

06

THE WISDOM OF LEADERS WHO SERVE

1 Corinthians 4:1-21





Daily Readings

- 01 1 Corinthians 4:1-7
- 02 1 Corinthians 4:8-13
- 03 1 Corinthians 4:14-21
- 04 Matthew 18:15-17
- 05 1 Peter 3:8-18
- 06 Ephesians 2:8-9
- 07 Philippians 3:17-21

WEEK 6

The Wisdom of Leaders who Serve

The people of Corinth were used to evaluating great leaders and speakers. Did they like this one better or that one? Did they impress people socially? People in Roman Corinth often participated in this kind of social theater. No wonder they had approached their leaders much the same way—as entertainers to be assessed and fought over.

Paul will have none of it. He argues that no one on earth has the right to judge him. That right is reserved for Christ alone. But this does not make Paul puffed up and arrogant, because he understands Christ's standard, which is the standard of the cross. The irony of the situation is that none of the leaders the Corinthians celebrate are playing their game. Neither Peter, nor Apollos, nor Paul. Certainly not Christ! While the Corinthians are chasing fame and success, the Apostles are being beaten for Jesus.

1 Corinthians 4 brings to a grand conclusion the entire argument of chapters 1-4. Paul began by calling out the ridiculous divisions, and then he highlighted how the cross should shape our perspective and the Spirit should transform our minds. Finally, the example of the Apostles is one worthy of imitation. Rather than one that ascends the ladder of prestige for praise, it is one that descends the ladder of humility for service.

THE NATURE OF TRUE APOSTLESHIP

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.

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?

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. 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.

PAUL'S APPEAL AND WARNING

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.

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?

Discussion Guide



GRATITUDE TO GOD IS MOST BEAUTIFULLY EXPRESSED
IN SERVICE TO OTHERS.

“Every Christian should select his church because he is convinced that within its particular structure, he will find the greatest opportunities for spiritual growth, the greatest satisfaction for his human needs, and the greatest chance to be of helpful service to those around him.”

BILLY GRAHAM

WARM UP

What was the first important responsibility that someone entrusted to you, and how did you do?

Were you ever entrusted with an important task, and you blew it? (Only share the funny ones!)

EXPLORING 1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-21

Once again, we find Paul addressing the issue of their quarreling. As believers, we are accountable to one another (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5). What is Paul's point about not feeling the need to be approved by others?

If a believer is faithfully seeking to follow God, whose approval should matter most? Read 1 Samuel 16:7. What does the Lord tell Samuel concerning God's perspective?

When it comes to serving others, how important is it that our motivation is pure? What is the result of actions done without the right motives?

In verses 6-13, Paul addresses the pride of the Corinthians that has caused division among them. They boast of the leader they follow while the leader exhibits service and humility. There seems to be a bit of sarcasm in his assessment. How important is it for us to lead (and follow) in a spirit of humility? What are the benefits of a humble spirit? What are the dangers of a prideful spirit?

Paul encourages the Corinthians to imitate his way of life—his good example. Consider Paul's life and how his priorities changed following his conversion. When you became a follower of Christ, how did your life change?

Our society seems to have a growing disdain for authority. Paul demonstrates in verses 18-21 his God-given authority in dealing with matters of the church. How important is it for the church to be under the guidance of Biblical authority?

APPLICATION

How can you demonstrate service to someone in your sphere of influence this week?

Do you need to repent of a spirit of arrogance in any area of your life?

PRAYER

List one or two prayer concerns to share with your group.