

1 Corinthians 4

1. Following Paul's exhortation that we are not to lift up one person over another because Christ is our example, Paul addresses how we, as Christians, are to view one another. Since we are no longer in the world, we are not to "see" each other through the world's eyes. How does the world judge or evaluate or determine a person's worth?

According to verse 1, whom does Paul say we are?

Different versions use the words "servant," "minister," and "steward." All come from the same Greek word so all are accurate to some extent. Do you see yourself as a minister of the Lord? Please explain.

What is a steward?

As a servant of Christ, He has made us stewards of the secret things of God. What are some of those "secret things" that have been entrusted to us?

As stewards, what are we to do with these "secret things"? (Read Matthew 25:14-30.)

According to verse 2, what is required of a steward of God?

What does it mean to you to be "faithful" or "trustworthy"?

As God's steward or servant, whom are we to please?

Is it possible to please man and God? Please explain.

2. Read verse 3 very carefully. Paul does not say he does care about others. He says that he does not care if others judge him. Why?

Paul says that he does not even judge himself. What do you think he means?

Have you or do you judge yourself? If so, what standard do you use?

In verse 4 Paul gives us one reason why the opinions of man do not bother him. What is that reason?

What are some of the results of a troubled conscience?

Why do you think Paul has a clear conscience?

Paul now makes another very interesting statement. He states that his clear conscience does not justify him or make him innocent. Why?

Can you remember a time when your conscience "gave you permission" to do something you later regretted? Please explain if you feel comfortable.

3. Do you see evidence of people judging others? If so, would you list some of those examples?

Based upon what Paul has said about people, why is judging others so dangerous?

Because we are unable to judge others justly, what advice does Paul give in verse 5?

What is the appointed time?

Who is the only person capable of judging?

What will Jesus do when it comes time for Him to judge each of us?

What are some of things that were hidden in darkness that He brought into the light?

Why does the Lord look at the motives of the heart instead of at the acts of people?

One reason we are not to judge others is because we cannot see into a person's heart. God can. How does that make you feel?

4. Instead of using others as examples, Paul states that he used Apollos and himself. In other words, Paul states that all he has written applies to himself and Apollos, both leaders in the church, just as it does to everyone else. This is an important point because in the world, many laws and rules do not apply equally. Where do you think the phrase, "No one is above the law?" originated?

In God's Kingdom, Paul wants all of us to know that God's word applies equally to everyone. Have we seen evidence where some have acted as if this were not the case?

How can remembering this benefit us as individuals and the church as the Body of Christ?

What do you think Paul means when he says, "Do not go beyond what is written"?

Why is it wrong to take pride in one person over another?

5. What is the opposite of pride?

Read James 4:6. Why does God resist the proud?

What do any of us have that we did not receive from God?

What are some of the "things" that we have received from God?

Read James 1:17. What does it mean to you?

If everything good thing has come to us from God, then how could we boast in any way?

Looking carefully at Paul's argument, what are we really doing when we boast?

6. Beginning in verse 8, Paul's tone changes. What is irony?

The Corinthians lacked the humility Paul considers so important. A key word in this verse is "already." What does Paul's use of this word imply?

According to Paul, what does the church in Corinth believe they already have?

Paul sarcastically states that he wishes they truly were kings. Why?

Why is it dangerous for followers of Jesus to believe they have "already" become rich and have all they need? In other words, what does a king need?

Read Revelation 3:17-18. How does this passage parallel Paul's word to Corinth and to us?

7. Paul now contrasts his life and the lives of the other apostles to those who considered themselves kings. In verse 9, what does Paul say about himself and the apostles?

What can you learn about what happened to some of the apostles?

Paul says they were like men condemned to die in the arena. To what was he referring?

Why do you think Paul was willing to be put on display?

It may not seem fair that God put them on display. However, God did not ask anything of Paul or of us that He did not ask of Jesus. Read Isaiah 53:2-5. What do these verses tell us about Jesus?

8. In verse 10, Paul says that he is a fool for Christ. What does he mean?

Why would the world consider us fools for following Jesus?

Before you came to know Jesus as your savior, what were some of the things about Jesus and/or the Bible that you considered foolish?

In what way or ways would be willing to be a fool for Christ?

9. Paul continues his sarcastic approach to bring the Corinthians down to reality. Remember, Paul said the Corinthians considered themselves rich and kings while the apostles were fools. What else does Paul say about the apostles in verse 11?

Instead of being rich, according to verse 12, how does Paul supply his needs?

Next, Paul makes an interesting statement that challenges all of us. How do you react when someone attacks you verbally?

What are some ways we can curse others?

How does Paul respond when he is cursed?

What does it mean to you to bless someone?

Read Romans 12:20-21. According to these verses, why should we respond to curses with blessings?

What enabled Paul and other believers to endure persecution?

Do you believe believers today are being persecuted? If so, in what ways?

Does the Lord expect us to endure it? Please explain.

What else does Paul say in verse 13?

Why do you think Paul became the scum and the refuse of the earth?

10. What does it mean to shame someone?

Why do you think people shame others?

Is it ever acceptable to shame another person? Please explain. (See Luke 6:31.)

In verse 14, Paul wants the Corinthians to know he is not shaming them. Instead, what is his purpose?

Of what is Paul warning the church?

Is that warning still applicable for us?

In what ways are the Corinthians Paul's children?

Whom would you say was a major part of bringing you to Jesus?

Do you have a spiritual father or mother? Please explain.

11. In verse 15 Paul states that they might have thousands of guardians, slaves, teachers. (The Greek word can mean all of these but usually refers to those who were in charge of the person's education.), but they have only one father. What does Paul mean?

All of us have in our lives a myriad of teachers, friends, colleagues, and others who speak into our lives and help us grow. However, Paul tells us that the one who loves us with the love of Christ should have more influence over us. Do you have such a person or persons in your life who love you in Christ? If so, do you seek their advice over all others?

Paul then makes an interesting statement in verse 16. Because he is their spiritual father and because he loves them in Christ, they should imitate (follow, pattern themselves after him) him. How do you react to such a comment?

Are there mature believers in your life whom you try to imitate? If so, what about them do you wish to imitate?

Paul is not looking for followers. Instead, he is holding himself up as one who earnestly desires to follow, honor, and magnify the Lord. Can you say to others, because of your walk with Jesus, "Imitate me"?

12. Paul now mentions Timothy. (To know more about Timothy, read the introduction to Paul's letters to Timothy.). What is Paul's impression of Timothy?

What qualities make Timothy a good witness for Christ and for Paul?

Paul is not sending Timothy to defend Paul but to witness that all Paul has said is true. Whom would you send to represent you who could testify to your relationship with Jesus?

Paul has already mentioned some of the problems that exist in church at Corinth. In verse 18 he lists another. What is that problem?

Because Paul had not yet come to Corinth in person, some were speaking against him and against Paul's message. How is this arrogance?

How do you handle arrogant people?

Earlier Paul warned the Corinthians against being prideful. (See Prov. 8:13; 11:2; 13:10 and 1 Cor. 13:4.). How is arrogance related to pride?

Why is Paul sending Timothy to the church in Corinth?

13. According to verse 19, what are Paul's plans to confront those who are speaking arrogantly against him?

How does Paul say we can tell the difference between those who speak God's truth from those who speak their own truth?

Paul says he does not want to listen to their words. Instead, he wants to see the power behind those words. Is this test still valid today?

In verse 20 Paul says the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What does he mean?

Read Jeremiah 1:12 and Isaiah 55:10-11. How do these verses relate to Paul's statement?

What power do you expect should follow God's word?

Paul's confidence in God's word caused him to confront the arrogant words of others instead of running from it. How much confidence do you have in God's word?

How do you react when you meet those who oppose Jesus and His Word?

How would answer Paul's question stated in verse 21?

14. This is a very pertinent chapter for us as almost daily we hear of those who speak against the word of God as being the definitive word of God. Pride and arrogance can be found in all walks of life. "Alternative truths" flow like water. How has this chapter spoken to you?