

1 Corinthians 4

Verses 1-2:

--Here Paul is summing up all his previous instruction. They Corinthians had been looking at Paul and Apollos and ministry in general in an unspiritual and immature way. The proof was their carnal divisions, envy, and strife around worldly wisdom.

--So how were ministers to be seen? How do Paul and Apollos belong to them as Paul had just said? Very simply as ***servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.***

--Paul uses a different word in the Greek for servants here than the word he had used for him and Apollos previously. The earlier word gave the idea of a deacon and related more to actual labor or service. The word here has the idea of an *under-rower* but is related more to the idea of following the orders of a superior. It is used in various ways such as: **John 18:36: *If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight.*** . . + **Acts 13:5: *They also had John (Mark) as their assistant.***

--Paul is moving to emphasize the picture of servants as faithful stewards. All true ministers are simply servants of Christ. They are nothing in and of themselves.

--In fact, they are most directly servants in relation to things that are not their own. That is why Paul follows quickly with the word ***stewards***. As a steward ministers of Christ are in possession of things that are not their own. *Joseph in Potiphar's house + Prison + Egypt*

--What we give is the truth of the ***mysteries of God***—the revelation of God. A true minister of Christ does not mediate supernatural power through the sacraments—communion or baptism—or religious rituals. What we have is the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

--We don't make it up. The truth is not our own. We don't cherry pick what we like—It takes a whole Bible to make a whole Christian! We trust in God's testimony of Himself and His Word.

Matthew 13:52: *He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."*

--There is always a pull to become a steward of something else. To go from the ***mysteries of God*** to: Pop culture—News—Statistics—Spiritual experience—Conspiracy—Blood Moons, etc.

--There is enough in the ***mysteries of God*** to fill eternity. ***Colossians 1:24-29***

1 Timothy 3:16: *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory.*

--Those ministers who turn to other things are no longer acting as ***servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.***

--Paul then makes it clear that this is a trust issue. The most important requirement of a steward is that they are faithful to the Word of the Master.

--Paul wanted to be faithful to God. Faithful to who God made and called him to be. Faithful with ***the testimony of God.*** Faithful in the common day-in and day-out style.

--The type of faithfulness that isn't flashy in quality but becomes so in quantity. The type of faithfulness that is available to all of us but should especially be seen and expected of ministers.

Verses 3-5:

--**(3-4)** Who then is to judge this faithfulness? Jesus! Not them or Paul himself.

--Paul says, that because he is a steward of Christ, and accountable to him, he is not moved by their judgments of him—his bodily presence, apostleship, message, etc.

--If we lived more with an eye to the judgment seat of Christ we would be much less moved by the judgments of other people. *Social Media—even just snooping into what people think of us out of “curiosity” in a type of glory voyeurism.*

--We are not any other man's servant or steward. We are God's alone. That was the context that Paul used the judgment seat of Christ in to remind the Romans to be careful how they were treating one another.

Romans 14:10: *But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*

--To show that he isn't just being prideful, Paul goes even further. In fact, Paul says his conscience is clear, but even that doesn't absolve him before God.

--**(5)** Then Paul sums up this issue in practical instruction. He teaches them something important about making judgments.

--Paul obviously doesn't mean we cannot judge anything in life. He in fact commands the exact opposite numerous times in this epistle alone:

2:15: *But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.*

5:12: *For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?*

6:2: *Do you not know that saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?*

--People like to quote Jesus when He says not to judge but they don't like to quote Jesus when He says:

John 7:24: *Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgement.*

--So what is Paul warning here? He is warning those who would judge the *unseen motives* of other servants of Christ. It is only the Lord who will ***bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.***

--To judge actions or fruit is not judging unrighteously. It is in fact judging righteous judgment.

The man in sexual sin in the next chapter—Naming an Alcoholic or Thief or Adulterer

--Yet when I am judging not *what* someone is doing but *why* they are doing it, I am on thin ice. I cannot see the ***counsels of the hearts***—as they could not see Paul's heart, nor could men clearly see Jesus' heart.

--This brings both a serious warning and encouragement for us.

--We are warned because it is easy to do religious stuff for selfish means. God knows *why* we are truly acting and speaking. That will come out one day.

--We are encouraged because like Jesus and the apostles before us—every true and faithful servant of God will have his name and motives slandered. Yet, if we seek the praise that comes only from God it will be made manifest one day! **“You are a heretic!”* has been said of many martyrs. *“That shall be known at the day of judgment!”* has been the response of many of those martyrs.*

--The day of judgment will be a day of resurrected of bodies and reputations!

--We have so little idea of what this means: ***Then each one’s praise will come from God!***

--*Praise from God!* When God gives praise a thing is not only praised—but must be praised! When God pronounces His praise on a life it is a sound of praise that echoes from that moment on throughout the eternal ages. It is a declaration of what men and angels *must forever than say of us!*

--So what are we seeking here? The praise of men or of God?

****John 5:44: How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?****

--How many are living to see the honor of those who will have no honor at the judgment seat of Christ? How powerful is the praise of men here—so powerful that almost none of us can handle much of it. Well then what will be the power of the moment when praise—true and eternal praise—will come from God?

Verses 6-7:

--Paul is saying that he purposefully stayed with the party names in his discussion with them so that they could learn to stay with the Word of God.

--Some discussion as to whether ***what is written*** is his current epistle or the Scriptures. I think there is no difference here. He obviously wants them to understand what he is writing as it is based off of the Old Testament Scripture and is inspired Scripture itself.

--They needed to say in their lane and not ***think beyond*** what God has to say about them or others. Such as. . .

--**(7)** Their evident pride in their differences. Everything we have—even our own souls—are not our own. They are His. He is Creator and we are creation.

****Jeremiah 9:23-24: Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.****

--All we have to glory in is God. *Chrysostom: *“All this about ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ is bare words only, and does not stand for things.”**

*Trapp (N.T. Commentary): *“Of all the good that is in us, we may well say as the young man did of his hatchet, ‘Alas, master, it was but borrowed.’”**

--Do we see everything good in our lives as something that we have received from God Himself? Do we hold them as stewards who are to be found faithful?

John 3:27: John answered and said, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.

Verses 8-13:

--Here Paul moves into a pretty stunning rebuke. We see in this both severity and mercy. Speaking the truth yet in love. Warning and exhortation. Christlikeness.

--Paul is pointing out here that how these Corinthians see themselves is how they think Paul ought to live. Paul, on the other hand, is showing them that how he is—is how they are supposed to live.

--It is important to see that Paul is speaking for: ***us, the apostles (9)***.

--This does a few things. First, it shows that what Paul is enduring is not just because of his personal call to suffer from the Lord. Second, it sets the Corinthians against *all* their teachers and does not allow them to divide them into camps. Third, and last, it confounds all of the “Live Large” apostles of their day as well as those in our day.

--**(8)** Here Paul takes their reasonings to the ultimate end which is utterly ridiculous in the world they lived in. Paul couldn’t wait for the day of Christ’s kingdom in reality.

--**(9)** Then Paul declares that the apostles—as God’s messengers of the end times—are put before heaven and earth as men on a theatre stage.

--This also introduces the idea of our service and suffering having a greater purpose than we know! *Job + Paul’s exhortations before ***God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels***. . . **(1 Timothy 5:21; 2 Timothy 4:1)**.*

--**(10-13)** Paul here is speaking of their general reception in the world and not necessarily in the Body of Christ. Unfortunately, the Corinthians were caving to worldly influence and wisdom.

--Paul ends the description as summing them up as ***filth & offscouring*** which have the idea of what is carried off by rinsing and scraping. Both have the general idea of refuse.

--Paul is simply pointing out the different reception the message and life of the apostles receives and the reception of the message and life the Corinthians are receiving.

--Now, this puts us all to shame. I don’t *want* or search for this. I would honestly say we want more of a middle of the road path through this world—I do in my flesh. But we must accept our place outside of the camp with Christ.

--We all know our nation and way of life is quickly changing. We are becoming the minority like so many of our brothers and sisters are around the world. We are walking the path Paul and the apostles walked—or we can turn from Christ and refuse obedience and faith.

*Chrysostom: *“He can take away your glory without your consent and bring you low; but He will have it from you with your own goodwill, that you may have a reward.”**

Verses 14-17:

--Paul is not seeking to shame them into cringing before him. He loves them as a father and he is trying to instill his values into them—which are really Christ’s values.

--For Paul, there was no shifting message or truth. He taught and lived the same everywhere. So even today you should be able to follow around a true minister of Christ and see that their lives are examples of what they teach.

--Paul constantly referred to his own life as an example. **(1 Cor. 11:1; Gal. 4:12; Eph. 5:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:1-2; etc.)**

--Parents—especially fathers!—can you say such a thing to your children? Have your children seen hypocrisy between your message and your life? Have they seen you suffer in faithful service to Christ? In sharing the gospel? In situations at work or with the culture? Do they know that you are simply a steward of your spouse, them as kids, your home, your money, your time?

--Paul does not want everything that he teaches everywhere to come to them without life. That is why he is sending Timothy. ***1 Timothy 1:2: *To Timothy, a true son in the faith...****

Verses 18-21:

--Paul makes a few things clear. He knows that this is only *some* of those in the church. A smaller group that affects others—as always!

--He also wants to make it clear that just because he is sending Timothy it doesn’t mean that he isn’t planning on coming himself—***if the Lord will***.

--Finally, he wants to make it clear that if the Lord does will, and he gets there, he is not coming as a person who isn’t going to *do* or *demand* anything. He is coming as a parent that means business.