

Since Paul understood that the Corinthians had been ensnared by pride, he spends time in chapter 4 teaching humility by showing that he and Apollos were but humble stewards of the gospel. Any superiority that the Corinthians felt because they followed either Paul or Apollos (or any other Christian leader) was imaginary because God is the true judge of men's hearts and motives.

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1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

In the previous verses (1 Cor. 3:21-23), Paul was urging the Corinthians not to boast in men (Paul, Apollos, Cephas, etc.) because both they and the Corinthians ultimately belong to God.

**“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers [servants] of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God”** – Because they all belonged to God, Paul, Apollos, Cephas and other such men should be considered servants and stewards. The gospel did not belong to Paul and Apollos, but they served God in proclaiming the truth of the gospel and teaching the “mysteries of God” (previously hidden truths that God had now revealed) to lost souls.

**“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful”** – Stewards are given the responsibility of managing their master's property, and Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and other gospel ministers have been given the responsibility of being stewards of God's property, which includes the gospel message and the church. Thus they are all accountable to God for how faithful they are in handling these things.

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

**“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged [examined; scrutinized] of you, or of man's judgment [day]”** – The Greek behind the phrase “man's judgment” is literally “man's day,” which is a Hebrew expression used to distinguish a day of man's judgment from the day of God's judgment. Paul is saying that he is not seeking the approval of the Corinthians or of public opinion since the praise or criticism of man carries little weight.

**“yea, I judge [to examine; scrutinize] not mine own self”** – Paul does not even accept his own opinion of how faithful he has been in ministering the gospel. We sinful human beings can either be our own worst critics or allow our pride to color our self assessment.

**“For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified”** – Although he was not aware of any unconfessed sin in his life, Paul knew that his assessment of himself was limited by his sinful human nature and therefore prone to be inaccurate. The reality of Paul's life could be quite different from what he thought of himself. Thinking himself to be righteous did not make him righteous.

**“but he that judgeth [to examine; scrutinize] me is the Lord”** – Paul knew that only the Lord could truly examine his heart and correctly assess his faithfulness as a steward of the gospel. The approval of the Lord was the only assessment that counted.

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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.

**“Therefore judge [to render an opinion of right or wrong] nothing before the time, until the Lord come”** – “The time” refers to the time when Christ returns. Jesus said to “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1), but both He and Paul here were referring to judging other people's motives, something we are not allowed to do since we cannot see into their hearts. We are allowed to judge actions, because Jesus also said “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20). Here, Paul is saying that we are not qualified to render an opinion on motives of others because only God knows their hearts. Instead, we are to wait until Christ's return.

**“who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts”** – When Christ returns, He will reveal what is in our hearts, whether it be good or bad. Hidden motives will be revealed at the judgment. **Luke 12:1-3**

*“In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.”*

**“and then shall every man have praise of God”** – If we have good motives, then it will come out at Christ's return and we will be rewarded. Paul is stressing that the praise we will receive will come from God. Man's praise carries little or no weight (v. 3).

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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.

**“And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes”** – Paul has been using Apollos and himself as an illustration to make his point for the benefit of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:6-15; vs. 1-5).

**“that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written”** – The Bible does teach that we should honor those that have been faithful to the work where God has placed them, as Paul told Timothy (1 Tim. 5:17 *“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine”*). However, these leaders should not be elevated above the limits of what scripture allows because these leaders are only human and as subject to their sinful human nature as the rest of us.

**“that no one of you be puffed up [proud] for one against another”** – Since these leaders are sinful human beings as well, there was no room to be proud because of who they were following. They shouldn't feel superior to their fellow Christians because they followed a certain Christian leader.

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*?

**“For who maketh [to make a distinction] thee to differ from another?”** – The Corinthians proudly considered themselves superior to anyone who followed any Christian leader other than the one that they followed. Paul asks them who it is that would consider them different or superior to anyone else.

**“and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?”** – Using a rhetorical question, Paul points out that if they were superior, it wasn’t because of anything inherent to them. If any of them had superior spiritual wisdom or understanding, it was because God gave it to them. They could not claim that any of it came from them because, outside of the gifts of God, all of us are nothing but sinful human beings under the condemnation of God.

**“now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”** – Once the Corinthians acknowledged that any gifts or strengths that they might have were given to them by God, Paul asks them why they boast in these things as if they were inherent to them and not a gift from God? The obvious answer to this second rhetorical question is that they shouldn’t.

**Verses 8-13:** Paul rebukes the Corinthians pride by sarcastically praising them for their supposed spiritual superiority, even above the apostles since he and his companions must suffer for the sake of the gospel while the Corinthians seemed to have all the blessings.

14 I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn *you*. 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.

**“I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you”** – Paul’s sarcastic rebuke in vs. 8-13 was not written with ill intent, nor was he expressing anger toward them. Rather, his intent was to correct them as a father corrects his sons in order to make them better people.

**“For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers”** – After the Corinthians were saved, any number of preachers might come along to educate them further in the ways of God. However, no one can come along and become another spiritual father to them (the one who led them to salvation in Christ) since that was a one-time event.

**“for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel”** – Paul reminds them that he was the first person to bring the gospel to them. Because he was the one that God used to lead them to salvation, he considers himself to be their “father” and thus is uniquely concerned for their spiritual well being.

16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

Because of his unique position of being the one who led them to Christ, Paul’s desire was that they would “follow” (the Greek word means “to imitate”) him. Paul isn’t wanting them to follow him but to follow his example because he’s already made the argument that they shouldn’t think of men more highly than scripture allows (v. 6). They had already followed Paul’s example of faith when they believed in Christ for salvation and now he wants them to follow his example of following Christ and growing in the grace of God because he knows that is the correct path for them (**1 Cor. 11:1** “*Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*”).

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.

**“For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord”** – Paul wants the Corinthians to follow his example and in order to help them do that he has sent Timothy to them. Paul describes Timothy as “my beloved son.” Timothy apparently was already a believer when Paul met him (Acts 16:1) but Paul took him under his wing and trained him in the gospel ministry. Timothy was such a valuable helper in Paul’s ministry that he was like a son to Paul. Timothy is also described as “faithful in the Lord” since he had proved himself many times over the years he’d spent working with Paul. Paul had complete confidence that Timothy would not lead the Corinthians astray.

**“who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ”** – Timothy’s assignment was to remind the Corinthians of everything that Paul had preached and taught and the example of Godly living that he had demonstrated. Again, they were not to follow Paul but his ways “which be in Christ.” Paul’s “ways” were that he was following Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

**“as I teach every where in every church”** – Paul did not teach one thing in one church and something else in another. He consistently taught and lived the gospel wherever he went. Everywhere he went, his life presented an example of what it meant to follow Jesus Christ and he wanted the churches to follow that example.

**Verses 18-21:** Some of the Corinthians were pridefully not following Paul’s example, thinking that they would never have to see Paul again. Paul assures them that he will return to the church in Corinth when the Lord allowed and then they would witness the power of God. He rhetorically asks them if they would prefer that he come with the rod of discipline or in love and humility.