

1 Corinthians 4

4:1 “This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.”

In verse 1, Paul tells them to regard Peter, Apollos and himself as servants. They are not to be worshiped or put on a pedestal. He is humbling himself before them. You have heard numerous times, “It is all about Him and not about me.” In verse 2, Paul says that regardless of which servant taught you, their responsibility is to be proven faithful. What did they teach? “*The mysteries God has revealed*”.

“There are several different words in the language of the New Testament to describe a servant. Here, Paul uses the word “*hyperetas*,” which describes a subordinate servant functioning as a free man. He does not use the more common New Testament word for a servant (*doulos*) which designated a common slave.” (Guzik)

“The word *hyperetas* literally means an “under-rower,” in the sense that someone is a rower on a big galley ship. So, though it is not the most lowly word for a servant, it certainly not a prestigious position. Under-rowers serve “Christ the master-pilot, helping forward the ship of the Church toward the haven of heaven.” (Trapp)

Pastor Brian usually says, “Don’t take my word for it, check what the Bible says for yourself.” This verse flips it around. The teacher better teach the correct Gospel. James says the same thing in James 3:1. He says, “*Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*”

In verse 3, Paul says that your opinion and for that matter, my opinion of myself, is unimportant. Remember Paul received his commission to teach from Jesus. He has never been a “people pleaser”, he is a “God pleaser”. In verse 4, he tells them that he believes that he has taught them the correct Gospel as he said earlier, he will be judged by God. He doesn’t say it but I believe that he implied that the Holy Spirit ensures that he is teaching the correct Gospel, that is how he can have a clear conscience.

Throughout history men have distorted the Gospel message to gain status or financial gain. I don't know how they live with themselves knowing that they are misleading or have misled others.

In verse 5, he uses something that the Corinthians are used to. Athletic competitions are judged all the time by the Greeks. They judge who get the trophies or go home as losers. This is the way they are behaving in regards to accepting the Gospel. They chose the victor based on who taught the Gospel.

Don't judge winners and losers based on the teacher, wait until Jesus returns. When Jesus judges He can see everyone's motives. He will be the judge that passes out the crowns in the end. "When Jesus judges, it will be according to the motives of the heart, not only the outward action. This is another reason why human judgment is often wrong, and why Paul feels free to disregard the harsh judgment of the Corinthian Christians towards himself." (Guzik)

In case you don't remember from our study of Heaven (Week 5) the Bible tells us about 5 Crown Rewards in Heaven:

The Victor's Crown (1 Corinthians 9:25-27)
The Crown of Rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19)
The Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8)
The Crown of Life (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10)
The Crown of Glory (1 Peter 5:4)

<https://davidjeremiah.blog/what-kind-of-rewards-will-believers-receive-in-heaven/>

6 Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

In verse 6, Paul is clarifying what he had said in the first few verses. He has been speaking figuratively. He and Apollos are not slaves in the true sense but he wants them to realize that even though they are apostles, they are not the one(s) to be raised up but they are serving Jesus. He tells them that if they are going to learn from anyone make sure that they "*Do not go beyond what is written.*" (NIV) Again, as Pastor Brian says about his preaching, check the Word of God to make sure of what it says. Make sure that what you are learning is Biblical.

In verse 7, Paul asks some pointed questions:

What makes you so special whether teacher or lay person?

If you have something special, wasn't it God given and not of yourself?

If God gave you what you have then: *"If you want to boast, boast only about the LORD."*

(1 Corinthians 1:31 or Jeremiah 9:24)

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!

Paul keeps questioning the Corinthians in verse 8. I consider them as questions even though the punctuation doesn't show it. As a parent, I have used Paul's tone with my sons. (NIV)

Already you have all you want!

Already you have become rich!

You have begun to reign—and that without us!

How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!

"9 For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings."

Paul says that God has not put the apostles on a pedestal. Paul was beheaded. Peter was crucified, upside down at his own request. All died as martyrs except John. They were made a 'spectacle' of by the world, much like Jesus was by Herod during His trials.

"10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! 11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment."

In verse 10, Paul uses sarcasm to show the Corinthians how foolish they are thinking more highly of themselves, possibly even more highly than the apostles.

"Today, the church is heavy with this same attitude of the Corinthian Christians. They were concerned about the image of worldly success and power, and many of them despised Paul and the other apostles because they did not display that image. Today, there is no shortage of

ministers who want to display the image of worldly success and power, and no shortage of Christians who will only value that in their minister.” (Guzik)

In 2 Corinthians 11:16-33, Paul goes into the details of what he has suffered for Christ. Here in verses 11 and 12, he gives the Corinthians an idea that the apostles do not have celebrity status in the world. Some of the human suffering that they have included:

They go hungry and thirsty
They don't have enough clothes to keep warm.
They are often beaten and have no home.
They work wearily with our own hands to earn our living.
They bless those who curse us.
When they are persecuted, they endure;
When they are slandered, they respond kindly.
They are patient with those who abuse them.

The Corinthians considered physical labor as offensive. That is why they have slaves. The Greeks were used to ruling using the “Aristocracy” where the government was ruled by a small group of privileged men. The Greek aristocracy would think that they are the “scum of the earth”.

“14 I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”

In verse 14, Paul says that he is not trying ‘shame’ them but he is trying to ‘warn’ them. What do you think he is trying to warn them about? Pride (see Proverbs 11:2)

In verse 15, the NIV uses the word ‘guardian’ but other translations use the words ‘tutors’, ‘instructors’, ‘guides’ or ‘teachers’. The Outline of Biblical Usage (created by Larry Pierce) says that the word, *paidagōgos*, used here means “a tutor i.e. a guardian and guide of boys. Among the Greeks and the Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood.” In verses 14 and 15, Paul is not speaking about their age but to their maturity as Christians. Again one and a half years is still immature as a Christian. After Paul left the Corinthians, the leadership of the church was in the hands of these immature Christians. His

reference to ‘not many fathers’ in the church means that there were not many mature church leaders in the Corinthian church.

Paul was the father of the Corinthian church and he left them. They do have the memory of how he behaved and what he taught while he was with them. So Paul urges them to “imitate me”. Interesting how Paul tells them in verse 15 that he could send them ten thousand instructors or teachers it would not be enough because what they need are fathers as examples of how to live a Christian life. Now Paul is telling them that he is sending Timothy whom he calls his son. Sounds like a daunting task for Timothy.

Again we have to look at Timothy’s age and experience as a Christian. Timothy had joined Paul on his 2nd Missionary journey (See Acts 16:1). He was a teen when he joined Paul so he had spent half of his life traveling with Paul. Young in age but much more mature as a Christian than the Corinthians. Paul calls Timothy as his true son in faith in 1 Timothy 1. So Paul feels that he will be putting the Corinthians in good hands. Timothy has had the benefit of being treated like a son by Paul and he has watched and learned about what it means to be a Christian firsthand from Paul. If the Corinthians imitate Timothy they will be imitating Paul.

“18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?”

This chapter finishes with Paul warning against arrogance. He would come back to the Corinthian church to check on this arrogance. Throughout Paul’s missionary journeys he was known to stop in a check on the churches that he had planted. He told them that it would be very “soon”, “*if the Lord is willing.*” In verse 19, Paul sounds like a father. I used to say to my boys, “Don’t make me come in there! Because if I do, it won’t be good for you!” This is what Paul is saying. “If I come to Corinth, I will find out who is speaking arrogantly and I will deal with them.”

In verse 20, Paul says “Talk is cheap and the kingdom of God is not about talk.” God, the Father is real, living and will judge and punish justly. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit? It says what it says! Your behavior determines how I come, to encourage or discipline.