe you missed this part of the Bible. **You are already filled,** pure irony.

Second one, **You have already become rich.** The Greek word **rich** means "plentifully satisfied. It's the idea that you have plenty so you kind of kick back. And what Paul is saying is "You think you have plenty of spiritual things."

The third one, **You have become kings without us.** Oh, you think of yourselves as kings, you think you are really on top of things. Well, I hate to break it to you but **I wish you were kings so that you might reign with us.** But the fact is you're not! You're not kings spiritually, you're paupers. And the Greek *ophelon* with the aorist means, I wish that you'd already become kings in the past. But see, the Corinthian's spiritual progress was slow going. Paul was there over a year and a half and for the year and a half they were on milk. They were growing but they were still on milk. When Apollos came they still required milk. When he left they were still not ready for solid food. They had grown but they were still immature. But here they are a few years later and now they think they're masters of the universe. And what a joke that is. These people thought they were spiritually mature; that can happen, there are Christians out there that think they know everything there is to know about the word of God. I mean, they don't need to learn anymore, they've already arrived. Brethren, if you ever say that, you are in a deep spiritual problem. You don't know hardly anything. And if you're fully



satisfied with what you do know that's sad because it's the equivalent of having a peanut for dinner. And if you think you are so rich spiritually and you can kick back and relax, you've got another think coming, you're a lazy bum. You think you're going to go into the kingdom and reign with the apostles, ha, you've got a wake up call coming, you guys may be saved but that's about it, you'll go into the kingdom but you aren't going in to reign. The ultimate goal of the Christian life is to grow to spiritual maturity and be given the honor of reigning in the kingdom of God.

But if you think you've arrived spiritually, you probably aren't going to rule over anything but the local dump. So the lesson is not to go beyond Scripture as if you know it all, that's arrogant. You don't know it all and the people who know the most know they don't know it all. And that's because when they ask questions and get the answers they get forty more questions for every answer. So get over yourself and realize there's a lot of growing to do.

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