

1Cor. 4:1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

This verse directly ties to the previous verse. Paul is saying that he, Peter, and Apollos should just be thought of as servants of Christ as overseers/preachers (both from the Greek) of the “mysteries of God.” These *mysteries* have already been discussed in 1Cor. 2:7; they are directly connected to God’s wisdom in sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

Notice that the steward includes the ministry of preaching, teaching publicly the truth of God’s word. We are to declare God’s word boldly and without apology.

1Cor. 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

The steward is a person that has supervisory responsibilities—over people and possessions. When I looked up the word *required* in the Greek, it was not what I expected; it references “to seek, endeavor, enquire about something hidden.” This makes a tighter connection to verse 1. The steward is not only an overseer and preacher, he is also a seeker of God’s truth. That same steward should also be found faithful (trustworthy, truthful) in sharing that truth.

1Cor. 4:3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

1Cor. 4:4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

Paul is basically saying that he is not that concerned about how men judge him; he is much more concerned about God’s judgment of him. Paul doesn’t trust the judgment of men; in fact, he doesn’t even trust his own judgment of himself. Again, I identify greatly with that feeling. That is one of the reasons I look so forward to being glorified; I will no longer have to question my choices and/or motives.

Paul goes on to say that even though he may think he is completely justified/innocent in his actions and motives, especially as a teacher (in context here), he can’t really be sure. Only God knows our hearts.

1Chr. 28:9 And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

1Cor. 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

“counsel” = purpose, intention

Since men are so unreliable in their judgments, we should refrain from judging. When Jesus returns, he will reveal the truth about the actions and motives of each of His children.

At first read it sounds like the last phrase is saying that God's judgment of each person will result in His praise of that person's service. I think what it means is that every man will give praise to God for judging righteously.

1Cor. 4:6 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

Paul states that he has used himself and Apollos to illustrate the truth of his teaching. He wants the people to realize that we should never equate the teaching of any man as more important than the teaching of any other man. The teaching of any man should be measured against what is written in the scripture as given to us by the Holy Spirit.

1Cor. 4:7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to think, so he poses questions that should bring them to some obvious answers. Who is the one who has gifted every believer differently according to His will? God—through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Paul will expound on this question further in chapter 12.

1Cor. 12:6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

1Cor. 12:7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

1Cor. 12:11 But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

If someone happens to be a better teacher than another, it is through the gifting of the Spirit; but the truth that is being taught is the same. This follows logically to the next question. Do you have any gifting or ability that wasn't given to you? The obvious answer is—No. This leads directly into the next question. If your gifts and abilities are God-given, why are you boasting; God is the One Who should be receiving the glory; He was the One that empowered / gifted you.

1Cor. 4:8 Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

At first reading, these next few verses could be confusing, but when you get to verse 14 you realize that Paul is rebuking these believers. They are acting as if they "have arrived" spiritually. They are acting as if they are already reigning as kings with the Lord even though the apostles are obviously still hard at work as servants. In fact, the Lord isn't even on His earthly throne yet; so in essence, they are putting themselves above the Lord. Paul states that he wishes they were reigning as kings, because that would mean that the apostles would be reigning as well. It would mean that Jesus was on the throne.

The epistle started with Paul dealing with divisions in this body of believers because of "pride" in the identity of the teacher they followed. It would seem that their attitude reflected a spiritual superiority that the teacher with whom they identified did not reflect. The teachers/apostles were still serving God and

denying self according to the coming verses. Jesus taught that the disciple is not greater than his master (instructor/teacher).

Matt. 10:24 The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord.

Matt. 10:25 It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.

The Corinthians were obviously not paying attention to the examples of their teachers.

1Cor. 4:9 For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

Paul continues to try to get the Corinthians to see the absurdity of their attitudes. Several of the translations word this as a word picture. Paul is speaking of a parade or procession at which the apostles occupy the end or last positions—positions that would result in their death. In Roman times the “spectacle” would probably be a reference to the events at the Colosseum where criminals were made to fight as gladiators and Christians were eventually fed to the lions for the entertainment of the crowd. It could also be a reference to the way that the Romans would line the road with crosses and publicly crucify criminals and/or those who were considered a threat to Roman rule.

The Greek for the word “and” also means “both.” I think verse 9 would read better to say “the world, both to angels and to men.” Paul is well aware that the spiritual forces at work in this world are also aware of and interested in the actions of mankind on this earth. The actions of men and women of faith are of special interest to both the holy and fallen angels. The holy angels are ministering spirits who rejoice at our successes, and the fallen angels rejoice when they can cause believers to stumble or can bring about their death and rid the world of their influence. I think the fallen angels don’t understand that the death of a believer that is standing firm in his/her faith in spite of the attacks of the enemy can be more powerful and effective spiritually than if that believer had continued to live and serve in their physical body. The holy angels rejoice in the victory of the believer who is faithful unto death.

1Cor. 4:10 We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

From the attitudes of the Corinthian believers, you would think that the apostles were spiritual fools before Christ while those who professed to follow them were wise—that the apostles were spiritually weak and the Corinthians strong; the apostles are despised and the Corinthians are honored because of their testimonies. What warped thinking!

1Cor. 4:11 Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;

1Cor. 4:12 And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

1Cor. 4:13 Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

Paul paints a pretty stark picture. The apostles had no place to call home. Even at the time he was writing this letter to the Corinthians they were experiencing hunger and thirst; they had very little clothing; they were being *buffeted* (beaten, punished). They were in a position of working with their own hands for their own support. They blessed those who abused them; they endured persecution. When people spoke evil of them, they responded with kindness and prayer. In fact, they were being treated like garbage, like scum, like the lowest of the low.

At first it sounds like Paul is taking pride in suffering for the Lord, but that is not his intent. He is lovingly trying to get the Corinthians to open their eyes to their own spiritual condition. You can't help but be convicted as you compare your own life to what the apostles willingly suffered in service to the Lord. I think the Corinthians were much like the church in America today. They were blessed materially and were quite learned. I'm sure they even exceeded the church in America in the use of spiritual gifts, because most of the church today denies that the gifts are still valid. We don't truly understand what it means to suffer want and persecution. Already the tide is turning. People who call themselves evangelical Christians have already been referred to in the media as those who just aren't that smart. Those who believe that Jesus is the only way to heaven are considered intolerant. Those who believe that the Bible is God's inerrant word are considered ignorant. History is being rewritten to refute our Christian roots and heritage. I believe that Christians in America are going to face persecution they never thought possible sooner rather than later if the Lord chooses to tarry.

This section also goes directly against the prosperity gospel that is so popular among the TV evangelists of today. The child of God is never promised riches on this earth. In fact, the believer is told that he will suffer persecution.

2Tim. 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

He is never told that he will never suffer want; but he is told that God is sufficient for his every need.

2Cor. 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Matt. 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

Matt. 6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

Matt. 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

1Cor. 4:14 I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.

Paul is making clear to the Corinthians that he is not motivated with wicked or selfish purposes. He is concerned about their spiritual wellbeing. A person who is boasting in anything other than Christ is well on the way to becoming a false teacher and/or an unprofitable servant for the Lord. Paul looks upon these people as his spiritual children; he cares about them.

1Cor. 4:15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

Paul emphasizes that he is the one that brought them to the knowledge of the gospel originally. He is the one that planted the original seed of truth. Many people may lay claim to giving instruction regarding the truths of Christ, but Paul holds the unique position of being their “spiritual father.” I thought the Greek for the word “instructors” was interesting—“a servant whose office it was to take the children to school; (by implication, (figuratively) a tutor.” An *instructor* is one who is performing an expected service; he is not necessarily motivated by care and concern for the student. A *father*, on the other hand, is deeply concerned about providing the best teaching for his children and ensuring that they know how to benefit from what they have been taught. I liked one of the definitions from Webster for “father”—“One who performs the offices of a parent by maintenance, affectionate care, counsel, or protection.” I think this definition describes Paul’s attitude toward this body of believers. Paul wanted to ensure that his spiritual children weren’t affected by the “weeds” of lies and/or deceptions. His concern for them was motivated by love and a desire to protect them and evidenced through his words of counsel and instruction. We will see in the next couple of verses that he also sent a trusted co-laborer, Timothy, to ensure that they had clear understanding of his counsel and instruction.

1Cor. 4:16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

Paul was confident of his testimony being a godly example for others to imitate. He took great care to deny self and avoid actions that could be misinterpreted or seen as possibly contradictory to the teachings of Christ. If only we as parents were as conscientious and selfless in our attitude as was Paul before his spiritual children. In fact, the more concerned we become about being good spiritual parents, the better parent we will be in every way.

Paul makes his point more clearly, I believe, in chapter 11.

1Cor. 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

Paul only feels that he is worth imitating because he strives to imitate Christ.

1Cor. 4:17 For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

In an effort to be sure that the Corinthians understood his heart, Paul has sent Timothy on a journey that will bring him to Corinth. Timothy became a disciple of Paul as a young man and had earned Paul’s confidence as a faithful (trustworthy) servant of the Lord. Timothy was coming to remind the people of what Paul had taught them. Emphasis is given to the fact that these teachings were not of Paul’s own wisdom; they were from the Lord Jesus Christ. These

teachings were the truths of Christ that Paul taught in every place he ministered. Paul was consistent. I am reminded again of the verses in chapter 2, verses 2-5.

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

When I looked up the word *ways* in the Greek, it referenced "a road, progress, a mode or means." This seems to be more a reference to how Paul lived what he taught. Timothy could remind the people of more than the content of what Paul taught; he could remind them of how he lived according to his teaching.

1Cor. 4:18 Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.

1Cor. 4:19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

I've read these verses several times and I'm still not sure exactly what they mean. Is he assuring them that they aren't being slighted because he is sending Timothy to them first? Is he making a statement about people who think he won't dare to come back once he learns that there are others there who can match his spiritual wits? I'm not sure. Whatever the case, Paul lets the Corinthians know that he will be coming to see them soon if the Lord so wills. After reading several translations, I would agree that he seems to be saying that he will be able to assess the spiritual maturity / authority of those who are making such bold spiritual claims for themselves. He seems to be declaring that the power of God will be evident if their walk matches their talk.

1Cor. 4:20 For the kingdom of God *is* not in word, but in power.

"the kingdom of God" – What does it mean? The realm where God's authority is honored and accepted—both in heaven and on earth. Jesus affirmed this truth when He was talking to Nicodemus.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Paul also connected the true kingdom of God to a relationship with Christ.

Rom. 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Rom. 14:18 For he that in these things serveth Christ *is* acceptable to God, and approved of men.

(4/11) The passages in Matthew 13 and Luke 13 can be confusing until you understand that they include those "claiming" to be part of God's Kingdom. His true Kingdom will be identified when He returns to take His throne; and after one final purging of rebels, established for eternity at the end of the millennium.

The kingdom of God is in evidence when the power of God is reflected in the lives of those that have accepted Jesus in faith. What you say has to be supported by how you live. Your actions prove your faith. The whole book of James is written in support of that truth.

1Cor. 4:21 What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and *in* the spirit of meekness?

Paul makes it very clear that he is coming to Corinth with a purpose. Their attitude will determine whether he comes in a spirit of firm correction or a spirit of love and meekness (humility, gentleness). I guess we would say whether he plans on coming and trying to knock some sense into them or in a spirit of gentle rebuke and correction.

As I thought about the option Paul presented in this verse, I couldn't help but think of how Jesus handled his disciples vs. how He handled the Pharisees in Matthew 23. So maybe the better comparison would be to say—"with fiery passion or a patient, humble spirit."