

## **"I Will Know ... The Power"**

*"Now some are puffed up as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will; and I will know, not the word of them that are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" (1 Cor. 4:18-21).*

It was unfortunate that Paul not only had to be alert to both Jewish and Gentile adversaries; he had to deal with the criticism of those within. Paul faced many foes in Ephesus from where this letter was written: Jews who blasphemed and forced him and brethren to find separate quarters to worship in; the hostilities of Gentile craftsmen whose business was threatened because Paul said there were no gods made with hands; the Corinthian brethren had divisions; immorality, lawsuits among themselves, etc. Some boastful brethren were just certain Paul would not return to Corinth to face them; they were some much superior to Paul in every way!

In this and the following chapter, Paul wrote of brethren who were "*puffed up*" -- vainly proud. Sometimes the word "*puffed up*" is used to describe "pouting," but its primary sense is of one whose ego is inflated with an exaggerated sense of "self-importance." Such is its meaning here. Some Corinthian brethren fancied Paul was afraid to meet them; that he would not return to Corinth because he feared "their superior knowledge and wisdom."

They were wrong. Paul did deliberately delay a return to Corinth but not because he feared any person there. His delay was to allow more time for them to repent so that he would not have to be harsh in action once he arrived (2 Cor. 1:23). Paul said he would return and would then know, not the boastful words of his critics there; he would know what power lay behind their arrogant words. "*For,*" said he, "*the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*"

Certainly the kingdom is "*in word.*" There would be no kingdom apart from the word that tells of its nature, purpose, and work. The kingdom of heaven, from the days of John and Jesus "*is preached*" (Lk. 16:16): wherever early preachers went, they preached "*the things concerning the kingdom*" (Acts 28:23, 31).

But, words without power to back them are not effectual. A teacher or parent that is seen as "powerless" cannot maintain control over either a classroom or home. And, Jesus had promised that "*some of them that stand by shall in no wise taste of death until ye have seen the kingdom come with*

*power*" (Mk. 9:1). And, come with power it did, for in addition to Christ's promise that the kingdom would come with power, apostles were told they would receive that power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:8). The Spirit came on Pentecost and with it the promised power.

That power involved ability to give gifts of the Spirit to others (Acts 8:17-18); to heal a lame beggar (Acts 3:1-8); to raise the dead (Acts 9:40; 20:9-11); to visit both blindness and death upon those who opposed the gospel (Acts 13:11; 5:5, 9-10). Paul promised the Corinthians he would come (if the Lord willed) and then he would know, not the word, but the power those boastful critics had! Did they really want such a demonstration and confrontation with Paul?

With what manner Paul came to Corinth was in the hands of the Corinthians. He could come with a rod (to chastise or punish); he could come in love and a spirit of gentleness. Such statement as this was calculated to deflate their arrogant, boastful spirit and apparently did. Those "*puffed up*" ones soon realized they would be no match in a contest of power with Paul. They had words, but no power to back up their words! On the other hand, Paul had both!

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