

# Do Not Exceed That Which Is Written (1 Corinthians 4:6)

By Jon Quinn



It is apparent that within the religious world attitudes toward the authority of Scripture vary quite alot. It was in the midst of sectarian, denominational strife that a few believers became convinced that the entire denominational mechanisms that existed were contrary to the will of the Father. Instead of arguing over various human religious creeds, that Christ would be much better served by discarding all religious creeds of men and simply return to the Bible as our sole authority (and our soul's authority).

A phrase was coined which conveyed this ideal. It said, "We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent." This phrase well states a Biblical principle often ignored today (Matthew 15:9; 28:18-20; Hebrews 8:5; I Peter 4:11; II John 9; Revelation 22:18,19). It states our purpose to do only those things which are authorized by the Scripture. We treat God's written word with reverence, accepting it as complete and adequate, and refuse to alter it in any way (II Timothy 3:16,17).

This is not a new idea. It is as old as the Scriptures themselves. Our faith in Jesus can be measured by our faith in His word (Luke 6:46). The Lord condemns treating His commandments in a casual way. If we think He will not mind it when we involve His church in things He has not authorized, then we are wrong. If we think proper doctrine and practice does not matter to Him as long as we believe in His person, then we have swallowed Satan's lie.

Consider the subject of Scriptural authority as it is expressed by the apostle Paul to the church of Christ at Corinth: "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other." (I Corinthians 4:6).

The Things Figuratively Applied

"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and

Apollos..." (I Corinthians 4:6a). What are the "these things" referred to here by Paul? For the answer, we simply look back into the text to see what Paul had "figuratively applied" to himself and Apollos. We find the answer in the previous chapter (I Corinthians 3:1-17).

Paul began by saying that the disciples at Corinth were very immature spiritually. Because of this, there was a lot of jealousy and strife at Corinth. This had led to them forming factions within the church, some saying that they were "of Paul" and others that they were "of Apollos" (3:1-5; cf. 1:10-13). They were acting like men with worldly standards and not as disciples of the Lord Jesus in this.

Then Paul used two figures of speech to illustrate the roles he and Apollos had played. First, he says that he had planted and Apollos had watered, but God was causing the growth. Paul and Apollos were only servants; the whole work belonged to God; the workers, the field and the building (3:5-9).

The second figure of speech was that of building a building. Paul had laid the foundation and others had come after Paul and continued to build on the work he had started. Paul says that the foundation which he had laid was Jesus Christ. No other foundation would do. The disciples at Corinth were being built into a temple of God, and no one ought to destroy the temple of God by trying to lay another foundation than that of Christ Jesus (3:10-17).

Paul had first brought the doctrine of Christ to Corinth. He taught only that which had been given him as an apostle from the Lord. It was the gospel that the believers at Corinth had obeyed. Later, Apollos came to Corinth and continued building on that same foundation. But now, the Corinthians were deviating from that purity of teaching and laying other foundations not of the Lord. Such would only serve to destroy the temple of God.

### The Need To Know

"...for your sakes..." (I Corinthians 4:6b). Paul had warned that "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are." (3:16,17). He warned that each of us need "...to be careful how he builds, for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (3:10b,11). When men begin teaching for their doctrines the religious creeds of men, then they are fostering division, laying other foundations than Christ, and destroying the temple of God. If we are to become what we need to be, then we need to put away the false religious wisdom of men

and allow only the word of God to make us wise (3:18-23). Our modern religious world and its leaders most certainly need to accept this truth as much as did the Corinthians!

### The Things Written

"...that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written..." (I Corinthians 4:6c). The things "written" refer to the written revelation of God. That which we know as the Bible was being delivered in the first century. As soon as these inspired messages were written, they were authoritative and viewed as Scripture (II Peter 3:15,16). To live by faith was to live according to the revealed message of God, whether by the spoken words of the apostles and prophets or by their written teachings. It was through the reading of this message that early Christians gained insight into the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:4,5). Men and women of faith continued in this doctrine from the beginning of the gospel era until now (Acts 2:42).

Paul wanted the brethren at Corinth to understand that they were not to exceed, or go beyond what had been written. To do so would constitute a faithless arrogance with respect to the adequacy of what God had caused to be written. It still does so today. Learning "not to exceed that which is written" is the same as "speaking where the Bible speaks, and being silent where the Bible is silent." Failure to maintain this kind of serious respect for God's written word will certainly cause us to go astray and be lost!

### The Arrogance of Human Creeds and Religious Division

"...in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other." (I Corinthians 4:6d). It is man's own arrogance that causes him to be unsatisfied with the Bible as a perfect guide for life and service. Sometimes it takes courage to remain true to the word when it is "out of season" (II Timothy 4:1-5). But this is where we must take our stand, to be examples of good deeds with "purity of doctrine" (Titus 2:7).

We need to recognize that we have no authority to bind or loose creeds in the kingdom of Christ; there is only one Lawgiver (James 4:12). It is time to say "enough!" and stand ready to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Think about this: if all human creeds were discarded in favor of relying only on the teachings of the Bible, religious division would melt away, and our Lord's

desire for unity would be achieved. But if the religious world is unwilling to do so, at least I can resolve to serve the Lord in such a way myself, joining with others who are willing to do the same, standing on His word alone.

**"We speak where the Bible speaks, and we are silent where the Bible is silent."**

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