

# Chapter 4

## The Responsibility of a Spiritual Father

### Live for and Serve God's Interests

**Verse 1**—*Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ.*

- Don't view one servant as more important than another, but all as servants—common rank—all under direction of Christ.
- The word *servant* is ὑπηρέτας, which means 'an under rower, a subordinate rower' like 'a slave who rows in the galley ship' under authority to coordinate the individual efforts for uniform outcomes.
- They should also regard Paul and his team as *stewards* [οἰκονόμους the manager of household or of household affairs], not party leaders.
- Ministry is a stewardship not an ownership. It's in the interests of Christ and God, devoting time, talents, gifts, and energy for master's interests.
- The *mysteries of God* referred to God's revelation, encompassing the truths of the Christian faith.
- So a steward does not manufacture the *mysteries of God* but manages God's revelation given to administer on God's behalf.
- Paul and Apollos were not competing against one another, but rather came as Christ's subordinates managing the Word of God given to them.

**Verse 2**—*It is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.*

- God does not require brilliance or cleverness or popularity—all having to do with wisdom of the world as the Corinthians were judging—but God's stewards are *trustworthy*.
- The most important quality in a steward is that he manages his master's affairs so the desires of his superior materialize.

**Verse 3**—Paul was not deflected from his ministry because the Corinthians or the worldly-wise rejected it, *but to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you or by any human court.*

- It mattered little to Paul how well the Corinthians or anyone else thought he was carrying out his stewardship, or how popular or unpopular he was.
- His personal evaluations of his own performance were irrelevant, too. *In fact, I do not even examine myself.*
- Motives are not something we should try to determine.
- What did matter to Paul was God's estimation of Paul's service. His interests were pleasing God, to whom Paul was accountable.

**Verse 4**—Even though he is unaware of a serious sin or deficiency in his own life, he still knew he could be wrong about that. *for I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted.*

- As far as he knew, he was serving God faithfully.
- God alone is the judge of the true nature of our service. *The one who examines me is the Lord.*
- We can evaluate the work of ministry and the spiritual life on its merits, but only God can determine its virtue. Only God has the insight and authority to judge us.

**Verse 5**—That being the case, therefore, *do not go on passing judgment before the time, that is, until the Lord comes.* Don't let there be a **pre-judgment seat**.

- All of this must wait until the Rapture, when attitudes and motives only God can see will be examined, *who will bring to light the things hidden in the darkness.* That is, the things we cannot judge and disclose the motives of our hearts.
- Then each person will receive his or her own individual praise *from God.* That is when the praise will be significant, not now!

- So motives are off-limits for judging. We can only judge one another's actions and compare that to God's Word.

## Supplant Pride-Based Service with Self-Abased Service

**Verse 6**—Paul gave himself and Apollos as illustrations of what true servants and stewards were to be *so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written*.

- Whatever ministry you have, do not exceed the Word of God. Don't add sacred tradition, or culture outside of the Bible, or a liberal or conservative agenda or decisions of church councils, doctrinal prejudices, or personal preferences because, when you do that, you can boast about either yourself or the one you are following.
- If the Corinthians avoided this pitfall, they would not embrace pride in their teachers, *so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other*.
- Competition is nurtured by pride. Their arrogance had set themselves against each other.
- It's only the Bible, nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else, and our motto should be "to determine to know nothing more than the Bible knows."

**Verse 7**—Paul asks three rhetorical questions to supplant their pride with humility:

- (1) *For who regards you as superior?* You may think you are, and then try to justify your intrinsic superiority.
- (2) To counter this tendency, ask yourself, *what do you have that you did not receive?* Nothing.
- (3) *And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?* God had given them everything they had so they should be **grateful, not boastful**.

Humble self-abased service is the only acceptable posture in relation to God's gifts to us and ministry through us. Whenever we excel, it's challenging to stay humble.

**Verse 8**—The Corinthians were behaving as if they had already been commended and rewarded *you (believe) you are already filled; you have already become rich* just as the Laodicean's had in Revelation 3:17.

- Ironically, Paul wished they had so he could enjoy reigning with them, too, *I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you*.
- There will be a time when they all will reign as kings, but not now and not like this, based on pride.

Service which ends in eternal rewards, like the apostle's self-abasing service, is described in **four ways**:

**Verse 9**—**Worthless (1)** *men condemned to death...a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men*.

- In the long line of God's servants, the patriarchs, the prophets, and the *apostles last of all*, instead of living as kings and victors, had suffered, been scorned, ridiculed, mocked, and treated as criminals before the universe, in both the spiritual and earthly realms (Hebrews 11).

**Verse 10**—**Weak (2)** *we are fools for Christ's sake*. They were foolish by worldly-wise standards.

- They believed they were *prudent* (appropriate and wise) *in Christ* with their pride-based perspective.
- To the worldly-wise *we are weak, but you [Corinthians] are strong*.
- To the worldly-wise *you are distinguished, but we [apostles] are without honor*.
- **God's ways will never make sense to the worldly-wise**.

**Verses 11-12**—**Weary (3)** *to this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty and are poorly clothed*. They were low-lives who looked like 'galley slaves' doing manual labor in order to survive.

- Roughly treated and homeless makes it easy for the proud Corinthians to look down with shame and disdain on the apostles.

- Paul continued to emphasize the apostle's humble status. *we toil, working with our hands* not even being supported by those he serves.
- The apostles did not act like the worldly-wise *when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate*. The worldly-wise would never think that was worth doing.

**Verse 13—Wretched (4)** in spite of, or possibly because of this—*we have become as the scum* (despicable, deplorable) *the dregs* (the scrapings cleaned from dirty dishes thrown away) *of all things, even until now*.

- They are **the bottom of the social barrel**. This is the way the apostles looked to the world. They were marching a parade route Jesus had taken.
- The Corinthians seem complacent and secure in their own perspective on things. Paul said, ‘Come, join us, in self-abased service!’”

## Application

We should not adopt worldly-wise standards of preference and superiority in our service to Christ and His kingdom. That requires humble humility as Christ's galley slaves.

## Influence People to Grow Through Discipleship

**Verse 14**—The point of the preceding characterization was not *to write these things to shame you* or put them on a guilt trip.

- It was to plead with them to change their ways with a change of heart *to admonish you as my beloved children*.
- Ministry includes warning about the direction their pride was taking them so they could change.
- They may have other teachers, but Paul had the heart of a genuine discipler.

**Verse 15**—Tutors were helpful to contribute to their spiritual growth, but Paul was their spiritual father *for in Christ I became your father through the gospel*.

- Paul did not speak to them as their boss or king or teacher or mentor but as a spiritual father, for many came to faith through his ministry.
- Disciplers are like spiritual fathers and mothers preparing their disciples to grow up, mature, and reproduce.

**Verses 16-17**—The Corinthians were to learn from Paul as a son learns by observing the example of his father *therefore, I exhort you, be imitators of me*.

- It's interesting that Paul never used the word ‘disciple’ in his epistles but appealed to his disciples as children or brothers.
- *for this reason, I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord*.
- Paul practiced discipleship as the means of reproducing his ministry and teaching, so he sent Timothy, who *will remind you of my ways which are in Christ*. This ensured that different things were not taught in different situations *just as I teach everywhere in every gathering of believers*.
- **Discipleship is one person intentionally impacting the life of some other person in the direction of Christlikeness.**
- The whole idea of discipleship is that others can be sent to participate in and further the work of discipling. Discipleship is a collaborative effort of disciplers and disciples who are affiliated together to teach, grow, and reproduce more disciples who reproduce that ministry in others.

**Verses 18-19**—Some Corinthians *have become arrogant*, estimating themselves and ideas superior to Paul.

- **They had become competitive.**
- These individuals did this as though *I were not coming to you*, to face them again.

- Paul gave them the opportunity to change before arriving in the future. *but I will come to you soon* was his hope.
- *If the Lord wills* should always be our posture.
- When Paul comes, he will not be fooled by their proud words, but his authority will expose their false pretensions, *and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power*. They were just words, but no substance.

**Verses 20-21**—*For the kingdom of God* represented by Paul's work as an apostle that transformed their lives *does not consist in words* of idle talk of the worldly-wise, as the proud Corinthians thought, *but in power*.

- The nature of ministry in the kingdom of God is not oratory or speaking ability but in the reality of what it can **effect**.
- The *kingdom of God* is the realm of God's universal rule. God's work is powerful (δυνάμει dynamite).
- Both times the strong adversative (ἀλλὰ but) is used to show the marked contrast between impotent idle talk and God's powerful power.
- *What do you desire?* Paul asked. It's your choice he said.
- *Shall I come to you with a rod?* that is, to oppose the Corinthians and use his apostolic authority to deal with them.
- The **goal is always** correction.
- Or do they wish him to come *with love and a spirit of gentleness* made possible by their realizing the need to change and repent.

## Application

Ministry is serving God's interest on behalf of people, never the other way around. If ministry is based in serving people's interest on behalf of God, then one gets to determine what people need independent of what God says. That's pride. Humility preserves God's interests and properly services the needs of people. We should never be proud of our gifts or abilities but use them to serve God's kingdom by making disciples, not building our own kingdom.