

1 Corinthians 4

The Corinthian church was problematic for Paul. In Chapter 1-4 he addresses their first problem: divisions within the church.

- In Chapter 1 raises the issue of their divisions – that they are each choosing their favorite Bible teacher and creating factions or cliques around each one.
- In Chapter 2 he draws the distinction between the spiritual man (person) and the natural man (person). His point is that the natural man – without the Holy Spirit cannot understand the things of God. He or she has no power or ability to do so.
- In chapter 3 he draws a further distinction – between the spiritual Christian and the carnal Christian. His point is that once we believe, are born again, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we're not done with the Christian life. Salvation is not the end, but the beginning of a growing, maturing relationship with the Lord. This growing and maturing was the part that the Corinthians were failing to do.
- In chapter 4 Paul provides a solution.

Christians mature in their faith when they gain a proper view of Christian service.

- I. A servant of God is required to be a faithful steward. 4:1-5
- II. A servant of God will have to learn to be humble 4:6-13
- III. A servant of God must be willing to be an example to others. 4:14-21

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- I. A servant of God is required to be a faithful steward. 4:1-5
 - A. 4:1 **servant** *hypēretas* The NT uses several words for “servant”. This one stresses subordination and responsibility to a superior (See *Bible Knowledge Commentary*)
 - B. 4:2 The **steward** was the manager of the household. Jesus illustrated the responsibility of this position with a parable.

Matt 24:45-51 NKJV ⁴⁵*“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. ⁴⁷Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ ⁴⁹and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, ⁵⁰the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

- C. 4:3-5 The Corinthians in their spiritual immaturity were judging Paul, but not judging him fairly. Still, he doesn't even trust his own judgment. He replies by deflecting final judgment to God where it belongs.

- The principles in this section don't only apply to ministers in the sense of pastors or missionaries. Each one of us has a stewardship from God.
 - We are all responsible to use our spiritual gifts in accordance with God's will.
 - We each have responsibilities at work or in our home and family relationships.
 - We have a responsibility to wisely handle the resources the Lord entrusts to us.
- In each case, at one level, we may answer to other people, but ultimately we answer to God.

Colossians 3:23-24 NKJV ²³*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men,* ²⁴*knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*

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II. A servant of God will have to learn to be humble 4:6-13

- D. 4:6 **that you may learn not to think beyond what is written** For the Christian, the written word is the ultimate authority. The Scriptures have the final say. The Corinthians needed to learn this – as they enjoyed creating their own standards.
- We may need to learn this today all over again today.
- E. 4:8 Paul is being a little sarcastic here to make a point. The Corinthians had a very high opinion of themselves and he's trying to knock them down a few levels.
- F. 4:9-13 He offers himself and the other apostles as their examples.
- i. 4:9 **spectacle** *theatron* Like a show in a Greek or Roman arena. *"Last of all" means that they were the final show for the day—normally reserved for the most wretched criminal condemned to die in the arena. Corinth's theater seated eighteen thousand.* (IVP Background Commentary)
- G. 4:13 **filth, offscouring** Both of these words refer to trash or waste – the stuff that is either washed away or scraped off and then disposed of. Paul is basically saying, "We the apostles often get treated like garbage."
- The Greeks and Romans both valued virtue. In their literature one sometimes even finds lists of the qualities they respected. Neither valued humility. Therefore, Paul confused the Corinthians. Absorbed in Greek and Roman thought, they just didn't get him. More than that, however, they really didn't understand God.
 - If we're going to have the mind of Christ, we're going to have to learn some humility.

Php 2:7-8 NKJV ⁷but [Jesus] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

- The church in our day can seem overloaded with the attitude of the Corinthian Christians, emphasizing the image of worldly success and power. Sadly, many ministers still want to display the image of worldly success or worldly influence. Just as sad is the fact that many Christians value such traits. The results, now as in the past, are rivalry, factions and immaturity.

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III. A servant of God must be willing to be an example to others. 4:14-21

- A. 4:14-15 Paul speaks to them in this section as their “father.” The Lord used him to get the church started in Corinth. No doubt many who would hear this letter first heard about Jesus Christ through the preaching of Paul. They should naturally expect that they would have a special place in his heart.
 - B. 4:16 Paul was intentionally setting a standard for others to follow.
 - C. 4:17 Timothy also came to Christ under Paul’s ministry – so Paul refers to him as a beloved and faithful son in the Lord. He was the apostle’s most faithful assistant.
- As any of us who are parents know, children more easily follow our example than our instructions – and sometimes we’re really happy about that. At other times we no doubt wish that it weren’t true. Paul drew attention to his own example often. If we’re going to be servants of God, we’ve got to face the fact that we are going to be examples to others. We have to make it our aim to be the best examples possible.
 - Paul was willing to draw attention to the example he set.

First Corinthians 11:1 NKJV *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*

Php 3:17 NKJV *Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.*

Second Thessalonians 3:7-9 NKJV ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

- Paul also encouraged Timothy to set the pace for others in the church.

First Timothy 4:12 NKJV *Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

- A servant of God must be willing to be an example to others.

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Conclusions: Three things to consider:

- Our Stewardship: What has God entrusted us with?
 - Time? Resources or Gifts? Responsibilities at work or at home? Relationships?
2. Our Humility:
 - Are we willing to take a back seat?
 - Hardest musical instrument to play? Second fiddle.
 - Are we willing to help someone else succeed?
3. Our Example:
 - Early on, I thought Paul must have been either a bit conceited or some kind of super Christian to ask people to follow his example. “We will never be able to do that.” Now I think differently. Consider how he told young Timothy to be an example to others.
 - The more I think about that, the more I believe that living as an example is what God wants from all of us. He wants us to take our role in this world just that seriously. He wants people to be able to look at us in order to learn how to live for Him.
 - i. Many will never read the Bible, come to church, or listen to sermons.
 - Yet all of these are no doubt watching us live our lives. They want to see the real thing.
 - ii. Beyond that more mature believers in the church need to think of what those younger in the Lord see in them.
 - Remember that there are two kinds of people in the world – the spiritual and the natural – the saved and the lost.
 - There are also two kinds of people in the church – the spiritual and the carnal.
 - God wants more from us as believers than our initial commitment to Christ. He wants us to move on to maturity in our relationship with Him.

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