

## 1 Corinthians 4

**In order to properly evaluate Paul and the other apostles, how should the Corinthians view them (v. 1)?** As "servants of Christ" and "stewards of God's mysteries" ("*those entrusted with the secret things of God*"), not as party favorites to follow (3:4). The mysteries of God ("*the secret things*") were the previously hidden Old Testament secrets.

**What is the most important character trait in a steward (v. 2)? Faithfulness.** He must be faithful to his master's trust. For Paul, this meant remaining faithful to the gospel as he had received it from his "Master."

**What was Paul's perspective on judging (v. 3)?** It mattered very little to Paul how well the Corinthian Christians or anyone else thought he was doing his job. What did matter to him was *God's* view of how he was doing his job. His personal evaluation of his own performance was irrelevant too ("*I do not even judge myself*"). He realized that he was born into the human family with a judgment that was constantly biased in his own favor.

**What is Paul's perspective on his conscience (v. 4)?** He was not aware of any charge of unfaithfulness that might be brought against him. However, he realized that his conscience might not be quite as sensitive as it should be. He simply was not competent to judge himself. Only his Master ("*the Lord*") had that insight, as well as that authority.

**What is Paul's point about judging (v. 5)?** Only God is qualified to pass final judgment. And He will judge at the appropriate time (3:13) and place, i.e. at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Paul is saying, "Let there be no pre-judgment seat judging!"

The things "*hidden in darkness*" does not refer to hidden sins, which God forgives and forgets (Psalm 103:12). It refers to that which we cannot see, i.e. "*the motives of men's hearts*" .....not only what was done, but *why* it was done. On that "Day" (3:13), each will receive some praise from God -- not from man.

**Why did Paul reference himself and Apollos (v. 6)?** He is holding up himself and Apollos as examples to follow of men under authority who did not go "*beyond what was written*," i.e. beyond the teaching of the Scriptures (15:3-4). From the example of their lives Paul hoped the Corinthians would avoid this pitfall, would not take pride in any one of their teachers over another and would learn the lesson of humility. This was a difficult lesson, for the Greeks believed humility was a despicable trait of a slave, a sign of weakness, not a characteristic of great men.<sup>1</sup>

Paul put his finger clearly on their problem: pride! He then suggested a practical cure—imitation of him (v. 16).

**What heart issue is Paul addressing with his three rhetorical questions (v. 7)?** They had a pride problem. Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were not inherently "superior" to anyone else. God had given them everything they had. Consequently, they should be grateful, not boastful.

**What is the point of Paul's irony and sarcasm (v. 8)?** The Corinthian Christians thought they were rich. They had become self-sufficient and were proud of it. They were living in luxury, comfort, and ease. There was no sense of need. They acted as if they were already reigning as kings but they were excluding the apostles. Paul sarcastically states that he wishes that the time to reign had already come so that he might reign with them!

They thought of themselves as kings in need of nothing when in fact they were as needy as the foolish king in the children's tale of the emperor's new clothes, who blithely paraded nakedly before his subjects (Revelation 3:17-18).<sup>2</sup>

**In contrast to the self-satisfaction of the Corinthian Christians, how does Paul describe the lot of the apostles (v. 9)?** He pictures them as being thrown into the arena with wild beasts while men and angels looked on. Paul seems to have been thinking of the apostles as the ultimately humiliated group. They were the leaders, and their sufferings

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<sup>1</sup> Lowery, D. K. (1985). 1 Corinthians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 512-513). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 513.

for the cause of Christ were common knowledge. How inappropriate it was, then, for the Corinthians to be living as "kings," rather than sharing in suffering with their teachers.<sup>3</sup>

**How does Paul ironically contrast the apostles and the Christian Corinthians (v. 10)?** While the apostles were seen as fools for Christ's sake, the Corinthians enjoyed prestige in the community as "wise" Christians. To the naturally "wise" person, the apostles looked "weak," but the Corinthians appeared "strong." The Corinthians looked distinguished while the apostles seemed to be dishonorable.

**How does Paul describe the dishonor of the apostles (v. 11)?** Because they proclaimed the message of the cross, they suffered from hunger and thirst and nakedness and persecution. They were hunted, pursued, and homeless.

**How does Paul continue to describe the dishonor of the apostles (v. 12)?** They supported themselves by working with their own hands (Acts 18:3). The Corinthians despised people who did manual labor; they regarded it as the work of slaves. To the world, it is foolish for anyone to "bless" those who curse him, but that is exactly what Paul did. When they were persecuted, they did not fight back, but patiently endured.

**How does Paul continue to detail the dishonor of the apostles (v. 13)?** When slandered, they responded kindly. This also was offensive to the Corinthians; they thought a man was a wimp if he didn't fight back when slandered. To summarize the previous few verses, they were looked upon as the "*scum of the earth, the refuse of the world*."

All of these descriptions of the apostles emphasize the depths to which they were willing to stoop to proclaim the Gospel (Philippians 2:14-18). They went to these extremes despite the fact that many called them "fools."

**What was Paul's purpose in writing the immediately preceding verses (v. 14)?** To explain his motive -- that he did not intend to humiliate the Corinthians but rather to warn them as his beloved children ("*my dear children*"). His goal was to bring about a change of heart in them, moving them away from their pride-filled divisiveness.

**How does Paul define his relationship with the Corinthian believers (15)?** Paul himself had led them to the Lord; he was their spiritual father. Many others might have come along to teach them, but no others could have the same tender regard for them as the one who pointed them to the Lamb.

**What might the Corinthians have seen in Paul that they could strive to imitate (v. 16)?** His unselfish devotion to Christ and his tireless love and service for his fellow believers (vv. 9-13).

**Why was Paul sending Timothy (v. 17)?** To show them what it looks like to imitate Paul. Timothy was to remind them of Paul's ways in Christ, ways which he taught in all the churches. Paul is saying that Timothy practiced what he preached, he walked the walk, and this should be true of everyone who engages in Christian service.<sup>5</sup>

**How was Paul critical of some of the Corinthians believers (v. 18)?** "Some" of the Corinthians, who did not value Paul as highly as they should have, had "become puffed up" (arrogant) in their own estimation of themselves and their ideas (v. 6). They had done so as if believing they would not face him again ("*as if I were not coming to you*").<sup>6</sup>

**What is Paul's intent/hope (v. 19)?** He promises that he will come in the near future, if the Lord wills. When he does, he will expose the pride of those who arrogantly talk so freely, but have no spiritual power.

**How does Paul describe the Kingdom of God (v. 20)?** It is not concerned principally with words but with action. Real, effective "power" that brings about change is the power of the Holy Spirit working through humble messengers.

**What does the manner in which Paul comes to them depend on (v. 21)?** The Corinthians' response to this letter. If they show a rebellious spirit, he will come to them with a whip. If, on the other hand, they are humble and submissive, he will come in love and a spirit of gentleness as a delighted father.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Corinthians, 2019 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 75

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 75

<sup>5</sup> MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (A. Farstad, Ed.) (p. 1758). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Corinthians, 2019 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 80