

# 1 Corinthians

## Chapter 4:1-21

March 10, 1996

---

- **1 Corinthians Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Ungodly divisions result from man's wisdom.
- Chapter 2 Carnal man cannot understand our Spiritual God.
- Chapter 3 All Christians will have their labors tried by fire.
- Chapter 4 Boasting in our leaders puffs up and destroys fellowship.

- **1 Corinthians 4:1-210**

- **Introduction & Review**

In the prior chapters Paul has focused on two primary issues, first he charges the Corinthians with the sin of division or sectarianism and secondly he declares the foolishness of man's wisdom.

In this chapter, Paul indirectly addresses some of the Corinthians who were either slandering him or were attempting to discredit him. We don't really know the specifics of the accusations but can surmise that they were accusing him of unfaithfulness to his ministry.

- **Exposition**

*Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.<sup>2</sup> Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.<sup>3</sup> But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.<sup>4</sup> For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.<sup>5</sup> Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.*

- The tone of these words makes it apparent that the divisions in the church were probably somewhat heated. Here, Paul is giving a defense of himself and of his ministry as though there were probably some who were trying to discredit him. As the people rallied behind their chosen leader, there probably were insults and accusations thrown around at each other to not only discredit other leaders, but to bolster each one's chosen leader.
- Paul reminds the church that as an Apostle, he was given insight into many mysteries that were hidden from others. Paul was not a second class or junior Apostle of Christ but was commissioned by Christ as were the others. What's more, Paul reveals a number of profound mysteries that God has seen fit to only preserve Paul's explanations. For instance, in Ephesians, Paul reveals that it was God's intention from the beginning that both Jew and Gentile would inhabit heaven for eternity. The inclusion of Gentiles in God's covenant of grace was not a new *invention* but rather a new *revelation*. Paul also reveals the mystery of God's messianic purposes in the creation of the institution of marriage.
- Paul brings up the topic of Christian judging and says that he is not concerned if he is judged by them or a human court. He goes on to say that he doesn't even judge himself but rather it is the Lord who judges him. But in other places there are confusing scriptures about this topic and the biblical position of judging is frequently confused. However, the confusion is not because the Word of God is unclear. An important question to consider is what is it that Paul is being judged about. The answer is in verse 2 where he states that a steward of God must be found *faithful*. There were obviously those in Corinth who were disputing Paul's faithfulness.
- Despite the accusations or criticisms that are leveled against Paul, he understands that our Lord is the final judge and it is He that we are concerned about pleasing. Paul is not advocating harsh introspection rather he understands that he is not capable of judging himself as the Lord will. He simply operates with what he has been revealed by the Lord and does so in faith.

<sup>6</sup> *Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.<sup>7</sup> For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?<sup>8</sup> You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us-and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!<sup>9</sup> For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for*

*we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.<sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!<sup>11</sup> To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.<sup>12</sup> And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;<sup>13</sup> being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.*

- The Corinthians, as do we, sought to have labels associated with themselves (Huskies, Cougars, Seahawks, Sonics....) not for the benefit of others but for their own glory or to be puffed up against one another.
- We are instructed in these verses to not go beyond what is written. The scriptures are our complete section of instructions for faith and practice. They are absolutely sufficient for a man to be equipped for obedience. Even so, frequently we are tempted to add other wisdom or apply additional standards to the Word of God. There may exist valid times to do so but the problems come in when we bring in other things to the Word inappropriately. This is Paul's admonition. When we place equal emphasis on the Word as well as other writings or wisdom, we are going beyond that which God has written and we are likely to become puffed up against one another.
- This kind of boasting is so vile and foolish. We boast about work we have not done, or things we have not done. These are lies and do not give glory where it is due-the Lord. Paul uses irony when he says that they have reigned as kings but really only in their own eyes. He contrasts the real servants of the Lord (the Apostles) with those in Corinth who thought themselves significant.

*<sup>14</sup> I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.<sup>15</sup> For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.<sup>16</sup> Therefore I urge you, imitate me.<sup>17</sup> For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.<sup>18</sup> Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.<sup>19</sup> But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.<sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.<sup>21</sup> What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness? NKJV*

- Paul has tough words for his beloved children. The children are acting foolish and have begun to listen to a new father that has steered them away. Although Paul's desire is not to see them humiliated, his words will be shameful to them. The shame should come because the words are true and God's Spirit applies the conviction. When it becomes our desire to see someone shamed, then we have stopped loving them because the purpose of Godly discipline is to see someone restored and mature.
- Paul felt a particular allegiance to the Christians at Corinth because it was through Paul that God revealed His mercy. For them now to question Paul's authenticity or creditability was especially hard to take. But the issues here are not just ones of preference of teachers. They were listening to instructors who were leading them astray and not teaching in line with the foundation which Paul laid. For him to see the building being built with poor materials and not in line with foundations was a particular concern for him.
- Paul was never afraid to say hard things. I am sure that he didn't enjoy doing so, but he also realized that the things that we speak about are of an eternal nature and not simply matters of preference.