



Pastor's Column

The Right Puff

“King of the Hill” “Pecking Order” “Hierarchy” “Up the Social Ladder” “Rankings.”

All of these terms/words are commonly used to describe one of the great preoccupations of our society and of sinful human nature in general: “Who’s up and who’s down.” We are constantly taught to be keenly aware of what our status is within an organization, or even within a relationship. Like a stock in the stock market, we “take stock” and see if, today, our value has risen or is dropping.

There are different ways to move on up the hierarchy of life. One way is “it’s not what you know but who you know” – your connections. Another method is touched on by the Apostle Paul today. In his first letter to the church members of Corinth, Paul is actually responding to a letter the church sent to him.

He sometimes quotes from their letter to him. They are defending their actions – actions they realize have become controversial. They insist that, based on Christian philosophy, they are doing the right thing.

The Corinthians try to explain to the Apostle that “All of us [Christians] possess [the proper] knowledge” about food offered to idols. They tell Paul “No idol in the world really exists” because “there is no God but One.”

But Paul tells them the problem with this reasoning. By eating food dedicated to false gods, these Corinthian Christians have been giving other Christians the impression that they believe in these false gods. As Paul writes, “for if others see you, who possess knowledge, eating in the temple of an idol, might they not, since their conscience is weak, be encouraged to the point of eating food sacrificed to idols [too]? So by your knowledge those weak believers...are destroyed.”

Paul was always pointing out the core of our beliefs – that we are called to love our neighbor and put our neighbor’s needs first. But the Corinthians were not doing that. They were flaunting their “superior knowledge” about idols and, in their own eyes, showing others just how amazing, spiritually, they now were.

Paul’s admonition: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. These Corinthians were trying to gain power and influence through their superior knowledge, which many of us try to do in our lives. We like to be “in the know.” We like to show off our degrees or answer other people’s questions or be the expert. There’s nothing immediately wrong with that – but in our sin we often use those situations to prove we are better than someone else. We puff ourselves up.

Meanwhile, God tells us to puff up our neighbor through service and good works. May the Spirit lead us away from concern for self and status, so that we may do this.



Bring it Home

SUNDAY: Jesus' Authority

Read Mark 1:21-28. Who first recognizes Jesus as the Holy One of God? Does this surprise you? How does Jesus show His authority over the evil spirit? How does the authority manifested in Jesus' actions validate and authenticate the authority of His teachings? Notice the people's reaction to Jesus' teaching. When you read Jesus' words in Scripture, do you see them as authoritative in your life?

MONDAY: Authority from Above

Ponder Jesus' authority as you read Matthew 28:18; John 1:1-18; 5:24-27. Jesus doesn't just speak with authority and perform wonders; He is the ultimate Authority in human flesh. Do we really believe this? If so, do we take it seriously? What difference will it make in our lives if we do so when many today do not recognize or bow before any authority or ultimate truth?

TUESDAY: A Lamp and a Light

Read Psalm 119:105; John 1:1,14; 6:14; 17:17; 21:24; and Hebrews 4:12a. Jesus speaks with God's voice. He quotes the Hebrew Scriptures and refers to them as spiritual food (Matthew 4:4); later He tells His followers that He (the Living Word) is the bread of life. Jesus cannot be separated from His words, and His words—cradled in Scripture—give life. Ask the Spirit to make God's Word a light for your path.

WEDNESDAY: Pushing Back the Darkness

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Thy kingdom come...and deliver us from evil..." Read Mark 1:21-28 and John 1:1-5,9-13. In these passages, do you see God's kingdom coming; do you see deliverance from evil? Do you see Scripture being fulfilled? Not all darkness comes cloaked in the demonic. Is there darkness in your life? Ask Jesus to bring the light of His presence into the dark areas of your life.

THURSDAY: Mighty Powers of Darkness

Read Mark 1:21-28. Do you believe Jesus cast out demons? Do you believe there are spiritual forces of evil in our world today? Do you run from this evil, or do you "play with fire" by involvement in occult practices? Read Acts 19:17-20; Ephesians 6:10-18; James 4:7-10. We needn't fear the evil one, for Jesus demonstrated authority over evil, and in Him, we are safe. Pray to flee from anything that draws us into the darkness.

FRIDAY: Our Freedom in Christ

Read Mark 1:21-28; Luke 4:31-37; and John 8:31-36. Imagine the joy of the one whom Jesus freed, as echoed in these song lyrics: "Through You (Jesus) the darkness flees; through You my heart screams, 'I am free to run; I am free to dance; I am free to live for You; I am free'" Our freedom in Christ is freedom to live in the light, not the darkness. Do you see your freedom as a call to live for Him?

SATURDAY: Delegated Authority

Read Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 9:1-2; Acts 4:1-37; and 2 Corinthians 4:5-7. Who today is called to minister with the authority of Jesus? Is the redemptive power of Jesus' authority evident in your life? Do you want to live with an Acts 4 kind of faith? Do you hunger for more of Jesus, for more of His authority, power, and redemptive transformation in your life and in the lives of those to whom you reach out in His name and with His love?