

THE CHURCH THAT CHANGED A CONTINENT AND THE MAN WHO LED IT
FIRST CORINTHIANS

STUDY NUMBER 4
Wednesday, May 22, 2013

I Corinthians Chapter 4
“Great Expectations”

1 1 Cor. 4:1-21

2 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the
3 mysteries of God. [2] Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found
4 faithful. [3] But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of
5 man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. [4] For I know nothing by myself;
6 yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. [5] Therefore
7 judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the
8 hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and
9 then shall every man have praise of God. [6] And these things, brethren, I have in a
10 figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us
11 not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for
12 one against another. [7] For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast
13 thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as
14 if thou hadst not received it? [8] Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as
15 kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with
16 you. [9] For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed
17 to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. [10]
18 We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are
19 strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. [11] Even unto this present hour we
20 both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain
21 dwellingplace; [12] And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we
22 bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: [13] Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as
23 the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. [14] I write
24 not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. [15] For though
25 ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in
26 Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. [16] Wherefore I beseech you,
27 be ye followers of me. [17] For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my
28 beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my
29 ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. [18] Now some are
30 puffed up, as though I would not come to you. [19] But I will come to you shortly, if

1 **the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the**
2 **power. [20] For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. [21] What will ye?**
3 **shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?**

4
5 I truly love this chapter. We see into the great heart of Paul. As the Word tells us of
6 Elijah (James 5:17), he was a man such as we are, subject to all the nuances of life. Well,
7 so was Paul and we see that in this fourth chapter.

8
9

I. THE CHALLENGE

10
11 We are to live lives above and beyond reproach so that when the citizens around us
12 behold our lives, they (our lives) will reflect the honor of Christ.

13
14 1. Paul claims that all of us are **MINISTERS**. You may not be a pastor, or evangelist,
15 but you **ARE** a minister of Christ, a representative of His Kingdom. The way you and I
16 live our lives is a sermon to all those around us.

17
18 2. Paul also claims that we are “stewards” of the mysteries (or truths) of God Himself.
19 In Paul’s day, a steward was the person who managed the household for its owner. He
20 was over all the day-to-day activity. One commentator reminds us that the steward gave
21 out necessities to the people who lived there as they needed them and so we who are
22 stewards of Christ are to be able to dispense the Word of God - and back it with our lives
23 - to those around us.

24
25 3. The primary value for which God will hold us responsible is **FAITHFULNESS**. 1
26 Cor. 4:2 **Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.**

27
28 While it is marvelous when we are **SUCCESSFUL** - and we should certainly strive to be
29 successful in our God-given callings, God will hold us responsible for our
30 **FAITHFULNESS** to that call.

31
32 We often grow weary or get wounded or disillusioned with our call. We are to stay
33 faithful, no matter the circumstance. Athletes tell us they often work “through the pain”
34 of their endeavor, thinking only of the finish line or the score of the game. In such a
35 way, we followers of Christ are to “work through” all the negatives and keep our eyes on
36 Christ and keep going: Hebrews 12:1-2 **Wherefore seeing we also are compassed**
37 **about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin**
38 **which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before**
39 **us, [2] Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that**

1 was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the
2 right hand of the throne of God.

3
4 ON THIS MATTER OF ... JUDGING

5
6 1. While Paul wanted to be loved and appreciated, if possible, by those around him, he
7 continued faithfully in God's work whether his constituents approved or not. He tells
8 us of several courts of opinion:

9
10 A. There is the court of opinion of those around him. Here is Paul's feeling about
11 that: I Cor. 4:3 (Phillips) "But, as a matter of fact, it matters very little to me what you,
12 or any man, thinks of me."

13
14 Do not misconstrue that to think Paul was huffy or insensitive. He cared desperately
15 that he did what God called him to do. When the "headquarters" church in Jerusalem
16 held him at arms' length for years, he just kept faithfully taking the Gospel to Gentiles.
17 It did not matter to Paul whether James or Peter - or anyone else for that matter - did not
18 like it. He would be true to his high calling.

19
20 The man or woman of God, of course always wanting the best of relationships with
21 everyone possible, will not be deterred in his or her mission when others don't like it. As
22 Joshua said long ago, (Joshua 24:15) **And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord,**
23 **choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served**
24 **that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye**
25 **dwelt: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**

26
27 B. There is the court of opinion of your own conscience.

28
29 *The greatest preacher of all time belongs to no particular age or class or nation. He is*
30 *as ageless as time itself, as old as the human race. He is as impartial as the grace of*
31 *God; he plays no favorites. He is as universal as sin and salvation, and he operates the*
32 *world around in all nations and in the lives of all men. His ministry began in the*
33 *Garden of Eden. He was heard crying out in protest against the spilling of the blood*
34 *of righteous Abel. He preached to the household of Jacob. He was introduced into*
35 *David's palace. He stood to accuse Judas and Pilate, and he has been preaching ever*
36 *since. He will continue to preach until the end of time and beyond time into eternity.*
37 *His message and its effectiveness will in no way diminish with the passing centuries,*
38 *nor will his power and ability fail when the crumbling mountains have sought the*
39 *plains. When lesser evangelists have weakened and died, this mighty ambassador will*
40 *be as strong as when he first began. I am talking about CONSCIENCE. His*

1 *audience is limited only by the number of people who have been born into the world.*
2 *He has preached to every rational man; his pulpit is the world. He goes everywhere*
3 *man goes. He finds his place in the office, the school, the factory, the field, the forest,*
4 *on the high seas, under the seas - everywhere. And he is tireless; he does not feel the*
5 *need for rest. He does not preach just an hour or two but every night - night and day.*
6 *Every week, every month, every year of your life he will be accusing you or else*
7 *excusing you.*

8 JACK SHULER / SHULER'S SHORT SERMONS / PAGES 8 - 9 / BACK TO THE BIBLE PUBLISHERS
9

10 While all those things Jack wrote about conscience are certainly true, there should be this
11 added caveat: Conscience can be 'seared' so that it no longer rebukes and corrects. But
12 followers of Jesus should have a sanctified conscience, that is, always sensitive to the
13 Holy Spirit who reproves and corrects us day by day.

14
15 C. The main court - and this one should jolt us awake - is God Himself. As Paul
16 wrote in verse 4, "...he that judgeth me is the LORD."

17
18 A holy fear of the Lord helps keep us on track. Unfortunately, the whole concept of
19 God has been so lowered, even in many churches, that men have made God no more than
20 their "buddy," their "pal." The concept of God's anger and holiness have been swept
21 under the rug in some misguided effort to get the world to "like us."

22
23 The Christian will not be judged by God for his or her sins; that's covered by the blood of
24 Jesus. But the believers will be judged for their stewardship. All our physical
25 possessions, our bodies, our material resources, our giving, these are the things that will
26 be presented at the Judgment Seat of Christ. How vital is it then that we be faithful
27 stewards!

28
29 D. It is not our place then to make ourselves judges of other people. As J. Vernon
30 McGee once pointed out: IF WE SIT IN JUDGMENT ON SOMEONE ELSE, WE ARE
31 TAKING GOD'S PLACE.

32
33 So - we do not use as an excuse for unfaithfulness the LACK on someone else's part.
34 When well-known leaders have failed in the cause of Christ, some have dropped out of
35 church, citing hypocrisy as their reasoning. However, good friend, if a hypocrite is
36 standing between you and God, that hypocrite is closer to God than you are! Think about
37 it! So stop judging other people. Don't drop out because others fail. They are not
38 your judge or measuring stick. Christ is. So keep your eyes on Him Who has never
39 failed, nor ever will.

40
41 Judging others is a sin. So don't do it.

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

Sometimes Christianity is made into some spooky, touchy-feely exhibit, taking the mind or brain out of the equation. Such should not be. Christianity has to do with thought, with reason and with applying principles to your own life. Paul demands that of his readers, and rightly so.

In verses 6 and 7 he makes this point: Everything you have was given to you as a gift from God. Me, too. None of us have any validation for boasting. The truth is, the more gifts of God you have, the more humble you should be because you are going to have to answer to Him for more than others might. The more you will have to answer for. If you have ever looked upon someone who had many more talents than you, and you felt envious, you might want to reconsider. That person will have a lot more to answer for at the Judgment Seat than you do. TO WHOM MUCH IS GIVEN MUCH IS REQUIRED - Luke 12:48.

MOVE OVER, ROCKEFELLER

One of the lyrics of "The Sunny Side Of The Street" is: "You'd be rich as Rockefeller." Well, according to Paul, you are very wealthy.

1 Cor. 4:8

Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

Poets and lyricists have waxed positively eloquently about our "riches," but their words pale into insignificance when one takes true stock of our wealth in Christ Jesus. By all eternal standards our wealth in Him is just simply beyond measure. Not wealth on this earth perhaps, but for all time and eternity - yes, indeed, move over, Rockefeller.

Do you ever take time to count your blessings? It might be very helpful for you to take some paper and pencil and begin to itemize all your blessings. An old hymn says:

*Count your blessings / name them one by one /
Count your blessings / see what God hath done /
Count your blessings / name them one by one /
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done!*

But lest we get carried away, let us also be apprised of the cost of discipleship, of bearing the cross. Paul's list here is both heart-breaking and attention-gathering:

1 THE COST OF FOLLOWING CHRIST

2
3 Salvation is free, to be sure; but discipleship is NOT free. In verse 10-13, Paul listed
4 just some of the things that caused him pain or concern day after day:

- 5
6 1. Weak (in body but not in spirit)
7 2. Despised by many
8 3. Hunger and thirst
9 4. Lack of necessities such as needed clothing
10 5. Buffeted - which included being stoned and left for dead and beaten many times
11 6. No home
12 7. Persecuted
13 8. Often defamed - accused of things he never did
14 9. Being considered by some as the filth of the world
15

16 Now that certainly interferes with some of today's teaching, doesn't it – that once you
17 become a follower of Jesus every prayer is answered, you live in plenty, and never have a
18 problem. The Apostle Paul evangelized Turkey and Europe and paid a severe price for
19 doing so. Why would he do so? Because he (1) loved Jesus and (2) loved the people
20 he was trying to reach.

21
22 1 Cor. 4:14-15

23 **I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. [15] For**
24 **though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers:**
25 **for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.**
26

27 Paul reminded the Corinthians that he was not only someone who brought them the
28 Gospel, but considered them his spiritual children.

29
30 I received a letter from a death row inmate not long ago who opened his writing with, "I
31 consider you my father....." That's about as fine an earthly reward as one can get, in my
32 opinion. To him I wasn't just some guy who came to the row from time to time, but
33 someone he knew loved him as a son.
34

35 That the relationship Paul had to the people of Corinth who had accepted Christ as
36 Savior. Paul loved them and gave himself for them. Instructors are a dime a dozen
37 unless they teach with a passion, that of a father for a child. Then their instruction, their
38 teaching burns in the heart of the listener. I had that relationship with several powerful
39 teachers - a relationship I will always treasure. It is a rare and wonderful gift for any
40 person to cherish.

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TIMOTHY

Because of Paul's love for the Corinthians church, he did not leave them leaderless but sent Timothy to encourage and help them.

Paul apparently met young Timothy on his first missions journey across Turkey (Asia Minor, as it's known in the New Testament). Timothy had a Godly heritage: 2 Tim. 1:5 **When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.** Oh, what a "step up" we give to children by bring them up in the nurture of the Lord! His mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois were Jews and his father, about whom we know little, was a Greek.

Timothy was a student of scripture. 2 Tim. 3:15 **And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.** I don't ever remember missing a single Sunday of Sunday School in my "growing-up" years. And our home was filled with Christian literature and music. What a foundation! Oh, parent, give your child a head start in life! Teach them about God!

Timothy was Paul's child in the faith, so to speak. Note in verse 17 he called Timothy "his beloved son." And the last thing Paul ever wrote, 2 Timothy 4, was addressed to Timothy, whom he implored to come to his prison in Rome, if possible, before he was executed. Paul trusted Timothy so fully that he gave him a number of difficult tasks.

Tradition indicates that Timothy, too, was martyred for his faith in Christ. His death came while Domitian was still the bloody emperor of Rome. It was excellent for the spiritual health of the Corinthian church that Paul sent Timothy to them, guiding them through difficult times and political transitions.

PAUL PROMISES TO RETURN TO THE CORINTHIANS - IF HE CAN

But, he wrote, how I come - whether as a loving father or a tough teacher - depends upon how you receive this letter I am sending and upon your attitude when I arrive. Paul asks, "Will I come with a rod of correction? Or can I come in love in the spirit of meekness?"

When we meet in two weeks we will come to chapters five and six in which Paul must deal with the Corinthians in matters of morality. They are chapters most appropriate for these days in which we currently live.