

August 27, 2023

“Judgment in the Kingdom”  
Lesson 3

I Cor. 4:1-6, 17-21

**Intro**

Christianity calls on its followers to emulate Jesus Christ. This means we copy His actions and make them our own. One of His most outstanding qualities is His humility and willingness to submit His will to the Father's. Church members are called to submit to church leaders (Heb. 13:17), and those leaders in turn are called to set an example of humility (I Cor. 11:1). If we follow their examples, then we seek to submit to one another in the church. We are even called to submit to the world's authorities (Rom. 13:5) while at the same time rejecting the world's principles (Col. 2:20-23).

It is very possible for Christians to have an incomplete understanding and practice of following and submitting to both Jesus and to other believers. We count on other believers to help us overcome our mistakes and our misunderstandings. Identifying those areas involves judgment (Matt. 12:33; I Cor. 5). Our text today deals with this paradox of submitting to others while pointing out areas of growth.

**Read I Cor. 4:1-6**

1. vs. 1: Paul addresses two aspects of how the Corinthians see him
  - First, he says the Corinthians should regard he and Apollos as servants of Christ
    - A servant is not greater than the one he serves
    - Paul is acknowledging that he himself is not the highest; he is a servant
  - Second, he notes that the message he brings is a trust given him by God
    - It is a mystery which God has waited until this time to make known
    - Paul's words aren't his own wisdom, but a mystery entrusted to him to deliver
    - To be entrusted with something is to be a steward of someone else's possession
  
2. vs. 2: Paul next notes that being entrusted with something means dealing with faithfulness
  - One must have shown some degree of faithfulness to be given the trust
  - One must continue to show faithfulness in carrying out the next task
  - Paul is setting himself up as an example for the Corinthians to model themselves after
  
3. vs. 3-4: Paul's comment about "not caring" if he is judged by them shows that some were judging him
  - This, however, doesn't affect his purpose
  - He says his conscience is clear towards God
    - That is the only approval he needs
  - Paul, however, understands that a clear conscience "does not make me innocent"
    - He recognizes that he does wrong at times, and that he has faults in God's eyes
    - Paul has a clear conscience because he continually seeks God's forgiveness
    - God knows Paul's heart, and how Paul deals with his daily life
  
4. vs. 5: When Paul says "judge nothing" he also adds some conditions to this
  - First, he says judge nothing "before the appointed time"
    - There is a time to deal with everything; it isn't always now, or not always apparent

Paul also notes that some things are currently “hidden in darkness”

Everything isn’t currently known to the degree it needs to be to judge rightly  
He mentions “the motives of the heart”

We can’t see others’ motives, nor can they see ours

This is another good reason to reserve judgement until the best time

Paul here reminds that at His coming, Jesus will judge and reward all

Paul entrusts himself entirely to God’s evaluation, not his or people’s

5. vs. 6: Paul says he “applied these things to myself and Apollos”

He’s not asking them to do anything spiritually that he hasn’t also applied to his own life

Since Paul and Apollos are not “taking sides”, neither should the people

The people in chap. 1 are chastised for setting up one teacher as better than others

They were “puffed up” in their choices

They thought one choice made them better than others with another choice

Their pride is at the root of many of the problems the Corinthian church was having

### **Read 1 Cor. 4:17-21**

6. vs. 17: Paul’s letters were his contacts points for when he couldn’t actually be with the churches

He usually sent those letters with close, trusted members, in this case, with Timothy

Timothy could explain, encourage, and observe to report back to Paul

Paul calls Timothy “faithful in the Lord”

This means he, like Paul, is walking in the “way of life in Christ Jesus”

Timothy will act like Paul would have acted had he been there

7. vs. 18: Paul’s comment here is more about the Corinthians’ behavior than if he will return to them

He’s saying, “You’re acting the way you are because you don’t think I’ll be coming back”

The Corinthians thought Paul was “timid” and “unimpressive” (see 2 Cor. 10:1)

If he’s not coming back, they are free to do whatever they want

They can be “arrogant”—the phrase “puffed up” is also used here at times

Instead of growing in their faith, they are looking for excuses to do what they want

They aren’t just denying Paul’s strength and authority, but Christ’s

8. vs. 19: Paul says he want to come see them, but the situation is in God’s hands alone, not his  
“if the Lord is willing”

This reminds us of Jesus’ phrase, “Not my will, but Yours be done”

If he is able to return to them, what will he find there?

He seems to think the arrogant now will still be arrogant in their words then

The bigger question for Paul is one of *power*

Will they be speaking/acting in their own power?

Paul relies on the power of the gospel and the Spirit

Paul knows this is the bigger issue

10. vs. 20: Paul develops this idea about power in vs. 20

God's kingdom isn't one of talk—it's based on God's power in all its forms  
Human talk doesn't compete or accomplish what God's power alone can  
Kingdom power begins with the resurrection of Jesus  
Kingdom power comes through the Holy Spirit in believers' lives  
This kind of power is the opposite of the pride and arrogance shown by the Corinthians

11. vs. 21: Paul finishes this section with some options for the Corinthian believers

- a) They can correct their own attitudes and actions before Paul returns
- b) Paul can correct their attitudes and behaviors when he returns
- c) Paul could be unsuccessful in correcting their attitudes and behaviors when he returns

This last one would likely result in some being removed from fellowship  
The choice is theirs to make about what happens next

In the letter of 2 Corinthians, we see how they responded to the letter and Paul's visit

Paul talks of "another painful visit"—this 2<sup>nd</sup> visit was challenging  
He also talks of how some repented of their behaviors (2 Cor. 2)  
He speaks of his joy that they are growing in their faith  
Paul's words and his visit enabled those who were willing to grow spiritually

Application: Paul's letter here shows us an important aspect of what God's kingdom is like. God is the ultimate judge; all His people answer to His will. This means pointing out uncorrected attitudes and actions seen in fellow believers. However, these followers are also to act humbly and lovingly toward others, helping to nurture each other toward greater Christlikeness. This happens as each of us acknowledges our own weaknesses and failures, and submit willingly to others who are seeking to help us grow.

Prayer: Father God, please forgive us of any arrogance in our thoughts, words, or actions. Help us to remember that our purpose is to serve You and Your will, not our own, and to serve others in helping all to come to know You better and more intimately. In Jesus' name, Amen.