

**1 CORINTHIANS**  
**On Display**  
**1 Corinthians 4:8-21**

I recently went to a house where the owners were obviously PROUD of their stuff! They had DISPLAY cabinets all over the house filled with decorative vases and fine china and ornate carvings. It was truly fascinating. *It was also interesting that almost everything they had on display was meant for ONLY one thing: Observation.* Most of these items were not USEFUL or HELPFUL. They were just pretty, or interesting. Some of them COULD have been useful, but they were deemed too beautiful for use.

But there are some items that are most beautiful when they are a LIVING display. They are MEANT to be in action, used for a purpose. **They are, in fact, MADE beautiful by the very way that they are used.** A silver TRUMPET or an ebony grand piano are most magnificent to behold when played by a master musician. A massive bulldozer or giant track hoe are awesome to watch when driven by a skilled workman. Even a simple tool like a hammer or a saw is ELEGANT when wielded by an experienced craftsman. They seem to leave their MARKS on such a tool. *[My dad's Estwing hammer and the old HOE that I bought some years ago.]*

We are meant to be like those tools, machines, and instruments in the hands of our Lord and Savior: Useful and beautiful! This is how Christ TRANSFORMED us for his purposes.

**Ephesians 2:10 NIV**

10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

But there is a PATH we walk to get there. The Corinthians were CONFUSED about what they were called to be, and how they were commanded to get there. Paul sets them straight in our passage today. There is much for us to learn. **1 Corinthians 4:8-11 NIV**

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! 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. 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.

The Corinthians were thinking that they had already "arrived." Paul engages in some spiritual sarcasm to jolt them awake. He literally mocks the way that they are portraying themselves to one another! His words to them are reminiscent of what Jesus said to the church at Laodicea: **Revelation 3:17 NIV**

**17** You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

How can this be? **Again, it is a sign that they are SELF-DECEIVED!** They literally do not realize that their arrogant words and divisive behavior are signs of spiritual SICKNESS, not spiritual success. **Could this be you and me as well? The key to this passage is the TRUTH that spiritual maturity is not arrived at simply by the acquisition of knowledge, but through the painful process of being OBEDIENT to Christ as he leads us through trials, triumphs, troubles, joys, and sorrows for his sake. [Recall my youthful passion to be like Percy Ray – until I realized all he had endured to get to that place!]**

Paul CONTRASTS the Corinthian believers with the Apostles (those heroes that they idolize!) to help them see the TRUTH about spiritual maturity. The Corinthians thought that they were beautiful displays of spiritual health because of the GIFTS and ROLES that they were bragging about. But Paul stunned them by allowing them to see that the Apostles were being treated like FAILURES and FOOLS and CRIMINALS. **And it was JESUS who allowed them to be put ON DISPLAY this way.** Look at the HARSH REALITY of what those men went through for Christ! Let's read it again . . . SLOWLY **[Vss. 9-11]**. These apostles were on display for several reasons:

### **THEY WERE ON DISPLAY AS CAPTIVES OF CHRIST.**

Christianity is a picture of VICTORY that is plucked from defeat! **It is not the story of ESCAPE from death, but the story of TRIUMPH IN and OVER death.** The apostles were put through the worst of experiences to demonstrate Christ's power IN them and THROUGH them. He warned them that it would be so. "In this world you WILL have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have OVERCOME the world!" **A captive does not get to DECIDE when and where he will go. He simply goes where he is led! We want to be in control in our lives, and we often even want to direct God in how he should act in our world! NOT SO! The disciples were at first just like the Corinthians, thinking that Jesus came to bring in the Kingdom through INSTANT victory over their enemies.** But Jesus came to destroy a much greater enemy than Rome. He came to destroy SIN and SATAN. **He walked through death to life first for us; and then he called us to do the same.** This is the PROCESSION the apostles were walking in for the sake of the Gospel! **2 Corinthians 2:14 NIV**

**14** But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

**The apostles were captives to Christ to demonstrate his victory OVER them and IN them.** They revealed the truth that all people can trust Christ no matter what they face, because he is with them in the WORST of circumstances. The apostles were not SUPERMEN. They were truly weak, hungry, and homeless; earthen vessels that contained the glory of the Gospel! They were not under the illusion that life would be "sunshine and roses" once they began to follow Christ. **Christ, in fact, called them to "take up their cross" to die. [Remember how Christ told Paul, ". . . the things he**

**must suffer for my name's sake!"]** The promise of deliverance from all pain and sickness and sorrow is only realized in heaven after the judgment. The promise of victory IN sickness and sorrow is realized every day in the life of his captives. **Are YOU a captive on display for Christ? How are people being pointed to Christ in your pains?**

**THEY WERE ON DISPLAY AS EXAMPLES FOR CHRIST. 1 Corinthians 4:12-13 NIV**

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 the first part of his response, Paul talks about how they are MOCKED and MISTREATED as apostles, but he then mentions how they were RESPONDING to this harsh treatment. They were acting like their Savior. **They were REPRESENTATIVES of Christ, and they responded to rejection and hatred in the same way that he did.** They blessed those that cursed them. They endured persecution. They answered slander with kindness, even when they were treated like the SCUM of the earth! These believers were truly AMBASSADORS for Christ, living out of his power and representing his character! This is actually the only way to call men and women to Christ. **They must SEE the difference his death and resurrection makes in his followers lives. They must be forced to ask the questions, "How can you be this way? How can you have JOY and PEACE in such horrible storms?" I love it when people outside of the faith are forced to utter statements like this!** We must understand that Paul is here indicating the kind of life that the followers of Jesus are called to live. This is not just for the apostles. This is why Paul goes on to make the instruction clear. **1 Corinthians 4:14-17 NIV**

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.**

**Paul's sarcasm was not meant to humiliate the Corinthians, but to WARN them.** This warning could not have come from a more personal or loving source (other than Jesus himself)! Paul was their spiritual FATHER. He brought the Gospel to them. He taught them the truth about Jesus, and nurtured them when they were new in the faith. He poured his life into them, and he was continuing to do that in this letter! **He appeals to their memory of his role in their lives in order to break through their quickly hardening pride. His appeal to them was singular: IMITATE ME!** He wanted them to see that spiritual maturity will be gained bit by bit over time as they humbly obey Christ. It will not be attained through human effort or human affirmation. The honor and approval they sought can only be found in the one who called them and uses them for his glory.

**They too will be on display, but not as pretty ornaments on a shelf. They will be tools in the hands of the Master.**

Paul sent Timothy to them to reinforce this lesson. He was a faithful follower of Jesus who knew Paul even better than those Corinthians. He was sent by Paul to teach them the truth in Christ Jesus, and to remind them of Paul's lifestyle and teaching. He was also sent to prepare the way for Paul's promised return to Corinth. The nature of Paul's return would be up to them! **It must be remembered that there were teachers in Corinth who were FEEDING and ENCOURAGING the division and pride that Paul was soundly rebuking in his letter.** These "pastors" were teaching that which truly "went BEYOND what was written" in scripture. **[Luke's message last week about Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.]** They were false teachers that were profiting from the errors and sins of the people. Paul warned them that he was coming to deal with such people, and it would not be pleasant. **1 Corinthians 4:18-21 NIV**

**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?**

Paul wanted his visit to be one characterized by love and a GENTLE spirit. But he was ready to come with the "rod of reproof" if need be. It was up to them. **[It was like my dad used to say to me and my brothers, "Boys, don't make me come up to your room!"]**

Paul had earlier instructed the Corinthians to "become fools, so that they might become wise." **Here again, he says that the apostles were "fools for Christ" that were a spectacle (theater show) for the whole universe of men and of angels.** They were being watched by the human and the spiritual worlds. Angels watched in wonder, and men and women watched with amusement (at first) at these strange people who so willingly suffered for the sake of their crucified Master. **This was truly a spectacle that would change the lives of those that watched. It still changes lives today. Now, WE are called to be that spectacle; that parade of people marching behind Christ in humble, joyful surrender.** May our lives be on display for HIS glory for the rest of our days!

Let's pray.

**FACILITATION GUIDE**  
**1 CORINTHIANS – Week 7**  
**On Display**

**START TALKING:**

What is the prettiest thing you have on display in your home?

**START THINKING:**

What is the most awesome display of spiritual strength you have ever seen?

**START SHARING:**

[Read 1 Corinthians 4:8-11 and Ephesians 2:10](#). How do you see yourself as the “handiwork” of Christ? Why do you think Paul contrasted the apostles with the Corinthians believers in such a sarcastic way?

[Read Revelation 3:17-19](#). How does pride blind us to our own ignorance and lack? What did Jesus tell this church to do in order to remedy their condition?

[Read 1 Corinthians 4:8-13](#). How were the apostles on display as captives in this passage? Why is a Christian’s obedience to Christ in deep trials so confusing and fascinating to the lost world? How were the apostles on display as examples of Christ’s character in this passage?

[Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-17](#). Why does Paul remind the Corinthians of his role in their lives? What does he instruct them to do, and why?

[Read 1 Corinthians 4:18-21](#). Why does Paul warn them about his coming visit? In what way are they in charge of how he will ultimately be when he visits with them? What can we learn from this warning?

**START PRAYING:**

Ask God to reveal himself to others through your troubles this week.

**START DOING:**

Stop complaining about your troubles and look for ways to glorify God in them.