

# "...NOT TO GO BEYOND WHAT IS WRITTEN..."

The title of our discussion is taken from 1Corinthians 4:6 (ASV). The text in its entirety reads, *"Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn **not to go beyond the things which are written**; that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other."* (ASV) This phrase, *"...not to go beyond what is written..."* has been a source of many differences of theological thought and opinions between Catholicism (traditions and scripture) and Protestantism

("sola scriptura" – scripture only) which is not the scope of this essay. There are some that take this phrase to be some type of Jewish idiom or proverb that Paul was referring to. Some think it had some type of meaning to the Corinthians in their Greek culture. The fact is that no one knows for sure where it may have originated. The one thing we do know for sure is that Paul wrote it in his letter to the Corinthian church. I believe that this little phrase was of vital importance to the Body of Christ at Corinth, as well as it is to the Body of Christ, today.

To get a better grasp of this little phrase, we must go back to 1Corinthians and see in what context Paul was writing to the Corinthian church when he included this in his letter. To take it in its proper context we really must begin back in 1Corinthians 1:10. Paul received a report that there were divisions within the Corinthian believers concerning who was the "real deal" as far as being the true apostle that they should follow. The Corinthian believers were divided in their thinking of who was the better spiritual leader. We see that they were divided between Apollos, Paul and even Peter (Cephas). I am quite sure that there were leaders and elders within the Corinthian church who were entrusted by Paul to care for the believers and keep them from such arguments and divisions. However, we see that these leaders were caught up in taking sides in this issue which caused even greater division.

Paul addresses this issue in many ways. He states immediately what the main problem really is concerning this issue. In 1Corinthians 1:13, he emphatically declares, *"Is Christ divided?"* The answer to that would be an unequivocal, NO!!! This is essential to the whole Gospel message and to what true believers in Christ are to be. Jesus prayed in John 17:11, 21 - that His disciples and all believers would be one with each other and in Him, as He and the Father are one. This is a paramount, fundamental aspect in believing in Jesus as our Savior and Lord. This is vital to understanding what eternal life truly is. Eternal life is that we are now able, through Jesus, to know the Father and that we are now set at one and have relationship with the Father. (John 17:3) A divided Body is totally opposite to what Jesus came to establish. It is totally opposite to what He is praying and interceding even today for His Body.

Paul continues addressing this particular issue of a divided Body in 1Corinthians 3. He tells the Corinthian believers that this type of thought and behavior is totally - carnal. He states to them in 1Corinthians 3:3-4, *"For ye are yet **carnal**: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, **are ye not carnal, and walk as men?** For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; **are ye not carnal?**"* He asks the question of the Corinthian believers, *"...are ye yet carnal..."* to which the answer based on their behavior was a great big, yes!!!

Paul was very emphatic that this kind of divisiveness revealed that the Corinthian believers were not being very spiritual but rather they were expressing a behavior of "carnality." He was very clear to assure them that he was not questioning their salvation. What he was trying to point out to them was that their manner of behavior was not very "spiritual" but rather they were acting very "carnal." So what is the definition of the term "carnal?" The word "carnal" is an adjective (a descriptive word) that means and refers to "the

flesh or the body – its passions and appetites, its lusts and sensual desires, anything that is of the world’s wisdom and philosophy, as well as anything that is temporal and will pass away.”

After asking this rhetorical question as a way of bringing correction, Paul then proceeds to express that he and Apollos were both servants, as well as stewards of the Lord. They were doing the same thing and most importantly saying the same thing concerning the Gospel. (1Corinthians 4:1) He states that there were no differences or divisions between them. They may have had different styles of bringing forth the Gospel, however, the primary issue at point was that they were both saying the same message. As far as Paul and Apollos were concerned, they were in “oneness.”

Here we then arrive at our primary verse for our discussion – 1Corinthians 4:6, *“Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn **not to go beyond the things which are written**; that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other.”* Paul begins this verse by reiterating that all he had just written concerning the carnality of the Corinthian believers’ behavior and divisiveness over who was more spiritual and who they should follow, Apollos or Paul, as well as emphasizing that they were both co-laborers in the Gospel, was for a very specific purpose that he was about to teach them. He goes on to use some very powerful words – *“...that in us ye might learn...”* Notice that Paul is trying to bring an understanding of unity to the Corinthian believers. He states and uses the pronoun, “us.” He is showing that there is no division between Apollos and himself. He tells the Corinthian believers that they should learn in and through both, Paul and Apollos, what was of true importance. Paul goes on to say that they should learn from both Paul and Apollos, *“not to go beyond what is written.”*

What Paul was stating was that he and Apollos both were saying the same things. They were both bringing forth the same Gospel – Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ ascended, and Christ will come again. That was it, period. Their message was the same. The message that they both brought forth came directly from the scriptures as the Gospel was shown to be a fulfillment of the Jewish scriptures – *“the things written.”* Paul was expressing and exhorting the Corinthian believers, as well as all believers, to not get caught up in things other than the simple Gospel message – Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ ascended, and Christ will come again. The reason being is that it “opens the door” for the enemy to come in and lure us back to our old carnal ways leading to divisiveness and divisions. When believers get caught up in all the other stuff concerning who is the better spiritual leader or as we may hear being said in today’s circles – my pastor is better than your pastor, etc, - that it is nothing but pure carnality and it only brings division. I can go on but I think you catch my drift.

The simple truth is that we are *“not to go beyond the things that are written”* within the scriptures. Many times we take scriptures out of their context and join them with other scriptures, taken out of their context and make them into a new and improved doctrine. We make new “movements” out of this. We take basic truths and fundamentals of our faith and we tend to “go beyond what is written.” This is where, I believe, we get into the “hyper movements.” We take one aspect of God’s word and run with it and take it to an inordinate extreme leaving behind the other fundamentals. If we look closely at the scriptures as a whole, we see that it is a very balanced message. We see the basics of faith, grace, love, mercy, salvation, justice, holiness, and yes even His wrath evenly distributed, revealed, illuminated and taught throughout the entirety of both the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament.

We see that Paul goes on in 1Corinthians 4:7-8, in a little sarcastic manner, telling the Corinthians believers that they got so far ahead and became so much more richer in understanding God’s truths than he or Apollos ever could that they should both be sitting and learning now from the Corinthian believers. In other words he was letting them know that they got prideful and “puffed up.” Why? It was because they went

“beyond the things that were written.” So much so that what they thought was them being so super spiritual, actually brought them to a place that was nothing more than pure carnality. Hmmm!!!

I believe we need to learn much from Paul’s teaching. Many of us are looking for more and more and more. We are looking for new revelations and other new things. That is not necessarily a bad thing. However, we must keep it all balanced within the totality of the Word of God as found in both the Jewish scriptures and the New Testament. We must be careful concerning all the “prophetic words” that are out there being brought forth today in great abundance from different sources, many of which do not line up with each other or for that matter lining up with the Word of God making our God look as if He is schizophrenic.

We must be mindful of those that profess themselves to be apostles in this hour but yet are not doing the function of what an apostle is to do. Paul expressed very clearly what the role of an apostle was as he was referencing himself and Apollos to the Corinthian believers as those who are acting in the function of an apostle. The function of a true apostle is to make sure that all believers hear the same Gospel message - just as Paul and Apollos did. The Corinthian believers heard the same Gospel message from both of them. They may have had different styles but they both taught the same thing and preached the same thing – Christ crucified, Christ resurrected, Christ ascended, Christ will come again. Unfortunately, we do not hear those who call themselves apostles today bringing such oneness to the Body of Christ but rather they are promoting things that “go beyond the things that are written.” The result is that we are only seeing more and more division within the Body of Christ and within the believers.

We must be mindful, as members of the Body of Christ, to not get caught up in senseless arguments and divisiveness as the Corinthian believers did concerning whose pastor is more spiritual; or what church is better, or who has the better worship team or worship leader, etc. We must not allow divisiveness to come forth caused by believers leaning towards a greater emphasis on one aspect of the Kingdom of God and running with it while leaving behind other valuable fundamentals of the faith. When we do these things it is a sign of carnality, not spiritual maturity.

The things mentioned above and many others are all consequences and results of “*going beyond what is written.*” I believe we need to get back to an understanding of a balanced approach to the Kingdom of God. Even though it may not be a popular statement and it may seem a little naïve, but I believe we need to return and get a firm grasp on and constantly revisit the basic fundamentals of our faith –Jesus Christ crucified, resurrected, ascended, and He will come again. Those are the truths, that in these “end times,” will not only make us one but they will keep us as one in the Father, with Jesus, and with each other as members of the Body of Christ and children of the “household of faith.”