

There was a problem plaguing the Corinthian church. It had to do with their attitude towards leadership, namely church leadership. Specifically, some were undermining Paul and his leadership.

The Background:

--Paul came to Corinth and ministered for 1 and ½ years (Acts 19). God used him to lead many to Christ and establish a church.

--Paul then moved on to continue his missionary task elsewhere. During the years that followed, the Corinthian church began to experience problems—as all churches do.

--Divisions developed in the church. Why? Some people in Corinth began to undercut Paul as a leader. They had to do that to justify their other ungodly teachings. So to promote their own agendas, they attacked and misrepresented Paul. And he wasn't there to defend himself. "Paul said he was coming back, but he hasn't yet. He's undependable. He is a weak leader. You can't trust him. All he thinks about is himself. Don't follow him. You need a new kind of leader, someone strong, someone that can get things done. And we just happen to know some people who qualify... *Us*."

--Paul caught wind of this internal attack when some from Chloe's household came to him and informed him of the conflict. And he responded, not for selfish reasons, not because his "feelings" were hurt.

Discuss: Why then did he write the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians?

By the way, the attack on church leadership is one of Satan's most effective ploys to hinder churches. What he did in Corinth he has repeated hundreds and thousands of times to this very day.

Today, society's view of leadership is very low—leaders of all types. That mindset has infiltrated the church, too. "No one has a right to tell me what to do! My opinion's as good as anybody else's, including the man who's preaching from that black book." We need to work hard at developing a biblical view of church leadership. 1 Corinthians 4 can certainly help us...

Review from Last Time: 1 Corinthians 4:1-7

The Need: A Proper View of Ourselves and Others

Just who are we? If a church is to be healthy, it's vital that its members obtain and demonstrate a proper view of themselves and each other.

I. Here's how we should view ourselves and others (1-2).

A. We are servants.

B. We are stewards.

1. *We've been given a trust.*

2. *We must be faithful.*

II. Here's the difference it will make (3-5).

A. We won't live to please people (3a).

B. We won't live to please ourselves (3b-4).

C. We will live to please Christ (5).

1. *He is the judge (4b).*

2. *He will judge when He returns (5).*

III. Here's what we must do about it (6-7).

A. We need to apply these truths to our lives (6).

B. We need to live with three questions in mind (7).

1. *Who made me different from the next person?*
2. *What do I have that I did not receive?*
3. *If everything I have is a gift, what right do I have to boast?*

At this point in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul gets very specific in dealing with the mentality of those who have undermined his leadership in Corinth.

I. Paul confronts wrong thinking about leadership (8-13).

He begins by talking about how the Corinthians viewed themselves. He uses sarcasm to open their eyes...

A. He exposes the “truth” about the Corinthians (8).

Q: How did the Corinthians perceive themselves?

1. *You have all you want.*
2. *You think you are rich.*
3. *You act like you are kings.*

Remember, Paul is saying this because to show a contrast. In the first part of chapter 4 he’s already expressed his view of himself and ministry. He sees himself as a servant and steward.

Notice his sarcasm at the end of verse 9. What did he say he wished?

This is a critical section for the American church. We seem to prize ourselves, to have lofty views of who we are what we deserve in the church...

B. He clarifies the truth about the apostles (9-13).

In the following verses it might seem like Paul is complaining. He’s not. He’s contrasting the erroneous views of the Christian life and of Christian leadership possessed by the Corinthians, and those demonstrated by the true leaders of the first church, those commissioned by Jesus Himself—the apostles.

Q: What kind of treatment did Paul and the other apostles receive? Paul gives a list of 16 or so things that were true of them.

1. *We’re at the end of the line (9).*

Q: Who did Paul say put them there?

God did. God’s ways are not man’s ways. God doesn’t use the high profile, the powerful, to accomplish His work. He does just the opposite. He uses the unlikely. And then He allows the unlikely to experience the unthinkable. And through them He does the unimaginable. He builds His church, all to His glory.

2. *We’re treated like condemned criminals.*

Q: What illustration does Paul use here?

3. *We’ve been made a spectacle.*

Q: Before whom?

In the next three traits, he again uses sarcasm to contrast the Corinthians with himself...

4. *Unlike you, we are fools for Christ (10).*

Were the Corinthians truly “wise?” No, they just thought they were.

Q: What does Paul mean by calling himself a “fool?”

5. *Unlike you, we are weak.*

Q: Weak in what sense?

6. *Unlike you, we are dishonored.*

Q: Dishonored by whom?

7. *We go hungry and thirsty (11).*

It’s not an easy life to serve Christ.

8. *We are in rags.*

Kind of goes against the “health and wealth” gospel being preaching today, doesn’t it?

Discuss: What is the “health and wealth” gospel? It’s basically another rendition of what Paul confronted in Corinth...

9. *We are brutally treated.*

10. *We are homeless.*

11. *We work hard to support ourselves (12).*

We “use our own hands,” Paul says. He was a tentmaker. Remember, the critics accused Paul of being self-seeking. He shows just how un-selfseeking he was right here. He was far from being a “taker,” which is exactly what some of the self-promoted new leaders in Corinth were.

The next three traits show just how supernatural the Christian life is. We can’t do these apart from the power of God...

12. *We bless when we are cursed.*

Q: What does that mean, and why do we do it? See Jesus’ words in Matt 5:43-44

13. *We endure when we are persecuted.*

14. *We answer kindly when we are slandered (13).*

By those outside the church, and by those inside it.

Discuss: This is one thing that makes Christianity so magnetic to the non-believer. How so?

Here’s the bottom line. Two things...

15. *We are the scum of the earth.*

16. *We are the refuse of the world.*

Any volunteers for Christianity?!

Discuss: What’s Paul’s point? Why did he list these things? Actually, he tells us why in the next section...

II. Paul calls for change (14-17).

Paul didn’t write this to “shame” the Corinthians, but to “warn” them. He had earned the right to speak so bluntly to them because they were his “children.”

A. The Corinthians needed to change their view of him (14-15).

1. *You may have many spiritual caretakers.*

2. *You have only one spiritual father.*

Q: Why does Paul remind them of this truth?

B. The Corinthians needed to change their view of the Christian life (16-17).

1. Choose to imitate Paul (16).

Discuss: From the lips of some people, this could sound like a very self-inflated request. Why is it not so coming from Paul?

What is he really inviting them to do? He's inviting them to join him in experiencing the 16 things he just listed. That's what *real* Christianity is all about. That's what should be *normal*.

Discuss: Our view of Christianity today in America is very skewed. What are some ways this is true?

2. Be willing to receive instruction on how to do it (17).

Q: What did Paul say he was going to do to help the church?

Q: What would Timothy do upon arrival?

Think about why Paul forewarned the church of Timothy's coming. They weren't going to change merely by "praying about it." They needed help. They needed a teachable spirit so that when Timothy came and taught them about true servanthood—about how to imitate Paul—they wouldn't resist the teaching but receive it.

Note: Don't miss the implication here that a church is supposed to give primary attention to teaching and applying God's Word. It's not enough merely to be a "soul winning" church. Why not?

But Paul wasn't going to leave the resolution of this problem solely up to Timothy...

III. Paul insists he will take action to bring about change (18-21).

A. He identifies the problem (18).

- 1. There were arrogant people in the church.*
- 2. They were undermining Paul's leadership.*

B. He revealed what he intended to do about it (19).

- 1. He planned to come.*
- 2. He planned to expose the critics for what they were.*

C. He gave biblical support for his actions (20).

- 1. God's kingdom isn't about talk.*
That's what the critics were all about. All *talk*.
- 2. God's kingdom is about power.*

Q: What kind of power? The kind exhibited in the 16 traits. God takes no name people, and uses them to advance His kingdom.

D. He offered an invitation (21).

- 1. Do you want me to come with a whip?*
Q: What does this question indicate about Paul?
- 2. Or, do you want me to come in gentleness?*