

# **“Imitate Me As I Imitate Christ”**

## **1 Corinthians 4:1-21**

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**Teaching Aim:** To realize we are not to judge the motivation of other people’s hearts, that is for God to do. To understand that everything we have received both physically and spiritually is a gift from God to be used for His glory, not ours. To recognize the danger of pride slipping into our lives and instead minister in a spirit of humility. To grow spiritually to the point where we can encourage other people to imitate us as we imitate Christ!

### **DIGGING DEEPER INTO GOD’S WORD (BIBLE STUDY)**

#### **Part I: Judge nothing before the appointed time, when Jesus Christ returns (1 Cor. 4:1-5)**

1. According to **verse 1**, how did Paul view his role as an Apostle? The Greek word Paul uses for the English word “*servant*”, or “*minister*” literally means, to be an “*under-rower*.” How are “*under-rowers*” in the ancient world a fitting picture of what church leaders should be today? Does the concept of an “*under-rower*” contrast with the CEO view of many Christian leaders today? If so, how? What kind of leader would you prefer?
  
2. What is a “*steward*” (**vs. 1**)? (See Dictionary) Were stewards commonly slaves in biblical times? What were “*the mysteries of God*” that Paul had been assigned to be a steward of? (**See Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18, 23**) How has coming to an understanding of the gospel changed your life?
  
3. Should a steward be worried about what is politically correct in the culture or what his master wants (**vs. 2**)? Why? Does **verse 3** imply that Paul was being judged by some in the Corinthian Church? What did Paul reveal in **verse 3** about his qualification to judge the motivations of his own heart? How does this truth relate to us today? Whom is the ultimate Judge of the human heart (**vs. 4**)? (See **1 Sam. 16:7b; Jer. 17:9, 10**)
  
4. Is Paul instructing Christians not to judge sin in the church when he says to “*judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes*” (**vs. 5**)? Explain. (**See Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-9**) What is Paul telling us not to judge?

## Part II: The contrast between Christ's Apostles and the Corinthian believers (1 Cor. 4:6-13)

1. The analogies that Paul transferred to himself and Apollos, as well as all those who serve the Lord, are that of the farmer (3:6-9), the builder (3:10-15), and the servant-steward (vv. 1-5). How do each of these analogies depict the faithful follower of Jesus Christ (vs. 6)? What are some of the dangers of going beyond the written Word of God?
2. According to Eph. 2:8-9, how much of our salvation did we earn (vs. 7)? How much of our spiritual giftedness are we responsible for? (See Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-11) In light of your answers, do we have any grounds for boasting? Why or why not? (See Psa. 34:2-3; Gal. 6:14)
3. At this point in Paul's letter, he gets sarcastic and begins to mock the Corinthians because many had elevated themselves, in their own opinion, even above himself as an Apostle of Christ. What accusation did Paul make against the Corinthians in **verse 8**? Are modern Christians at risk of doing the same; wanting exaltation without having to pay the price through suffering?
4. The word "*spectacle*" is actually the Greek word: "*theatron*." This is the Greek word that we get our English word, "*theater*" from (vs. 9). The imagery here is that of the ancient Roman Coliseum where pagan crowds cheered as Christians were led in and executed in front of them. Paul compares the plight of the Apostles to these victims. Does this analogy give you the desire to enter full-time ministry? Why or why not? What are some ways that Paul had to suffer in his service for Christ? (See 2 Cor. 11:23-30) Have you had to suffer yet in your service to the Lord?
5. What can we learn about the mindset of many in the Corinthian Church from **verse 10**? What do we learn about Paul's life in ministry from **verse 11**? Why are so many pastors today bi-vocational? How does bi-vocational ministry interfere with the effectiveness of a pastor's ministry in the local church? What are the advantages of having a full-time pastor?

6. What do we learn about Paul and his church planting efforts from **verses 12 & 13**? According to the following passages, what should the born-again Christian's attitude be like as he or she serves Christ? (**See Matt 5:3-12; 44-45; 18:21-22**) Does your lifestyle reflect this? Why is a proper attitude important as you minister? What areas do you need to improve in your Christian walk?

### **Part III: Paul expresses his love for the Corinthians as their spiritual father (1 Cor. 4:14-21)**

1. What was Paul's purpose in writing the Corinthians in such a challenging way (**vs. 14**)? In **verse 15**, Paul used a hyperbole (extreme exaggeration) to make the point that, though the Corinthians would have an unlimited number of "*spiritual tutors (instructors)*;" they had only one "*spiritual father*," him (**vs. 15**). What was Paul telling the Corinthians?
2. What did Paul encourage the Corinthians to do in **verse 16**? Would you feel comfortable encouraging others to imitate your lifestyle? What kind of example are you setting for your children and grandchildren? How consistent was Paul in this encouragement? (**See 1 Cor. 4:15-17; 10:32-11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-9; 2 Tim. 3:10-11**) What practical steps can you take to become more Christ-like so that you can encourage others to imitate you as you imitate Christ?
3. Why did Paul send Timothy to Corinth (**vs. 17**)? How does **verse 17** relate to Paul's teaching in **verse 16**? Was Timothy Paul's "*biological son*" or "*spiritual son in the faith*?" According to **verse 18**, how were false teachers attempting to undermine the ministry work Paul had done in Corinth? (**See 1 Cor. 9:1-3; 2 Cor. 10:1, 10; 12:12**) Are church divisions today still caused by people undermining leadership?
4. Does Paul show any of the signs of weakness false teachers were accusing him of in **verse 19**? What did Paul threaten his accusers with in **verse 19**? What happened to Korah and his cohorts when they rose in rebellion against Moses and Aaron? (**See Num. 16:1-40**) What happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to Peter and to the Holy Spirit? (**See Acts 5:1-11**) Should these demonstrations of the Spirit's power be of concern to those Corinthians making false accusations against Paul? Why or why not?

5. What is *“the kingdom of God”* and why is this theme a central motif in Scripture (**vs. 20**)? There is a certain sense in which the kingdom of God is *“already, but not yet;”* the kingdom of God is present, but not in its fullness yet. How does the kingdom of God relate to your life today? What do you think the church would be like if Christians stopped speaking empty words today and instead lived by the power of the Holy Spirit? Do you think that the world would be changed?
  
6. How does the imagery of Paul as a father relate to **verse 21**? (**See Heb. 12:6-7**) According to **verse 21**, what is Paul’s real desire for his next visit to the church in Corinth? What are some practical applications from **1 Corinthians 4** that you can apply to your life?

**MINER’S CORNER ~ *Manna to live by!***

- As Christian stewards, we are responsible to please our Master, not popular opinion!
- As Christians, we are not to judge the motivation of other people’s hearts, we are to judge our own hearts! (**See Jer. 17:9-10**)
- God is the Ultimate Judge of a person’s heart!
- Every spiritual gift comes to us as a gift from God and is to be used for His glory; the only boasting we should do as Christians is to boast about God and His goodness!
- The faithful Christian can expect to suffer for Christ; life will not always be easy!
- As Christians, our walk should be close enough with Christ that we can encourage other people to imitate us as we imitate Christ!
- The Christian’s life should be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, not empty talk!