

First Corinthians
Chapter Four
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1Cor 4:1 “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

1Cor 4:2 In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

1Cor 4:3 But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself.

1Cor 4:4 For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord.

1Cor 4:5 Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.”

The word used by Paul that is translated “servants” is not the same word he used earlier. This Greek word is “hyperetes”, not “diakonos” and the word originally meant “under rower”, which was the name for the people who rowed in the lower part of a large ship. It later came to mean those who served subject to direction and, of course, Paul here means that the director of these servants is God. He is stating that the Apostles are under servants of Jesus Christ and subject to His direction. He also states that they are the ones responsible for the mysteries of God. Remember that such mysteries are those that can only be understand through the revelation of God and not something that anyone could understand with enough work. In the second verse he says that God requires these servants to be faithful in the carrying out of their duties of explaining the Gospel to the people chosen by God. He is also going to say that since he is responsible to God, it is only God who can truly judge him for his faithfulness. Verse three is very important to understand properly. He served the Corinthians but his master was God. His charge was to present the Gospel message and the judgment of his efforts was to be done only by God. Although he received criticisms from the Corinthians he was not moved to change his presentation or to modify the Gospel because his only judge was God. He knew that there would be a day of judgment by God and he was to be subject to such. Although he did think and plan and even evaluate his actions he left the judgment of his acts to God and we must do likewise. Even though he knew of nothing that he had done wrong in his Gospel presentation he knew that his final judge would be God and he rested in that knowledge. He then tells them to quit judging him for there will be a day of judgment when the deeds of all people will be revealed and the judgment of God passed upon those deeds.

1Cor 4:6 “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.

1Cor 4:7 For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

It is really hard to keep down the pride in ourselves! Paul applied his teachings of the responsibility of teachers to be under the authority of God to Apollo and himself for the purpose of an example for them to follow. Now he makes it clear that such also applies to them. His warning about exceeding what has been written probably applies to their adding to the Scripture with the "wisdom" of their worldly teachings. When one receives the mystery of God it is tempting to become vain in such knowledge and we need to constantly be reminded that all the wisdom of God is from God and we get none of the glory of the proper understanding of that mystery. When someone exclaims "Wow, you really made that Scripture clear to me", it is very tempting to take the glory rather than praising the Lord for the verses and the understanding. Without the indwelt Holy Spirit it is impossible for us to properly understand the world of God. I can speak by example in that regard for I had been reading the Bible since I was a child but it was not until I was born again at age 29 that I began to really understand what I was reading.

1Cor 4:8 "You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and I would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you."

1Cor 4:9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

1Cor 4:10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

1Cor 4:11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

1Cor 4:12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

1Cor 4:13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now."

Paul is using great sarcasm here because the members of this church had become too much like the world. They were proud of their knowledge, mixed the Words of God with the "wisdom" of the world, and lifted up various teachers as their idols. Contrary to all of this, the Apostles were viewed by the world as fools because of their clinging to the teachings of Jesus and the fact of His death and resurrection. If they appear shrewd in the eyes of the world then they are in fact fools before God. If they appear strong to the world then they are really weak. If they appear distinguished then they are really without honor. In his description of the state of the Apostles he is using the present time. They are hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, homeless, working with their hands, reviled, persecuted, slandered, and are viewed as the lowest of life on the planet! What a state of affairs for prosperity theology! Saying that they are the dregs of all things refers to the state of humans who were sacrificed to idols. Such people were chosen from among the group of people in the area who contributed nothing to society and were of absolutely no use to society. But Paul says that in all of those hardships they blessed, endured, and were friendly toward all. The entire set of sentences is meant to shock the

members of the church into a proper understanding of their position in the world and before God.

1Cor 4:14 “I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

1Cor 4:15 For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

1Cor 4:16 I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me.

1Cor 4:17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

1Cor 4:18 Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.

1Cor 4:19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power.

1Cor 4:20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in words, but in power.

1Cor 4:21 What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness?”

He is admonishing them as his children. The Greek word translated “father” is ‘paidagogous’ and is not a position prevalent in our society. It was a person who took care of a boy in a family. This “guardian” would be the personal assistant to the boy and would take him to school, taught him good manners and generally took care of the boy’s needs. This is the type of person that Paul says he was to these Christians. He says that he became this guardian to them in regard to the gospel. So although they may have had other teachers they did not have anyone else who tutored and took care of them spiritually in regard to the teachings of Jesus. Since he did so much for them they owed him respect and honor. By virtue of his teaching, status before the Lord, and his devotion to them he was worthy of being a person that they could imitate. He is not asking them to lift him up as they had been doing with Apollos but to imitate him because he was imitating Jesus and thus he was pointing them to Jesus. Since Timothy was so familiar with Paul, he had been sent to them to remind them of Paul’s manners of imitating Jesus and therefore a worthy person to imitate. He also stated that he was not doing anything particular for this church but that his ways were consistent in every church that he established and served. Evidently some members of the church said that Paul had sent Timothy because he had no intention of coming to Corinth and thus they had nothing to gain by offending Paul. He clearly states that his intention is to come soon to Corinth if the Lord allows the visit for he is not a free agent but a servant of Jesus Christ. Paul is not impressed with words but he wants to see if they have the power of the gospel. It is not mere words that God gives to his people but He gives them the power to do His works. He reminds them that the kingdom of God is not a certain philosophy or a set of rules to learn but it is the power of God to transform people into His servants and to give them the gifts to bring the gospel message throughout the world. He closes this discussion with the certainty that he will come to visit them and it is up to them as to how he will come. Which door will you choose? I would choose love and gentleness! But I am afraid that I also deserve the rod.

References

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