



Week 6 10.16.2019

Welcome
Worship w/Prayer Board

Ann

READ ALOUD:

1 Corinthians 4: Paul's Relationship with the Corinthians

1 So look at Apollos and me as mere servants of Christ who have been put in charge of explaining God's mysteries. 2 Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful. 3 As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. 4 My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. 5 So don't make judgments about anyone ahead of time—before the Lord returns. For he will bring our darkest secrets to light and will reveal our private motives. Then God will give to each one whatever praise is due. 6 Dear brothers and sisters, I have used Apollos and myself to illustrate what I've been saying. If you pay attention to what I have quoted from the Scriptures, you won't be proud of one of your leaders at the expense of another. 7 For what gives you the right to make such a judgment? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift? 8 You think you already have everything you need. You think you are already rich. You have begun to reign in God's kingdom without us! I wish you really were reigning already, for then we would be reigning with you. 9 Instead, I sometimes think God has put us apostles on display, like prisoners of war at the end of a victor's parade, condemned to die. We have become a spectacle to the entire world—to people and angels alike. 10 Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools, but you claim to be so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are so powerful! You are honored, but we are ridiculed. 11 Even now we go hungry and thirsty, and we don't have enough clothes to keep warm. We are often beaten and have no home. 12 We work wearily with our own hands to earn our living. We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us. 13 We appeal gently when evil things are said about us. Yet we are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash—right up to the present moment. 14 I am not writing these things to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children. 15 For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you. 16 So I urge you to imitate me. 17 That's why I have sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you of how I follow Christ Jesus, just as I teach in all the churches wherever I go. 18 Some of you have become arrogant, thinking I will not visit you again. 19 But I will come—and soon—if the Lord lets me, and then I'll find out whether these arrogant people just give pretentious speeches or whether they really have God's power. 20 For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power. 21 Which do you choose? Should I come with a rod to punish you, or should I come with love and a gentle spirit?

The Corinthians believed they had it all together. Did they? NO

Large Group Question 1: (scribe on the board)

4: 10a Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools, but you claim to be so wise in Christ!

What is the impact to the body when this attitude is around?

When you are around people who act like they have it all together,

what do you feel,

what do you think,

how does it make you want to respond?

An atmosphere of inequality, greater than/lesser than, inferiority/superiority.

At atmosphere where our humanity isn't factored in & understood.

The tyranny of perfectionism.

The masks they hide behind perhaps OR the blindness of pride.

READ:

If Paul's admonitions are followed, the party spirit that was dividing the church would evaporate, and the Corinthians could recover health as a part of the one body of Christ.

This homily includes the following themes.

- 1. The wisdom of God is beyond the wisdom of this age.**
- 2. One must "become a fool" to acquire such wisdom.**
- 3. Boasting before God is not acceptable, because all we have comes to us as gifts.**
- 4. Boasting about various leaders is meaningless.**
- 5. The Christian must never go beyond Scripture.**
- 6. All Christian leaders belong to all Christians, and all Christians belong to Christ in God.**
- 7. Authentic Christian leaders are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.**
- 8. The Lord alone can judge others, because he alone knows the secrets of the heart.**
- 9. Paul accepts the judgment of the Lord, but not the judgment of the Corinthians.**
- 10. Lowliness is always an essential part of authentic Christian leadership.**

Large Group Question 2: What do you think 'arriving' or 'having it all together' looks like in the kingdom?

Make a list.

Compile their highlights on the board.

○ **Look at what he tells the Philippians:**

The Priceless Value of Knowing Christ

3: 1 Whatever happens, my dear brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord. I never get tired of telling you these things, and I do it to safeguard your faith. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved. 3 For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort. 4 though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! 5 I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. 6 I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. 7 I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. 8 Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ 9 and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. 10 I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, 11 so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

Pressing toward the Goal

12 I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. 13 No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. 15 Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. 16 But we must hold on to the progress we have already made. 17 Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example. 18 For I have told you often before, and I say it again with tears in my eyes, that there are many whose conduct shows they are really enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 They are headed for destruction. Their god is their appetite, they brag about shameful things, and they think only about this life here on earth. 20 But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. 21 He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.

READ: The yawning void in the life of the Corinthian church was caused by the **absence of love:** 'love is not puffed up' (13:4). On the contrary, 'love builds up' (8:1), whereas '“knowledge” puffs up'. This 'knowledge', this false wisdom, of the Corinthians was clearly taking them *beyond what is written* (6). This is a difficult phrase, which Barrett interprets as enjoining 'life in accordance with Scriptural precept and example'.¹⁴ The phrase 'going beyond Scripture' has been seen as the characteristic and the watchword of the Christ-party, in the sense that they saw the Old Testament Scriptures as a thing of the past, which 'mature' Christians had left behind. It could well be, alternatively, that 'Nothing beyond what is written' was a Jewish formula brought to Corinth by the Peter-party. We shall never know the full significance of what is clearly a topical allusion of some importance. The major point of these two verses is the foolishness of boasting amongst people who owe everything to the grace of God.

What safeguards do we have in our lives that prevent us from living 'beyond what is written?'

Small Group: Evaluating each other

3 As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. 4 My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide.

- **Question 3:** Other people's opinions held little influence with Paul & he doesn't even trust his own assessment of his performance.. Why?
 - Stewardship mindset or my life, my ministry, my, my-whose is it really? What do our words reveal is in our heart?
 - 'How much more shall the blood of Christ ... purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God' Hebrews 9:14
- How might the Lord's examination look? Certainly one in the future with last week's discussion on evaluation at the judgement seat of Christ & reward. **Question 4: How does Paul live with a clear conscience daily?** How may we apply this?

S/G Paul urges them to imitate him.

16 So I urge you to imitate me.

- Was Paul being proud or arrogant to make this statement?
- Discuss the cultural pattern of mentoring/teaching/discipleship.
 - Phil 3:17 Dear brothers and sisters, pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example.

Paul's use of the metaphor "father" is significant. Behind him is Hosea 11:1–9 and the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32. When these three texts are compared, six themes appear in all three, and one theme surfaces in two of the three. The list is as follows:

1. **A father and his children appear in each.**
2. **The father is insulted and badly treated by his wayward children.**

3. The father tries to reconcile/conciliate and calls his children beloved.
4. The father admonishes the wayward children.
5. The father goes beyond what is normally expected of a human father.
6. The father directly or indirectly presents himself as a model for his children to emulate.
7. Compassion is mentioned specifically (Hosea, Jesus).

It is certain that Paul knew the book of Hosea. The comparisons between Paul's use of the metaphor "father" and the parable of the prodigal son make it possible that Paul (directly or indirectly) knew something of that parable. Thus three of the parables of Jesus can be seen to share theological and ethical content with this section of Paul's first essay.

In conclusion, the following aspects of Paul's concluding remarks can be noted.

1. Arrogance is irritating. The Corinthians saw themselves as rich, powerful and wise. Paul spares nothing as he points out their flawed self-image.
2. Paul openly admits that he becomes discouraged and makes no attempt to hide his feelings. At times he feels (like Jesus?) he is on the way to his death. In the final essay Paul affirms "I die every day" (15:31).
3. Yet, Paul accepts being a "fool for Christ's sake."
4. His lifestyle involves great hardship.
5. When cursed, persecuted and slandered, he responds with love.
6. He absorbs evil, and in the process that evil dies.
7. He is their father in the gospel and writes to admonish, not to shame, his "children."

The final personal appeal "be imitators of me" is not an ego trip for Paul. Students of a rabbi were expected to live with the rabbi. They could learn from him in two ways. His teachings provided one method of learning. Watching him live in observance of the law provided the other. How did he keep the sabbath? What about ceremonial purity? Which food stuffs did he subject to the tithe? Observing the rabbi's lifestyle was an indispensable part of the learning process. **(super practical)** Paul would naturally assume this teaching method—but what a litany of suffering! As noted earlier, this final admonition needs to be placed beside the admonition of Jesus in the upper room on Easter night when he showed the fearful disciples his hands and his side and said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21).

- **Question 5 for personal reflection: If someone were to imitate our personal Christian life, what would they be doing?** (the good, bad, & ugly.)
 - Prayerfully asking the Lord's assistance. While we participate with the work of the Holy Spirit, we are not grunting & straining this out in our own strength—a 'work' of our flesh. Freedom comes as a touch from the Holy Spirit releasing God's ability through us. (working through us in spite of our weaknesses.)

Summation:

- We never reach our perfect bliss here: we shall not have perfect health, we shall not have instant guidance, we shall not be in constant, beautiful contact with the Lord. We are still human; we are still in the world; we are still mortal; we are still exposed to sin, the world, the flesh and the devil; we must still wrestle and watch and pray; we shall still fall and fail. There *is* victory; there *is* power; there *is* healing; there *is* guidance; there *is* salvation—but we have not yet arrived. We live in two worlds and there must therefore be tension. Paul describes the true situation in these terms:

‘It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.’

5. Servants and stewards (4:1–7)

If the Corinthians have a completely wrong view of Paul, Apollos and Peter, what is the correct one? *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God* (1). Being man-centred, the Corinthians were giving their allegiance to men, men of God, but only men. That was the way the world behaved and taught—and still does, not least because of the powerful impact of television. Whenever the church follows big names and becomes man-centred, it is aping the world. No, says Paul, do not boast of men; you are not servants of such people: they are your servants. The word for *servants* is unusual, literally meaning an under-rower, i.e. someone who is simply responding to higher authority and doing his job. This authority is that of Jesus Christ.

The second word, *stewards*, is fairly common in the New Testament. The Greek *oikonomos* was a housekeeper or overseer (often a slave), charged with providing the establishment of a large estate with food and all things needful. He was responsible, not to his fellows, but to his lord. He was not expected to exercise his own initiative, still less his own personal authority. He simply did his master’s bidding and looked after his affairs. So Paul sees himself as responsible, not to the Corinthians or to *any human court* (3), but to *the Lord* (4) alone. He is very much aware that he must render account of his stewardship, and this sensitivity keeps him more than alert to the needs of the Corinthians. He will not lord it over them. He is not going to curry favour with them. He is not going to play fast and loose with them. He is not going to deprive them of what God has provided for them. Like a good steward, he will ensure that the right nourishment is provided at the right time. He has nothing to give them except what he has himself received from his master. Paul’s supreme motivation as a minister of God to the Corinthians is this: ‘One day I will have to render account to God.’

Because Paul sees himself and the others as *stewards*, he exhorts the Corinthians not to slip into any judging attitude: do not condemn us, and also do not eulogize us. Leave that to the Lord: he will do all the judging. If a man deserves to be commended for his stewardship, then the Lord will indeed commend him (5). Do not pronounce judgment before the time, i.e. before all the evidence is out in the open, and that will be only when the Lord comes. He will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart (5), a disclosure a good servant or steward will not fear. Paul is free of any sense of guilt about the way he has so far discharged his stewardship (4), but a clear conscience in itself is not the same as full acquittal: only God, the righteous judge, can pronounce that. Paul is more than content to leave his case with God.

Verse 4 is of special interest. The first part of the verse can be interpreted like this: ‘My conscience says nothing against me, but I have not been justified on that basis.’ Paul’s understanding of the role of conscience is seen in Romans 2:14–16, ‘When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires ... they show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.’ Paul himself told the Roman governor of Judaea, Felix, ‘I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men.’ Even if this conscience did accuse him, there were two cleansing and strengthening secrets, summed up in these two passages: ‘How much more shall the blood of Christ ... purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God’ and ‘God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything’.¹⁰

Greek and Roman philosophers (e.g. Plato and Seneca) regarded conscience as passing final judgment on a man. For Paul, only God can do this. The essential ground for Paul’s clear conscience is the fact that God ‘justifies the ungodly’ by virtue of the cross of Christ. So, when Paul says in verse 4 that, because there is nothing on his conscience, he is not thereby justified, he is actually pointing to the only grounds of justification and the only source of a clear conscience—Jesus Christ and him crucified. No wonder he made that the kernel of his preaching.

The final phrase of verse 5 is interesting, because the emphasis in the original falls on the first and the last words: *Then ... from God*, i.e. then, and not before, certainly not now, when all judgment cannot be anything but ‘pre-judice’; commendation *from God*, and not from anybody else, in Corinth or anywhere else.

In the teaching of this paragraph there is a door open into true freedom for Christian workers. Paul had a grim past as a vicious opponent of Jesus Christ, as he himself readily admits later (15:8–9); but, such is his experience of the grace of God in forgiving him, he can boldly say, *I am not aware of anything against myself* (4). The remainder of his life (after the Damascus Road experience) is consecrated to being a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God. He knows that the Lord’s criterion, in ultimately scrutinizing his ministry, will be neither success nor popularity, but faithfulness: *Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy* (2).

⁶ I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favour of one against another. ⁷For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?

The short paragraph in 4:6–7 summarizes the teaching, not just of this section (4:1–5), but of chapters 3 and 4. *All this* (6) probably refers to the material in these two chapters thus far. Paul is affirming that his analysis of the nature of Christian leadership is valid for all time, but is here being applied to himself and Apollos for the benefit of the Corinthians. These Christians saw even the gifts of God as grounds for boasting. But, says Paul, they are no different from any other church. *What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?* (7) All true ministry in the church, whoever brings it and of whatever kind it is, is provided by God: it is ridiculous to *be puffed up in favour of one against another* (6).

The yawning void in the life of the Corinthian church was caused by the **absence of love**: ‘love is not puffed up’ (13:4). On the contrary, ‘love builds up’ (8:1), whereas ‘“knowledge” puffs up’. This ‘knowledge’, this false wisdom, of the Corinthians was clearly taking them *beyond what is written* (6). This is a difficult phrase, which Barrett interprets as enjoining ‘life in accordance with Scriptural precept and example’.¹⁴ The phrase ‘going beyond Scripture’ has been seen as the characteristic and the watchword of the Christ party, in the sense that they saw the Old Testament Scriptures as a thing of the past, which ‘mature’ Christians had left behind. It could well be, alternatively, that ‘Nothing beyond what is written’ was a Jewish formula brought to Corinth by the Peter party. We shall never know the full significance of what is clearly a topical allusion of some importance. The major point of these two verses is the foolishness of boasting amongst people who owe everything to the grace of God.

6. Kings and paupers (4:8–13)

At the heart of the boasting at Corinth was the conviction that they were really a very successful, lively, mature and effective church. The Christians were satisfied with their spirituality, their leadership, and the general quality of their life together. They had settled down into the illusion that they had become the best they could be. They thought they had ‘arrived’. Hence the irony in Paul’s double *Already* in verse 8: ‘you are filled ... you are rich ... you are kings’—*already!* This word indicates Paul’s own conviction that this is a valid part of the Christian message, but it is not one to be fully experienced in this life on earth: we have been filled, enriched, lifted to reign with Christ (*cf.* 1:4–9); but we shall not enter fully into that inheritance here and now. It is a theology of glory, but it has to be placed in the context of a theology of the cross, which Paul proceeds to do in verses 9–13.

He readily acknowledges that he would love to be set fully free in Christ, together with the Corinthians: *Would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!* (8). He would love to be beyond all the persecution, the batterings, the depression and the sheer slog of being *fools for Christ’s sake* (10). They may have arrived, but he has not. They reckon they are strong, but he is all too aware of his weakness. They glory in their reputation

and respectability in worldly society, but he is mocked and scorned by the world. In a passage reminiscent of his powerful statements in 2 Corinthians about his weakness and his vulnerability, Paul paints the authentic marks of Christ's own ministry. 'A servant is not greater than his master'¹⁶ and for Christ's sake he has become the scum of the earth (13). Paul sees the apostles as supremely called to this suffering. He imagines a Roman general's triumphal procession on his return to Rome. The captives and the booty are paraded as a spectacle for the public to relish, culminating with the captured general or king, who was already *sentenced to death*. The apostles are in such a position.

For people, like the Corinthians, who are concerned for their own status, reputation and popularity, authentic Christian ministry is immensely difficult to accept, let alone to embrace. The truth that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness gets through to us very slowly. To be *a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men* (9) goes against the grain, because it means being constrained to live our life under the critical, often scornful, scrutiny of all and sundry. We tend, in our natural inclinations, to erect a screen around our privacy and our real selves, allowing only those whom we choose to penetrate and see us as we really are.

It is no sociological or circumstantial phenomenon that the Christian church is growing most noticeably amongst the poor in Third World countries: this growth reflects accurately the way these Christians approximate more closely to the pattern of Christian life and ministry described in the New Testament. 'God has *chosen* the foolish ... the weak ... the low and despised' (1:27–28). It is this divine wisdom which so intrigues, not just men, but angels (when they are given the chance to see it in operation). Angels have always been fascinated by the message of the gospel, and the church has been commissioned to make 'the principalities and powers' aware of God's wisdom in the cross of Christ.¹⁸

Three principles for Christian ministry need to be stressed from this metaphor of kings and paupers. First, if we are amongst those being blessed in our Christian life and work, it is axiomatic that others are being buffeted. Secondly, if we are experiencing the buffeting and the authentic cost of Christian ministry, then we can be assured that it is genuinely releasing blessing in others whose lives we are touching (consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly). Thirdly, all Christians are, at one and the same time, *both kings and paupers, i.e.* it is the authentic Christian experience to be wealthy in Christ and yet despised by the world. We never reach our perfect bliss here: we shall not have perfect health, we shall not have instant guidance, we shall not be in constant, beautiful contact with the Lord. We are still human; we are still in the world; we are still mortal; we are still exposed to sin, the world, the flesh and the devil; we must still wrestle and watch and pray; we shall still fall and fail. There *is* victory; there *is* power; there *is* healing; there *is* guidance; there *is* salvation—but we have not yet arrived. We live in two worlds and there must therefore be tension. Paul describes the true situation in these terms: 'It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.'

7. Fathers and children (4:14–21)

In verse 14 Paul seems to recognize that he has been verging on sarcasm in the previous paragraph, and he pulls himself up by assuring the Corinthians that he is not trying *to make you ashamed*, not in any wrong way. He is not averse to arousing in them a proper sense of shame, but here he emphasizes that he is speaking as a father to his *beloved children* (14).

Before we trace the way in which Paul sees himself as a father to the Christians at Corinth, it is necessary to stress that he does *not* see it as an authority-position, let alone as one invested with status. He would have known the words of Jesus himself: 'Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven ... He who is greatest among you shall be your servant.' The way the title 'Father' is given to, and accepted by, the ordained ministers of certain denominations flies in the face of this teaching. Indeed, many other sections of the church often manifest a paternalistic, over-dominant style of leadership, even if they do not use the title 'Father'. The folk-religion which lies behind this is not nearly so serious as the unbiblical theology which gave rise to and still endorses such an understanding of status and authority in the church. This false teaching is arguably the

strongest barrier to the growth and health of the church in our day. It affects church unity, evangelism, worship, lay ministry, the ministry of women, theological training. Indeed, virtually every aspect of the mission of God's church is hampered, so long as this anti-Christian view of leadership in the church is perpetuated.

Positively, Paul sees himself as father to the Christians at Corinth (and particularly to Timothy, *my beloved and faithful child in the Lord*, verse 17) in the sense that he proclaimed the gospel to them and was, therefore, responsible on a human level for their faith in Christ. Like any father, and because children always copy their father, he has striven to set them an example in daily life of the behaviour expected of Christians; *I urge you, then, be imitators of me* (16). Timothy's task was *to remind them of Paul's ways in Christ* (17). This consistent example was number one priority for Paul wherever he went (*as I teach them everywhere in every church*, 17). It underlines the vital importance of exemplary behaviour in the daily lives of all called to leadership in the church. The Corinthians had not seen Jesus in the flesh: they had no Bible; but they had seen Paul (*cf.* 11:1). Many others had pointed the way to Christ, but he was the first to come all the way to them with the gospel: *I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel* (15).

It is, then, as their father that Paul now promises to come to them. When the father has been absent from his family for some time, he wants to come home *with love in a spirit of gentleness* (21), not *with a rod*. Many of those in Corinth whom he had brought to faith in Christ were now behaving in an arrogant and boastful way, writing off him and his ministry and causing great trouble and division in the church. Paul's fatherly heart was deeply hurt by this behaviour and something of that pain can be gauged by his comments elsewhere: 'My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!'

Children often make loud claims in a boastful way: it is a reflection of their immaturity. There is a lot of talk, and not very much power to put the big words into action. So Paul ends these two chapters in the same mood as he began—with a strong (and strongly-felt) plea to the Corinthians to stop boasting and to grow up: *the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power* (20). He does not often use this phrase *the kingdom of God*, so common in the Synoptic Gospels; but, when he does, it always refers to fundamentals. He does not ever explain its meaning; he accepted it as the heart of the gospel—and proclaimed it day by day.¹

B. The role of religious leaders shows they are important but should never be the cause for boasting (3:5–4:5). Paul demonstrates that there should be no jealousy among the leaders in the church (3:9), emphasizing the unique gifts each brings to the body of Christ. However, the foundation for every believer is Christ (3:10), and as the person of God "builds" their life the quality of the materials selected to work with will be determined by whether that person can withstand the "fire"—both of God's inspection and of the "fiery trial" of life (1 Pet. 4:12). This is not a matter of salvation. It is secure. At stake here is the substance of our life's work. (*see Craftiness.*)

"Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes"

(4:5). All will be judged at the coming of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:10). Harsh criticism of believers within the body of Christ is unnecessary. God is judge; God is just; and God will reward according to the scales of eternity, not according to the balances of humanity.

C. An open rebuke by ironic comparison of the Corinthian's pride with Paul's foolishness (4:6–21). Paul's introduction of the Corinthians' being "wise" and "strong" places them directly in the category of

¹ Prior, D. (1985). [*The message of 1 Corinthians: life in the local church*](#) (pp. 61–69). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

the worldly in chapter 1. Paul appeals for them to “imitate me” (4:16) rather than to continue in their confused ways.²

4:1–5

Do Not Evaluate Before the Real Test

A sinful lifestyle always indicated sinful motives, but a godly lifestyle could sometimes mask selfish motives. Only God knows hearts, and Christian celebrities could be accurately evaluated only in the light of the final judgment (3:5–15). Paul adapts the language of philosophers respected by the Corinthian Christians.

4:1. “Stewards” (“those entrusted”—NIV) were often servants, as here, or freedmen. These servants and freedmen were trusted to manage the master’s estate, especially his financial affairs, and had great authority and prestige. Some philosophers saw themselves as stewards or managers of divine truths.

4:2. Because stewards were trusted to handle their masters’ finances, purchasing slaves and goods and making wise investments, it was most important that they be “trustworthy” or “faithful.”

4:3–4. The Old Testament speaks of the day of God’s judgment tribunal as “the day of God.” “Day” sometimes meant “court,” as Paul uses it and many translations render it here. Paul uses several legal expressions in these verses. Most philosophers, especially Cynics, expressed disdain for what anyone else thought about them.

4:5. Jesus and other Jewish teachers spoke of God bringing secret thoughts to light at his judgment (cf. Is 29:15). Ancient rhetoric was concerned with “praise” for those to be honored; Paul says that the only honor that counts is what God will assign at the final judgment.³

4:6–13

Apostles Last of All

In Jesus’ kingdom, where the greatest is the least and the King died for his people, no one is more important than anyone else. Indeed, true apostles take the lowest role, not the greatest; they should not be objects of a celebrity cult.

4:6. Philosophers advocating harmony often warned people not to “go beyond what is written” but to comply with a prior agreement; Paul may thus summon them to unity, reminding them of a contract implied in their acceptance of Christ. Some commentators have suggested that “not beyond what is written” refers to the learning of schoolchildren, who learned how to write by imitating what was written. Others think Paul refers to Scripture, perhaps texts he has cited so far in 1 Corinthians on the worthlessness of human folly.

4:7. Everything they have, God has given to them; they have earned none of it. Philosophers often liked to make this point to keep people from boasting.

4:8. Irony was a standard rhetorical and literary device. Philosophers often claimed to be the only true kings, asserting that only they had character noble enough to rule rightly. They also claimed to possess the only genuine wealth. Paul ironically concedes the claims of his most educated readers: “You are true philosophers; I, your teacher in Christ, am foolish.”

4:9. Stoic philosophers believed that they evoked the admiration of gods and mortals as they persevered through suffering; but Paul declares that the suffering apostles became a “spectacle,” objects of scorn in the theater of the world. The person in charge of games in amphitheaters would exhibit the gladiators who would battle wild beasts there; here God himself exhibits the sufferings of the apostles. “Last of all” means that they were the

² Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). [*Hayford’s Bible handbook*](#). Nashville, TN; Atlanta, GA; London; Vancouver: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

³ Keener, C. S. (1993). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*](#) (1 Co 4:1–5). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

final show for the day—normally reserved for the most wretched criminal condemned to die in the arena. Corinth's theater seated eighteen thousand.

4:10. Philosophers claimed to be wise, powerful and truly honorable, as opposed to the foolish masses. They meant that their conduct was wise, they were morally strong, and they were honorable in virtue. But society at large thought the opposite, especially of the homeless Cynics: they were foolish, weak beggars. Paul's detractors think his behavior unbecoming of true wisdom; Paul uses irony to suggest that the true wisdom is on his side.

4:11. Greek moralists often presented themselves as models for others to imitate; a few philosophers, especially the Cynics, wandered around homeless and dependent on charity. Paul presents his own sufferings and sacrifices for the gospel as a model for the Corinthians to imitate (4:9–16). Everything Paul describes in 4:11 fits the typical ancient depiction of the wandering Cynic philosopher.

4:12. Here Paul distinguishes himself from most kinds of philosophers and from the more aristocratic ideals of the higher-status faction within the Corinthian church. Philosophers might beg, charge tuition or be supported by a patron; to them, manual labor was the least honorable option. Because wealthy landowners also considered manual labor undignified, well-to-do people in the church would be embarrassed to invite friends of their own social circle to hear the teachings of Paul, who worked as an artisan (skilled laborer). Paul here supports the majority, lower-class faction in the congregation and boasts in his low social status.

4:13. Philosophers sometimes thought of the masses as “garbage” (TEV) and “refuse” (NIV); more often, the masses may have thought of wandering Cynic philosophers in these same terms. It was a universally disgusting image for something worthless and rejected (Lam 3:45). Following Jesus, Paul goes beyond Cynics in answering slander gently (cf. Prov 15:1; 29:8); many Cynics were happy to revile their audiences, even without provocation, to prove their independence. Stoic and Cynic philosophers believed that their perseverance in suffering authenticated them as genuine philosophers, and Paul wants his philosophically educated readers to recognize that on their own terms he can compete with the best of them.

4:14–21

A Father's Threat

4:14. “Letters of blame” could be written either to shame those who had acted dishonorably or (less harshly) to admonish them. Except in the most extreme circumstances, philosophers preferred to admonish rather than to rebuke and thereby humiliate. Moralists generally emphasized that they admonished people only because they cared for them, sometimes describing their concern in parental terms. Paul has already portrayed himself as a parent in 3:1–2; calling his readers “beloved children” here may reflect the fact that fathers were responsible for their sons' education.

4:15. “Guardian” (NIV; better than “tutor”—NASB—or “instructor”—KJV) refers to a slave who would accompany a child on his way to school; although respected by the child and responsible to teach him manners, this guardian was not a teacher per se. Students could affectionately call and treat special teachers as “fathers”; that Paul here calls himself their “father through the gospel” somewhat demeans other teachers by comparison, because slave aides were nothing like fathers.

4:16. Philosophers, rabbis and teachers in general were models to imitate as well as to listen to. This is one of the most common ideas in Greek literature.

4:17. A disciple of a teacher could be called his “child” (4:15); Timothy as an imitator of Paul can become a model for Paul's “children” in Corinth. Paul's “ways” (NASB) or “way of life” (NIV) may allude to the Jewish use of “ways” to mean divine laws or proper behavior.

4:18–21. Paul continues in the role of “father” (4:14–17) in this passage. Fathers were often portrayed as gentler than mothers, but they also used the rod for discipline, and in Roman political rhetoric, the proper patriarchal figure was stern and uncompromising.⁴

Figure 1.4(10). Cameos 3 and 5 (1 Cor 3:21–23; 4:6)

The sweeping nature of what Paul is saying takes the reader’s breath away. In cameo 3 Paul includes the full list that appeared in 1:12. Paul, Apollos, Cephas and Christ are mentioned. But here in cameo 3 being “of Paul” or “of Apollos” or “of Cephas” lose their preeminence because *all believers* are (literally) “of Christ” and Christ is “of God.” The divisions in the church then and now pale in the bright light of such a comprehensive worldview. The rising movement of the text must not be missed. The three church leaders are mentioned first. Next comes “the world, or life or death or the present or the future.” The text finally reaches its summit with “you are of Christ and Christ is of God.” The view from that lofty height does not allow for quibbling over Paul, Apollos and Cephas. Instead, the reader is powerfully stimulated to reflect deeply on what Paul intends when he writes “all things are yours” as the mind and spirit move up the high mountain to its summit. The Christian traditions out of Syriac, Coptic, Greek, Armenian, Latin, Arabic, German, French, English and Spanish as they are in harmony with Scripture and currently affirmed in Africa, Asia, Europe, South America and North America (and more)—are *all ours!*

In the matching cameo (5) Paul tells his readers that he has applied “all this” to himself and Apollos for their benefit. In the fourth century Chrysostom argued that Paul chose to omit the names of the contending Corinthian leaders and astutely mentions only himself and Apollos. Chrysostom writes, “if he had applied his argument in their persons, they would not have learnt all that they needed to learn, nor would have admitted the correction, being vexed at what was said.”

This brings us to the extended cameo that forms the climax of this apostolic homily [see fig. 1.4(11)].

4a.	^{4:1} This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.	SEE US AS Servants and Stewards Under Judgment
4b.	³ And to me it is trifling to be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself.	THE LORD

⁴ Keener, C. S. (1993). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*](#) (1 Co 4:6–21). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

⁴ I am not aware of Judges Me
anything against
myself,

but I am not thereby
acquitted.

It is the Lord who judges me.

4c.

⁵ Therefore do not
pronounce judgment before
the time,

before the Lord comes, THE LORD

who will bring to light the Judges and
things now hidden in
darkness

and will disclose the Commends All
purposes/motives of
people's hearts.

That every person receive
his commendation from
God.

Figure 1.4(11). Cameo 4a, b, c (1 Cor 4:1–5)

This center forms an important point of emphasis not only for the homily but for this section of the essay. The Corinthians had seen their founders as leaders of competing and conflicting groups in the church. As noted, ethnicity may have been involved. In any case, after three closely argued chapters Paul at last tells his readers how they *should* see him and his leadership team. The question of “judgment” runs through the three parts of this climax.

Within a few verses Paul uses four key words to define himself and his colleagues. Two of these were in the parable about farmers (3:5–9). The other two are in this text. Seen together the four are as follows:

diakonoi assigned by the Lord (*servants* assigned by the Lord)

sunergoi for God (*fellow workers* for God)

huperetai of Christ (*assistants* to Christ)

oikonomoi of the mysteries of God (*stewards* of the mysteries of God)

The first two make clear that they are *servants* “assigned by the Lord” and that they work *for God* (not the Corinthians). The third and fourth appear in the text before us. I have chosen to translate *huperetai* as “assistants.”

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

As a Greek word it was used for a physician's assistant, an adjutant and a priest's helper. It was also the word for a synagogue official, and in the Gospels it is used for assistants in the temple in Jerusalem. In a detailed discussion of the synagogue in the early Christian centuries, Shemuel Safrai notes that *huperetes* was the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew word *hazzan*. He writes,

The head of the synagogue had an adjutant the *hazzan*, undoubtedly the *huperetes* of Luke 4:20, who acted as executive officer in the practical details of running the synagogue.... The *hazzan* acted in fact as master of ceremonies throughout the whole liturgy.

In Paul's mind Christ was the *head of the synagogue/church*, and the apostles were the *huperetai*.

In this text Paul asks his readers to look on the apostolic band as "*assistants to Christ*" and "*stewards of the mysteries of God*." In the parable about the farmers, Paul presented himself as a *servant*. But having been assigned by "the Lord" he and his colleagues were, on the deepest level, "*fellow workers for God*" rather than "*servants of the Corinthians*." In the first two out of the four words listed, *lowliness* is emphasized. Here, *leadership* is central.

In every place Paul was ready to serve the church gathered in that city. But he obeyed orders from a higher authority. In regard to his readers he was not a "quivering mass of availability." One of the illuminating texts in this regard is Mark 1:35–38. In that account Jesus withdraws early in the morning "to a lonely place" for prayer. Simon and others follow him, find him and say "Everyone is searching for you." Jesus replies, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out." The people he served did not control his agenda—he did! Paul acts out this theology with clarity when in the book of Romans he writes, "But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, ... I go to Spain" (Rom 15:23–24). How could there be nothing left to do in Greece or Asia Minor? Were Christian communities established in all the towns and villages of the area? As "a servant of Christ" Paul was on his way. The people he served could not trump that higher obedience.

Paul also saw himself as a "steward of the mysteries of God." The inner core of his identity was not formed by *counseling* or *administration* or even by *preaching*. He was certainly engaged in first-century forms of those activities as he lived out his "anxiety for all the churches" (2 Cor 11:28). But out of the inner core of his identity he sensed responsibility for the "mysteries of God." This vision of Christian leadership is a noble standard for the church in every age.

This title of "steward of the *mysteries of God*" appears in this first essay, where he discusses the cross, the Trinity and the hidden mysteries now revealed through the Spirit. Then in essay five, he concludes with "behold, I tell you a *mystery*" (15:51). There the steward again fulfills his assigned task. This theme provides an *inclusio*, a thread that helps connect the end to the beginning and bind the letter together.

Yet Paul does not act out his servanthood and stewardship as a freelancer. By its very nature the apostolic band required some clear authority that could provide oversight and review. A steward is a steward *for someone*, and the servant cannot serve in a vacuum. He concludes this opening section of the cameo by saying, "moreover it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." Found by whom?

Two aspects of this statement are worthy of note. First, biblical languages (and modern Arabic) have no word for *honesty*. Honesty is a Roman concept, and the word has roots in Latin, Old French, Italian and Spanish. It has to do with commitment to an impersonal ideal. The biblical word is *faithful*, which requires *a person to whom one is faithful*. A servant is *faithful to his or her master*. Paul was faithful to "our Lord Jesus Christ" (as stated repeatedly in the opening chapter). One day the master will say, "Give an account of your stewardship."

Second, Paul does not say the steward must be "successful" but rather "faithful." A parallel to this text is the parable of the talents in Luke 19:12–27, where a master gives large sums of money to his servants and leaves. On his return he calls them in that he might know "how much business they had transacted." The first *was* successful, but the master congratulates him on his faithfulness, not on his success. The first is clearly more important than the second.

The second cameo (4b) in this compound center reads:

4b.

³ And to me it is trifling to be judged by you

1. ~~The wisdom of God is beyond the wisdom of this age.~~
2. ~~One must “become a fool” to acquire such wisdom.~~
3. ~~Boasting before God is not acceptable, because all we have comes to us as gifts.~~
4. ~~Boasting about various leaders is meaningless.~~
5. ~~The Christian must never go beyond Scripture.~~
6. ~~All Christian leaders belong to all Christians, and all Christians belong to Christ in God.~~
7. ~~Authentic Christian leaders are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.~~
8. ~~The Lord alone can judge others, because he alone knows the secrets of the heart.~~
9. ~~Paul accepts the judgment of the Lord, but not the judgment of the Corinthians.~~
10. ~~Lowliness is always an essential part of authentic Christian leadership.~~

Paul concludes this opening essay with some final reflections [see fig. 1.4(12)].

THE RHETORIC

Paul is winding down as he brings his first essay to an end. He again uses seven cameos to express his concluding thoughts and his personal appeal. Paul opens with three cameos of comparison between the Corinthians and the apostles (1–3). To this he adds three cameos that describe the world within which the apostles carry out their mission (4–6). There is a climax in the center of each half of the homily. In the center of the first (2) he offers the parable of the Roman spectacle. This creates an encased parable. The center of the second half describes the apostles’ responses to their suffering.

At the same time the two sets of three cameos interlock. Cameo 2 (Paul’s suffering) becomes the beginning (4) and the end (6) of the next section and thus locks the two sets of cameos together. Cameo 2 presents a picture of brutalized, ragged captives at the end of a Roman victory parade. The picture is filled out in 4 and 6. This method of interlocking occurs also in Isaiah 48:1–11 and Isaiah 55:6–9.

In the last cameo (7) Paul asserts his authority as their “father” with the right to “admonish” them. The final line is his personal appeal. Some type of personal appeal concludes each of the five essays. It is a form of literary signature. With it he is “signing off” on this first topic.

1. ⁸Already you are filled,
already rich!

Without us you have become YOU AND WE
kings!

And would that you did rule,

so that we might rule with
you!

2. ⁹For I think that
God has exhibited
us apostles last,

like men sentenced THE PARABLE OF
to death;

because we have God’s Spectacle
become a spectacle

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

to the world, to (the apostles'
angels and to men. condition)

3. ¹⁰We are fools for Christ's sake,

but you are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but you are strong. WE AND YOU

You are held in honor, but we in dishonor.

4. ¹¹To the present hour we hunger and thirst,

we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, OUR CONDITION

¹²and we labor, working with our own hands.

5. When reviled, we bless;

when persecuted, we endure. OUR RESPONSE

¹³when slandered, we try to conciliate; To Our Condition

6. we have become as the scapegoats of the world,

the offscouring of all things until now. OUR CONDITION

7. ¹⁴I do not write this to make you ashamed,

but to admonish you as my beloved children. CONCLUDING

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

¹⁵For though you have Personal Appeal
countless guides in Christ,

you do not have many
fathers.

For I became your father in
Jesus Christ through the
gospel.

¹⁶I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

Figure 1.4(12). Christian unity: Paul, Apollos and Cephas—concluding remarks (1 Cor 4:8–16)

COMMENTARY

The first three cameos in this homily are seen in figure 1.4(13).

Paul opened this first essay (1:4–9) with gentle compliments telling them that they were enriched in Christ in “all speech and all knowledge” and “not lacking in any spiritual gift.” In the center of the essay he started to open a can of worms related to their failures and flatly told them that they were still “children” and were thus only able to digest milk. Now at the end he pulls out all the stops and speaks to them harshly with irony and sarcasm.

1. ⁸Already you are filled, already rich!

Without us you have become kings! YOU AND WE

And would that you did rule,

so that we might rule with
you!

2. ⁹For I think that
God has exhibited
us apostles last,
like men sentenced
to death; THE PARABLE OF
because we have
become a spectacle God’s Spectacle
to the world, to
angels and to men. (the apostles’
condition)

3. ¹⁰We are fools for Christ's sake,

but you are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but you are strong. WE AND YOU

You are held in honor, but we in dishonor.

Figure 1.4(13). Cameos 1–3 (1 Cor 4:8–10)

Cameo 1 concentrates on the Corinthians while in cameo 3 the emphasis tilts in the direction of Paul and his colleagues. The Corinthians think they have become kings (without kingdoms) and they imagine themselves to be wise, strong and held in honor. They believe Paul and his friends are weak, foolish and dishonored. Paul is not amused by their preposterous views.

Then dramatically his ironic mood shifts as he exposes some deep pain. This pain appears as he tells the parable of the Roman spectacle in cameo 2. He becomes calm and reflective as he contemplates the idea that God is leading a great triumph with the world and the angelic hosts watching. After a major military victory Roman generals were given a grand parade through the streets of Rome. The conqueror rode in a chariot near the front followed by priests and notables. The victorious army marched behind them. Then came wagons loaded with captured booty. At the very end were captives in chains who, at the conclusion of the parade route, would be killed in a public sacrifice to the Roman gods. Paul wonders if God has formed such a parade and has placed the apostles at the end under sentence of death. What is amazing about this parable of the Roman triumph is its similarity to the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus was also in a (Roman) parade that ended with his death in a public place.

On July 18, 1944, the German martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a letter from prison to a friend. In it he said, “Christians stand by God in God’s suffering,” and that distinguishes Christians from pagans. “Could you not keep awake with me one hour?” Jesus asks in Gethsemane. This is the reversal of everything a religious person expects from God. Human beings are called to suffer with God’s own suffering caused by the godless world.

Later in the same letter Bonhoeffer continues, “Being swept into the messianic suffering of God in Jesus Christ happens in the most varied ways in the New Testament.” In Philippians 3:10 Paul writes, “that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, *and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death*, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” Was this what Paul was thinking about as he wrote the parable of the Roman triumph?

As noted, the center of this first essay focuses on the power and wisdom of the cross (1:17–2:2). As Paul concludes his discussion of this topic, his mind returns to the theme of the cross with hints of his own participation in the suffering of Christ.

This is an often neglected Pauline cry of dereliction. If this is God’s triumphal parade, why are the apostles at the end anticipating death? “My God, my God—why ...?” Like Jesus, Paul is perhaps not expressing his studied conclusions but rather his deepest feelings. This is how *he feels*, and surprisingly, he is not ashamed to expose those feelings to his readers. Perhaps this is because such feelings connected him to the suffering of Jesus.

In the second set of three cameos Paul moves beyond the Corinthians and looks back over his ministry at large [see fig. 1.4(14)].

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

nor was I ever homeless, and I was not obliged to pay my own way. Had I been called on to walk in Paul’s shoes, how would I have responded? Who is able for these things? Both the conversation with Jesus on Easter evening and the concluding remarks in this first essay are stunning challenges to all who choose to travel the narrow way. Even more amazing is the manner in which Paul responded to this litany of hardships.

When insulted, he blessed. When persecuted, he endured. When slandered, he sought reconciliation. In traditional Middle Eastern culture (and elsewhere), retaliation is considered one of the marks of an honorable self-respecting person. Aristotle agreed, and made “great-heartedness” (megalopsukhia) the highest virtue. He then defined that virtue to include an *unwillingness* to endure insult. Cultures East and West endorse this view. For centuries the Islamic world has granted the right and indeed affirmed the duty of taking revenge to preserve honor. Islam has traditionally criticized Christianity for its failure to endorse the exercise of that right. Paul’s responses to insult, persecution and slander were not approved or applauded in the culture of which he was a part. For the Jewish community, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” was still a sacred law to be observed. But the “mind of Christ” and his sacrificial life pointed Paul in a radically new direction. That new narrow way, here on display, links Paul’s earlier discussion of the cross to his personal life. This is how he takes up his cross and follows Jesus.

Paul then offers two final descriptions of his condition (cameo 6). The NRSV translates the first “We have become like the rubbish of the world.” The word is *peri-katharma*, which was used to describe the dust and dirt that is thrown out at the end of a round of house cleaning. BAGD describes this word as “that which is removed as a result of a thorough cleansing, i.e., dirt, refuse.... Purification results from this activity.”²⁶

The second word, *peri-psema*, also has to do with scrapings, cleaning and purifying.

Regarding this text, William Orr and James Walther write,

[Paul] knew what physical deprivation meant.... His reward was often insult, persecution and slander; but Paul responded according to the irenic admonition of Jesus. The end result of all this was that *the dirt scoured from the world* was poured upon him and his apostolic co-laborers. They then acted as cleansing agents, taking to themselves hate, malice, and bitterness; and by absorbing this without violent or vengeful response, they took away those evils. Thus in a particular way they were carrying on the work of Christ.

Paul wrote to the Colossians, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” He continues and mentions “the mystery hidden for ages and generations and now made manifest to his saints” (Col 1:24, 26).

As seen above, Paul brings this essay to its conclusion with a stunning homily composed of seven remarkable cameos. Only the final personal appeal remains [see fig. 1.4(15)].

7. ¹⁴I do not write this to make you ashamed, CONCLUDING

but to admonish you as my beloved children. Personal Appeal

¹⁵For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ,

you do not have many fathers.

For I became your father in Jesus Christ through the gospel.

¹⁶I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

Figure 1.4(15). Cameo 7 (1 Cor 4:14–16)

As noted earlier, Paul was acting *like a mother* and feeding milk to a young child (the Corinthians). Now he presents himself as their *father*. The “guardian” in Greek culture was a well-known figure with a great deal of responsibility for forming the character of the child. But the father was naturally more important.

Paul’s use of the metaphor “father” is significant. Behind him is Hosea 11:1–9 and the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32. When these three texts are compared, six themes appear in all three, and one theme surfaces in two of the three. The list is as follows:

1. A father and his children appear in each.
2. The father is insulted and badly treated by his wayward children.
3. The father tries to reconcile/conciliate and calls his children beloved.
4. The father admonishes the wayward children.
5. The father goes beyond what is normally expected of a human father.
6. The father directly or indirectly presents himself as a model for his children to emulate.
7. Compassion is mentioned specifically (Hosea, Jesus).

It is certain that Paul knew the book of Hosea. The comparisons between Paul’s use of the metaphor “father” and the parable of the prodigal son make it possible that Paul (directly or indirectly) knew something of that parable. Thus three of the parables of Jesus can be seen to share theological and ethical content with this section of Paul’s first essay.

In conclusion, the following aspects of Paul’s concluding remarks can be noted.

1. Arrogance is irritating. The Corinthians saw themselves as rich, powerful and wise. Paul spares nothing as he points out their flawed self-image.
2. Paul openly admits that he becomes discouraged and makes no attempt to hide his feelings. At times he feels (like Jesus?) he is on the way to his death. In the final essay Paul affirms “I die every day” (15:31).
3. Yet, Paul accepts being a “fool for Christ’s sake.”
4. His lifestyle involves great hardship.
5. When cursed, persecuted and slandered, he responds with love.
6. He absorbs evil, and in the process that evil dies.
7. He is their father in the gospel and writes to admonish, not to shame, his “children.”

The final personal appeal “be imitators of me” is not an ego trip for Paul. Students of a rabbi were expected to live with the rabbi. They could learn from him in two ways. His teachings provided one method of learning. Watching him live in observance of the law provided the other. How did he keep the sabbath? What about ceremonial purity? Which food stuffs did he subject to the tithe? Observing the rabbi’s lifestyle was an indispensable part of the learning process. Paul would naturally assume this teaching method—but what a litany of suffering! As noted earlier, this final admonition needs to be placed beside the admonition of Jesus in the upper room on Easter night when he showed the fearful disciples his hands and his side and said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you” (Jn 20:21).

We will observe similar signature conclusions at the ends of each of the other four essays.

This brings us to the second essay.

ESSAY 2

Sex

Men and Women in the Human Family

1 CORINTHIANS 4:17–7:40

אם לא תבין את המצב

הפזיז מן המצב

הזמנתי את המצב הזה

(6:19)

2.1

Immorality and the Church

1 CORINTHIANS 4:17–5:6A

PAUL IS NOW READY to begin his second essay, which focuses on sexual practice and its theological foundation. The essay comprises four sections and one extended aside. The outline of the overall essay is as follows:

- 2.1. Immorality and the Church (4:17–6:8)
- 2.2. (Three Road Blocks: Leaven, Immorality and the Law Courts [5:6b–6:8])
- 2.3. Theology of Sexual Practice: Kingdom Ethics (6:9–12)
- 2.4. Theology of Sexual Practice: Joining the Body (6:13–20)
- 2.5. Sexual Practice in Harmony with the Gospel (7:1–40)

In each of the five essays, Paul opens with a call to *remember the tradition*. This is followed (as always) with a presentation of the problem under consideration. The new topic is sexual immorality.

Reference to the tradition (4:17) requires careful scrutiny. The text reads:

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

1. ¹⁷For this reason I sent to you Timothy,
my beloved and faithful child in the Lord:

To remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus,

as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Many commentators have assumed that 4:17–21 is a conclusion to what precedes, and that Paul’s discussion of sexual practice begins in 5:1. It is also possible to read 4:17 (cameo 1) as the opening of the essay on the topic of sexual practice that follows. The phrase “For this reason I sent to you” (4:17) is thus best seen as looking *forward* rather than *backwards*. This question is significant and deserves careful attention. A number of points can be made.

A clear break in the text between 4:16 and 4:17 has been observed for more than a thousand years. Writing an Arabic language commentary on 1 Corinthians in Damascus in A.D. 867, Ibn al-Sari of the Syrian Orthodox church placed his first chapter division between verses 16 and 17. Key aspects of the text support Ibn al-Sari’s view.

1. The two verses 16 and 17 (when read side by side) give the reader two occurrences in a row of the idea expressed by the English word *therefore*. Namely:

¹⁶I urge you, *therefore* [oun], be imitators of me.

¹⁷*Therefore* [dia touto], I sent to you Timothy, to remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Both the RSV and the NRSV soften this problem by translating the first “therefore” (*oun*) as “then.” But it is difficult to argue that Paul is summarizing his previous argument twice in a row with two similar phrases one after another. Rather, the first “therefore” is a word Paul often uses to summarize a previous discussion (cf. 10:31; 11:20; 14:23; 14:26; 15:11; 16:11; 16:18). This leaves the second phrase (*dia touto*) as an introduction to what follows.

2. The phrase “to remind you” (v. 17) clearly opens a new discussion in two of the following essays (1 Cor 11:2; 15:1), so why not here as well?

3. What Paul “teaches everywhere in every church” is the church tradition. Such a reference *begins each* of the five essays. This has been widely recognized in essays three, four and five. So why should a reference to these traditions be left here as a *conclusion* to the first essay?

4. To my knowledge, no ancient Middle Eastern paragraph system divided the text at 1 Corinthians 5:1. However, there is widespread early evidence for a break at the end of verse 4:15. Codex Vaticanus made such a break (adding the admonition “imitate me” of verse 16 to the new paragraph). The ancient paragraph divisions of the northern Coptic tradition and those of the classical Armenian tradition do the same. The ancient liturgy of St. James, followed by the Syrian Orthodox Church, and also the liturgy of the Greek Melkite Church of the Middle East break at the end of verse 16 and read 4:17–5:5 as a single passage. As noted, Ibn al-Sari placed a chapter division in the text at this point.

5. In 4:17–19 Paul discusses Timothy’s impending visit and his own. This topic indirectly reappears in 5:3 in reference to the judgment of the immoral man. Paul seems to be saying, “Some think I am not coming [4:18] but I am *indeed* coming [4:19]; as a matter of fact, although I am absent in body consider me already present in spirit [5:3].”

The references to the visits of Paul and Timothy thus support the inclusion of 4:17–21 with what follows.

6. In 4:18 Paul refers to some who are “arrogant” (*ephusiothesan*). In 5:2, using the same word, he becomes more pointed with the remark, “and you are arrogant!” That is, 4:18 joins 5:2 on the subject of “arrogance.”

7. In 4:20 Paul refers to “the kingdom of God.” This phrase occurs only nine times in Paul. Six of the nine are specific references to people *not* entering the kingdom of God. Setting aside the verse under discussion, four out of these five negative references (6:9, 10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5) specifically mention sexual immorality as one of the reasons for exclusion from the kingdom. The overwhelming weight of evidence is that when Paul is talking about sin and the kingdom of God, he is thinking of lists of sins that include sexual immorality. Here Paul specifically makes that connection (6:9, 10).

8. An examination of Paul’s use of *dia touto* (for this reason) leads to the conclusion that this phrase always looks forward *in some sense*. Often it introduces a new thought with little or no reference to what has come before (cf. Rom 15:9; 1 Cor 11:30; 2 Cor 4:1; 12:10; Eph 1:15; Col 1:9; 2 Thess 2:11). At other times the phrase builds on a previous discussion and moves on to introduce a new idea (cf. Rom 1:26; 4:16; 5:12; 13:6; 1 Cor 11:10; 2 Cor 4:1; 7:13; Eph 5:17; 6:13; 1 Thess 3:5, 7). In most of these cases modern editors (RSV and others) have *dia touto* introduce a new paragraph. Schultz argues that in 1 Corinthians 4:17 *dia touto* points forward. I suggest a translation of, “For this reason I sent to you Timothy ... to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus as I teach them everywhere.” The reason for Timothy’s visit is to remind them of Paul’s ways in Christ.

9. There is a shift in tone between 4:14–16 (in the previous essay) and 4:17–21 (in the current essay). In verses 14–16 Paul speaks very gently. He wants only to *admonish* his beloved children not to make them *ashamed*. But in verses 17–21 he is threatening the *arrogant* with a *rod*! C. K. Barrett has noted this dramatic shift of tone and writes,

At verse 14 Paul began to moderate his tone towards his readers; he did not wish to humiliate them, only to see that they were soundly instructed in Christian principles. When however he recalls the actual ... state of the Corinthian church he feels obliged to end his paragraph on a firmer note.

It is easy to see the threat of beating with a rod as related to the new discussion of incest rather than as part of the previous discussion on the cross that concluded with a “gentle admonition.”

10. If 4:14–21 is indeed one paragraph, then what is there in these verses that triggers Paul’s sudden anger? When verses 14–16 end the previous discussion and verses 17–21 are read as the opening volley of the new topic, the answer to this question is obvious. In the first text (vv. 14–16) Paul, the “father” of the Corinthian believers, wants to deal gently with his wayward children. In the second (vv. 17–21) he is angry about their gross immorality. But without that break in the text there is no apparent reason for Paul’s intense flare-up of anger.

Why then, we naturally ask, have commentators and editors placed the break in subject matter at 5:1 for so long? There are at least three possible reasons as to why this has happened.

1. First is the visit. In 4:18–21 Paul *is* talking about his coming visit. Chapter 5 discusses incest. They seem unrelated. But this reference to the coming visit is indirectly mentioned in 5:3. Paul’s visit is an introduction to his discussion of the case of incest. His point is, “I am coming, and you had better get this matter taken care of, or on my arrival I will have to use a rod (4:18–21)! Do not await my return, but consider me already present in spirit and proceed (5:3–5).”

2. The discussion of “I am coming!” moves naturally into the directive “Here is the problem (5:1–2), and you must deal with it before I arrive (5:2b–6).” But if this connection is not noted, it is easy to see 5:1 as a major division.

3. Finally, there is the matter of the tradition. When the translator does not observe that in the other four essays Paul refers to the tradition at the *opening* of a new essay, making a chapter division in 5:1 becomes an option.

In conclusion, there are numerous reasons for seeing 4:17–21 as an introduction to the topic of immorality and not as a dangling personal aside. Like each of the other four, the second essay opens with a reference to *the tradition*. As with other essays, this reference is attached to a call to *remember*.

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

After invoking the tradition Paul states the problem boldly and gives a firm directive to the Corinthian church regarding what they must do. Once again Paul composes an apostolic homily with seven cameos. The text is displayed in figure 2.1(1).

1.

^{4:17} For this reason I sent to you Timothy,

my beloved and faithful child in the Lord:

to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus,

as I teach them everywhere in every church.

THE TRADITION

2.

¹⁸ Some are arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.

ARROGANCE

¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills,

and I will find out not the talk of these *arrogant* people but their power.

And Power

²⁰ For the kingdom of God does not consist of talk but power.

3.

²¹ What do you want?

Shall I come to you with a rod,

or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

A ROD

Or Gentleness?

4.

^{5:1} Everyone has reported that there is immorality among you,

and of a kind that is not found even among the Gentiles;

ARROGANCE

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4

<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

for a man has [conjugal relations with] his father's wife. And Immorality

² And you are arrogant!

Ought you not rather to mourn?

5. Let him be removed from among you,

the one who has done this. HIM—REMOVE

³ For I, absent in body My Body

yet, present in spirit, My Spirit

I have already judged, as present, Him—Judge

the one who has done this.

6. ⁴ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. NAME OF JESUS

When you are assembled, Your “body”

and my spirit is present, My Spirit

with the power of our Lord Jesus, Power of Jesus

7. ⁵ surrender this to Satan HIM—REMOVE

for the destruction of the flesh, His Flesh

that his spirit may be saved His Spirit

in the day of the Lord. Day of the Lord

^{6a} Your boasting is not good.

Figure 2.1(1). The problem: Immorality, arrogance and what must be done (1 Cor 4:17–5:6a)

THE RHETORIC

The structure of this apostolic homily is similar to the homily that precedes it in 4:8–16. The one structural difference is that in the previous homily the stand-alone cameo is at the end. Here it is in the beginning. Otherwise the two homilies have the same structure.

Again there are seven cameos. The first affirms the tradition. The other six are divided into two sets of three cameos, each of which has an A-B-A format. The first set presents the problem: Incest! The second commands a response: Remove the offender! In 4:8–16 the concluding cameo looks *back* over *the entire essay* from 1:10–4:13. In this homily cameo 1 looks *forward* over *the entire second essay* that stretches from 4:18–7:40.

COMMENTARY

As noted Paul opens with an invocation of the tradition.

1. ^{4:17} For this reason I sent to THE TRADITION
you Timothy,

my beloved and faithful
child in the Lord:

To remind you of my ways
in Christ Jesus,

as I teach them everywhere
in every church.

At the beginning of the first essay Paul wrote about “the testimony of/to Christ” that “*was confirmed*” among the Corinthians (1:6). Here the tradition is referred to as “my ways in Christ Jesus as I teach them everywhere,” which were *not confirmed* (as he will quickly point out). What he has to say about sexual morality and its theological foundation is not something he is dreaming up for the occasion. His views on this new topic are known to all the churches. Previously he taught all of this to *them*. On his recent visit, Timothy repeated his views, and thus they cannot plead ignorance. Paul wants, once again, to set the record straight.

He then sets off a bomb [see fig. 2.1(2)].

After the invocation of the tradition, the pace quickens and the pitch rises. He begins by writing bluntly “some are arrogant.” In cameo 4 he becomes more pointed by saying, “you are arrogant!” He is very angry! The word *arrogant* is another key word that appears in the definition of love in 13:4–7.

It appears that some in Corinth assumed that Paul would not return. In cameo 2 he affirms that he intends to come soon—and they will therefore have to deal with him. He has not faded out of the picture.

2. ^{4:18} Some are *arrogant*, as if I ARROGANCE
were not coming to you.

¹⁹ But I will come to you And Power
soon, if the Lord wills,

Living Scripture
 Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

Paul begins his confrontation with the Corinthians over the case of incest with the key word *olos* that can be translated “actually it is reported” or “everyone has reported.” The RSV, NRSV and NIV have chosen “It is actually reported.” This carries the nuance of “I am sorry to have to say this, but *it is actually reported* that ...” The second translation option of “everyone has reported” means “I am hearing this from all my sources.” These English versions show that many in the Western world take the first view. But how have Middle Eastern Christians read this text?

Out of the twenty-three Semitic versions gathered for this study, both the Hebrew and eighteen of the Arabic versions read some form of “Everyone has reported” or “It is known for a fact.” Three of these translations have some form of “It is commonly known,” and one lists simply “It is known.”

The winner for more than a thousand years is “Everyone has reported.” This option fits Paul’s cultural context. The Corinthians had reported some things to him in writing (7:1), and he had heard about other things orally “from Chloe’s people” (1:11). No doubt Stephanas (16:17) and Sosthenes (1:1) had their own “grapevines.” But Paul does not reveal his sources. Such a disclosure would have given the Corinthians a chance to immediately shift the subject from the case of incest to the question, Who ratted on us? Paul protects his sources by saying, “The cat is out of the bag, *everyone has reported* ...” That is, “Don’t try to identify the person who gave me this information and then get angry at him or her. *I am getting this disgusting news from everyone!*”

The key word *immorality*, which appears in cameo 4, is a general term for all forms of unacceptable sexual behavior. The Mishnah legislates stoning for a man who has sexual relations with “his mother, his father’s wife, his daughter-in-law, a male, or a beast.” Roman law also forbade incest. One of the aspects of this particular case that appears to anger Paul the most is that some in the congregation are “boasting” about this matter. Apparently they understood “freedom in Christ” to mean “anything goes!” “No!” thunders Paul—you should be in mourning!

The first trilogy of cameos (1–3) focuses on the problem. The second trilogy (5–7) gives attention to what the Corinthians have to do about it [see fig. 2.1(3)].

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 5. | ^{2b} Let him be removed from
among you,

the one who has done this. | HIM—REMOVE |
| | ³ For I, absent in body

yet, present in spirit, | My Body (absent)

My Spirit (present) |
| | I have already judged, as
present,

the one who has done this. | Him—Judge |
| 6. | ⁴ In the name of the Lord
Jesus Christ.

When you are
assembled,

and my spirit is
present, | NAME OF JESUS

Your “body”

My Spirit (present) |

The meaning of *cameo 7* is elusive. Anthony Thiselton has a full discussion of the many questions and options. He writes, “there emerges a further strand to the issue which is relevant equally to Corinth and for today: *in certain cases law ministers to trust and to freedom*: it does not oppose freedom.” Gordon Fee’s discussion is also extensive and helpful.¹⁶ He comments on the fact that we live in a world where the church tolerates every kind of sin because (of course) we cannot be “judgmental.” Fee then offers four astute general comments. These are (1) the entire church was told to participate. The problem was affecting all of them. (2) Discipline was intended to be “remedial, not judgmental.” That is, the goal was the salvation of the sinner. (3) That discipline was important because the sin contaminated all of them. (4) In our day the man could simply have gone to another church that might too quickly accept him. Fee reflects on Paul’s day where “exclusion could be a genuinely redemptive action.”

Yet after nearly two thousand years of study and discussion this text remains partially elusive. Paul’s goal is trying to heal the church and save the man. To accomplish this purpose the church must “draw a line.” “Everything goes” and “whatever society accepts has to be acceptable to us” is not good enough.

At the very end of the homily he tells them bluntly, “Your boasting is not good.” As we will observe, boasting features in chapter 13 as a failure of love.

To summarize this first homily (in this essay), five points can be made

1. The church has a tradition; it is known and it is important.
2. Some are arrogantly affirming total freedom in sexual practice. Paul tells them to mourn.
3. They must come together in a public meeting and throw this man out of the church.
4. This action has the possibility of redeeming the sinner and restoring the church.
5. They are to act in the name and power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul then turns to three roadblocks needing removal before he can lay a theological foundation for sexual practice that is in harmony with the gospel. It is possible to see these three roadblocks as profoundly relevant to the topic. To them we now turn.⁵

4:1 The third illustration pictures ministers as **stewards** in God’s household, standing between the householder and the household, and charged particularly with the task of feeding the household. A steward was in full charge of a household and was accountable only to the owner, who alone could render final decisions. The steward was expected to be **faithful** in dispensing to the household exactly what had been entrusted to him. In the same way, ministers are to expound nothing more and nothing less than the whole counsel of God.

4:6 The Corinthians were **puffed up**, bloated with pride (vv. 6, 18, 19). In humbling them without rejecting them (v. 14), Paul appeals to reason (vv. 6, 7); resorts to satire (vv. 8-13); tries tenderness (vv. 14-16); and uses toughness (vv. 17-21). **In their pride** the Corinthians were arrogantly presuming the full right *in this life* to things promised in part at the present, but only fully realized in the coming of Christ’s kingdom (v. 8). They were drawing their values from the false standards or fallacious teaching born of the spirit of this age, forgetting that this era’s values stand judged under the Cross of Christ. The apostles, on the other hand, lived like **fools** from any other perspective than faith in Christ. Paul’s life-style was ridiculous by the world’s opinion (vv. 9-13).

4:9 In contrast to the smug self-satisfaction of the Corinthian Christians, Paul uses a vivid metaphor to paint the actual condition of the apostles. **Displayed us, the apostles, last**, is a pitiful analogy drawn from the cruelty of

⁵ Bailey, K. E. (2011). [*Paul through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*](#) (pp. 140–165). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

Living Scripture
Week 6 – 1 Corinthians 4
<http://www.realchurch.org/wednesdaynight/>

the Roman arena. The apostles were like gladiators fighting to the death, or like criminals thrown to the lions, made a spectacle as the grand finale to a day's sport in a colosseum.

4:15 I have begotten you: Because Paul founded the church, he had a special fatherly role in the life of the people.

4:17 Timothy will prepare them for Paul's future coming (see 16:10, 11).

4:20 See section 6 of Truth-In-Action at the end of 1 Cor.

4:20 Kingdom of God: God's present reign in Christ through the lives of believers is backed up by the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, which carries a moral authority that Paul can use if necessary.⁶

⁶ Hayford, J. W. (Ed.). (1997). [*Spirit filled life study Bible*](#) (electronic ed., 1 Co 4:1–20). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.