

1 Corinthians 4:8-13 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! ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹² and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

22-Oct-2008 Session Devotional, "Kingdom Greatness"

vv8-11, An Unreliable Benchmark. Some of the Corinthians were basking in the glow of their ministerial glow, kings of the church so they thought. They delighted in how wise, strong, and honorable they had come to be considered. Now, while being considered wise or strong or honorable are not necessarily bad things, such reputations are not necessarily indicative of spiritual greatness.

Notice how he does not refer to himself only but to all of the apostles; the point is to say, "let's take your test of greatness and examine it against a known benchmark: the apostles." What we find in the benchmark are people for whom things are so difficult that it seems like they've been sentenced to it (v9). What we find in the benchmark is people who are considered fools, weak, and disreputable (v10). What we find in the benchmark is people who lack basic necessities (v11). So the Corinthian standard of greatness fails against the benchmark of the apostles.

vv12-13, A Reliable Hallmark. But Paul keeps going, by way of example, to offer in the apostles the hallmark of kingdom greatness: holiness of life. Note that the hardships are not the hallmark; they just disprove the worldly benchmark of greatness. The lesson of this text is not to seek out bad reputations or hardships. The first would disqualify you for office! No; the hallmark his holiness of life, and the distinguishing characteristics highlighted here are:

- Diligent work
- Blessing those who revile you
- Enduring (i.e. patiently!) persecution
- Entreating (rather than returning in kind) when slandered—note that this indicates that there is a time for setting the record straight
- Not considering yourself worth defending, maintaining, or promoting

Conclusion: would we be great in the kingdom? Let us become the least of all! Let us not have as our motive to build up our own name or use as our measure how we have increased. Let us instead have as our motive the glory of Christ and use as our measure whether we have responded righteously (humbly! lovingly!) to every situation. There is a wonderful quote from whence I cannot remember, but it goes something like this: "You cannot minister for the glory of Christ and secretly hope others will think better of you for it at the same time."