

Words of Truth

A Caution From I Corinthians 8:1

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In our article last week we discussed the need to grow in our knowledge of God's word. Here locally, we know that the congregation at Sunrise has grown in knowledge over the past six years. It is evident in our work for the Lord and in our discussions of the Scriptures we have together. This is great, for God's people are supposed to be a people whom are knowledgeable (Proverbs 10:14, Proverbs 13:16, Proverbs 19:2, Romans 15:14, Colossians 3:10, and II Peter 3:18).

While it is obviously right to grow in knowledge of the truth, there is also a caution we need to be aware of. Notice what Paul wrote to the church of Christ in Corinth: *"Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth"* (I Corinthians 8:1). From the pen of the inspired Apostle Paul, we just learned that knowledge could puff us up. That is, knowledge can inflate us to a point of pride. Knowledge can be dangerous if we allow it to make us think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. Knowledge can even lead us to a point wherein we get that "I can do no wrong" attitude. Notice this: *"For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness: thou hast said, None seeth me. Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, it hath perverted thee; and thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me"* (Isaiah 47:10). Certainly, we do not want to become "puffed up" to a prideful state. Thus, the warning in I Corinthians 8:1 is very serious. God is not pleased by "puffed up", prideful people.

Being Puffed Up And Prideful Is Wrong!

If you look at Scriptures that discuss being puffed up, you can know God is not pleased with those of such a disposition (I Corinthians 4:18-19, I Corinthians 5:1-2, I Corinthians 13:4, etc.). So, what happens when one is inflated, becoming arrogant and full of pride? Notice these Scriptures: *"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate... Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall... And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible... But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble... Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time"* (Proverbs 8:13, Proverbs 16:18, Isaiah 13:11, James 4:6, and I Peter 5:5-6).

When you put together what we've studied already, you can see the seriousness of the words Paul wrote in I Corinthians 8:1. We have to realize that the more we grow in knowledge the more we have to make sure we do not become puffed up. That is especially true for us here in El Paso now that we have reached a greater depth of knowledge. It would be easy for us to allow that knowledge to give us not only pride, but also a false sense of spiritual security (Isaiah 5:21). So, we have to be cautious as we grow.

The Caution We Have To Use

The Apostle Paul did all that he could as a teacher to keep people from learning and becoming puffed up (I Corinthians 4:6). That shows the level of caution we must use as we learn and teach as well. We have to maintain a balance when it comes to our motivation to learn. You see, we know we are commanded to be able to answer Bible questions that come our way (Colossians 4:6 and I Peter 3:15). Yet, we have to be sure we never get to a point wherein we are learning just to be able to “win debates”. We never want to become the person that studies the Scriptures just so that we can “show-up” others when a Bible discussion occurs.

This is a difficult balance to maintain, because we know we are supposed to be defenders of the truth (Proverbs 28:4, Philippians 1:17, and Jude 3). To be able defenders of the truth we want to have knowledge and be able to properly handle the word of God (II Timothy 2:15). Additionally, we know it is right to speak the truth with confidence and boldness (Acts 19:8, Ephesians 3:12, and Ephesians 6:19-20). In fact, we are to be as bold as lions (Proverbs 28:1). To be capable of maintaining confidence without being puffed up, we have to have the right mindset. We have to be sure that we are spiritually minded rather than carnally minded.

The Type Of Person That Can Become Puffed Up

The type of person who can become puffed up is one who still has a carnal mind (Colossians 2:18). When one obeys the Gospel of Christ they need to be sure that they’ve destroyed the carnal mind they had in their fleshly lives (Galatians 5:24; cf. Romans 13:14). Therefore, being of a new way of thinking in Christ (Romans 12:1-2 and Ephesians 4:22-24), we’ll be more capable of not allowing knowledge to puff us up.

The spiritually minded individual obtains knowledge for two purposes. The first is to be sure that what we’re saying and doing is right (Ephesians 5:10; 17). The second reason a spiritually minded individual wants to have a good handle on the truth is to be a capable teacher to help others to be saved (Ezra 7:10, Matthew 28:19-20, Ephesians 4:16, and II Timothy 2:2). By having the right mindset and reasoning for having knowledge, we’ll be capable of not being puffed up through our knowledge of the Scriptures.

Conclusion

While God’s people have erred through ignorance (Isaiah 5:13 and Matthew 22:29), we’ve also seen the dangers that come with knowledge. We do not want to become the people who begin acting foolishly while professing to be wise (Romans 1:22). Sometimes, it is good for us all to look back on the times when we ourselves were foolish and ignorant (Titus 3:2-3). Then, we have to remind ourselves that we’ve spent much time in learning not to be “know it all’s”, but to be saved from our former state of ignorance (Proverbs 9:6).

Let’s be sure to keep learning more and more. At the same time, we need to be sure we don’t allow our knowledge to make our heads get bigger. Let’s maintain our humility in knowing our knowledge needs to be credited to God rather than ourselves (I Peter 4:11). It is because God is a great teacher, not that we are great in ourselves, that we have our knowledge (Psalms 119:97-104 and Isaiah 48:17).