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1 Corinthians 4
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By Dan Maines

1 Corinthians 4

1 Corinthians 4:1-2

This is the way any person is to regard us: as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

† Paul calls himself a servant and steward, not a master. Apostleship is service, not status.

† The requirement for every steward is faithfulness, not fame or

power.

† Clement of Rome (1 Clement 42) emphasized the role of stewards as trustworthy guardians of the gospel.

1 Corinthians 4:3-4

But to me it is an insignificant matter that I would be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, however I am not vindicated by this, but the one who examines me is the Lord.

† Paul is not moved by human judgment. The Lord alone is judge.

† Self-examination is necessary, but divine judgment is ultimate.

1 Corinthians 4:5

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the intentions of hearts; and then praise will come to each person from God.

† The Lord's coming in judgment (fulfilled in AD 70) revealed hearts and exposed hypocrisy.

† True praise is from God, not from men.

1 Corinthians 4:6-7

Now these things, brothers and sisters, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos on your account, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that none of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who considers you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

† Paul uses himself and Apollos as examples to expose the folly of boasting.

† All we have is a gift from God, leaving no room for pride.

1 Corinthians 4:8

You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us, and indeed, I wish that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you!

† Paul rebukes their arrogance with sarcasm, showing how they thought too highly of themselves.

† Their premature sense of triumph contradicted the humility of the cross.

1 Corinthians 4:9

For, I think, God has exhibited us the apostles last of all, as men condemned to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to mankind.

† Apostles were treated as the lowest, displayed like criminals in an arena.

† Tacitus (Annals 15.44) described how Christians were mocked and executed, aligning with Paul's imagery of spectacle.

1 Corinthians 4:10-13

We are fools on account of Christ, but you are prudent in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are without honor! Up to this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed and roughly treated and homeless; and we labor, working with our own hands. When we are verbally abused, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we reply as friends; we have become like the garbage of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

† Paul contrasts his suffering with their prideful boasting.

† Apostolic ministry was marked by humility, weakness, and endurance.

† This shows the true cost of following Christ, contrary to Corinthian arrogance.

1 Corinthians 4:14-15

I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

† Paul's correction comes from love, not spite.

† He is their spiritual father, having begotten them through the gospel.

1 Corinthians 4:16-17

Therefore I urge you, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

† Paul calls them to imitate his example of humility and endurance.

† Timothy's presence was to reinforce apostolic teaching and practice.

1 Corinthians 4:18-21

Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant, but their power. For the kingdom of God is not in words, but in power. What do you desire? That I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

† Paul warns that his authority will be proven by God's power, not words.

† His coming would test the arrogant and vindicate the faithful.

† The kingdom of God is revealed in Spirit and power, not

empty rhetoric.

How it applies to us today

† 1 Corinthians 4 shows that Christian leadership is service and stewardship, not pride and power.

† Faithfulness, not human applause, is the true measure of a servant of Christ.

† Believers must imitate the humility of Paul and avoid arrogance, knowing that all we have is a gift from God.

† The kingdom is revealed in power and truth, not in human boasting.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 42 - stewards as trustworthy guardians

† Tacitus, Annals 15.44 - Christians mocked and executed as spectacle

† Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11 - wisdom of the wise exposed (parallel to Paul's teaching on arrogance)

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