

# *Discovering God's Wisdom*

## STUDIES IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

### **Lesson 4** **1 Corinthians 4**

#### ***Searching the Scriptures*** ***for hidden treasure***

***"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." Psalm 119:162***

Chapter 4 actually finishes up the first section of Paul's letter to the Corinthians, which began in chapter 1 with his appeal for unity. We remember the problem was that the Corinthian church had divided itself into parties, some for Paul, some for Apollos, some for Peter. Those for Paul were, in essence, looking down on those for Apollos. Those for Apollos and Peter would have been looking down on those for Paul. All in all, it was wrong—whether they thought Paul was the best or the worst! In chapter 4, he reminds them again of who he is—on the one hand, simply a servant of Christ—on the other, the very father of their faith.

#### ***First Day: Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5***

1. Paul uses 2 key words to express how he sees his ministry. Consider the meaning of his words and see if you can define what he is communicating about himself. (You may look these words up in a regular dictionary or a Bible concordance or dictionary for a clearer meaning.)
  - *Servant(s)* of Christ
  
  - *Steward(s)* of the mysteries of God

Even these words give us a sense of the **humility** of the calling. The word *servant* speaks of a subordinate who waits to accomplish the commands of his superior (in this case, Jesus Christ). We also see the **high** calling of his ministry. The word *steward* speaks of a high-ranking servant entrusted with the oversight of a household, managing and distributing the household resources (in this case, the very mysteries of God!).

2. What does Paul say is the particular requirement for his position? v. 2
  - a. To whom would the steward be accountable—those he distributed the household goods to, or the master of the house?
  
  - b. How did Paul explain his perspective on this in verses 3-4?

- c. Why do you think Paul said this to them?
3. Paul says, “*Therefore judge nothing before the time.*”
- a. When was “the time” Paul was referring to?
  - b. What would the Lord do at that time?
  - c. What would be the result?
4. It’s interesting that Paul speaks of *each one’s (man’s) praise* coming to him from God. He doesn’t say some men’s praise, but each man’s praise. How do Paul’s words in Romans 14:4 agree with this thought?
- a. How does this encourage you today?

### *Making It Personal...*

We live in a world where, for most of us, it matters very much what other people think. Yet, at the same time, we are very quick to share what we think about others!

5. How has it been a problem for you to be too concerned about human judgments?
- a. Why, again, does Paul not concern himself with the judgments of others?
  - b. How might it help you to apply Paul’s perspective to your own life?
6. On the other hand, can you completely divorce yourself from the judgments of others? Share your thoughts on how you might maintain a healthy balance.

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today’s passage in a couple of sentences.

### *Pearl of Great Price*

**“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”** 1 Corinthians 11:1 This is your memory verse—begin memorizing it today!

**Second Day: Read 1 Corinthians 4:6-13**

This passage is a difficult one to clearly understand, as Paul uses irony to make his point to the Corinthians. What does stand out in this portion of Scripture is the fact that, although we regard the position of Paul the apostle as of the highest order, in his day, it was one of degradation and lowliness. What an amazing thing to realize!

1. Each of the following verses have adjectives describing how the Corinthians seemed to see themselves. See if you can locate these adjectives:

*verse 6b*

*verse 7 (NASB, NLT best)*

*verse 8*

2. Use the adjectives from the following verses to describe Paul and the apostles:

*verse 9*

*verse 10*

3. In verse 10, note the contrast Paul sets up between the Corinthians and the apostles, in order to point out the foolishness of their thinking.

*The Apostles*

*The Corinthians*

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- 
- 

4. From verses 11-12a, describe reality for the apostles.
  - a. Are these the conditions you would expect for the apostles—the very ministers of the mysteries of God? Have you seen this to be true of ministers in today’s world? Think of any examples you can.

Although Paul used these statements to make a point to the Corinthians of the mistakeness of their boasting, still he presented the truth as it was. And yet, Paul walks in the Spirit not the flesh...

5. From verses 12b-13:
  - How did the apostles handle being reviled?
  - How did they handle persecution?
  - How did they handle being defamed (slandered)?
  - How did Paul describe what they became in order to fulfill their ministry?

*Making It Personal...*

The Corinthians thought too highly of themselves, but not according to reality from God’s point of view, only according to their own evaluation of things based on the wisdom of the world at that time. How embarrassed they must have been when they read the words Paul wrote.

6. Do you think in general Christians today are more like the Corinthians, in all their glory, or like Paul in his degradation?
  - a. Have you ever found yourself looking down on someone less fortunate than yourself? How would you feel if you found out that person was sacrificially doing the work of the Lord?
  - b. What does the person who is proud in this world fail to realize? (See v. 7)
  - c. What do you have that you have not received? If you are going to boast, what does Paul suggest that you boast in? See 1 Corinthians 1:30-31

### *Digging Deeper*

Paul's description of the apostles reminds us of the description of another, namely, Jesus Christ who said, "*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*" (Luke 9:58). The Bible also speaks of Him as being "*despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*" (Isaiah 53:3a). How quickly we forget our example. How easily we are led to think that our lot should be somehow different, and definitely better.

- ❖ In the following verses Jesus Himself gives a picture of the one who would follow in His steps:

*Matthew 5:3*

*Matthew 5:4*

*Matthew 16:24*

*Matthew 16:25*

*Matthew 19:21*

*Luke 9:62*

*Paul's thoughts—Philippians 1:29*

*Peter's thoughts—1 Peter 2:21*

*The apostles' example—Acts 5:41*

*Jesus' example—1 Peter 2:23-24*

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

### **Third Day: Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21**

1. What gave Paul the right to admonish the Corinthians?
  - verse 14*
  - verse 15 (explain this verse)*

2. Because of his position in their lives, how was he able to exhort them? v. 16
  - a. What further reason did Paul have for being able to exhort them in this manner? 1 Corinthians 11:1
  - b. If they began to obey this exhortation, how would their behavior be changed? (Remember what we studied yesterday.) What a great perspective this was for them!
  
3. What provision was Paul making that would help the Corinthians in their effort to *imitate* him and why would this make a difference? v. 17
  
4. In what way were some of the Corinthians being arrogant about Paul? v. 18  
What kinds of things might they have been saying?
  - a. What was it Paul's plan to do? What would he then learn?
  - b. How did Paul want to come to them? (Remember verse 14.)

### *Making It Personal...*

Paul was able to say to the Corinthians, "*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*" Paul not only shared the truth with his words, but he also lived it with his life.

5. Would you be able to tell another person that they *should* imitate you? Consider an area you would need to change in order to be able to exhort another person in this manner.

### *Digging Deeper*

- ❖ Find out who Timothy was by looking at the following verses:

*Timothy the young man:* Acts 16:1-2; 2 Timothy 1:5

*In ministry with Paul:* Acts 16:3a

*To Philippi: (they)* Acts 16:6-12

*To Thessalonica: (they)* Acts 17:1

*To Berea: (with Paul and Silas)* Acts 17:10; 13-15;

*At Corinth: (with Paul)* Acts 18:1; 4-5

*To Ephesus:* Acts 18:18-19

*At Ephesus: 1 Timothy 1:3*

*In Paul's heart:* Romans 16:21; 1 Cor.4:17; 16:10-11; 1 Tim. 1:1-2 and 2 Tim. 1:1-2

*Last personal written words of Paul (to Timothy):* 2 Tim. 4:9; 13; 21

- ❖ Do your best to summarize today's passage in a couple of sentences.

**Fourth Day:**

**Deeper Discoveries**

*This portion of the lesson will take a closer look at some of the words in the chapter. You will need to have your tools—or resources at hand: more than one Bible translation, a dictionary or Bible dictionary, concordance, atlas, and encyclopedia. (If you don't have all of these, simply use what you do have to enrich your learning.)*

Using the tools you have at hand, do some digging into the following terms. Start with your dictionary (or Bible dictionary), and then look up the references to add to your understanding. If you have additional resources, you may want to keep digging (making notes in the margins). After you've completed the investigative process, write a definition in your own words. Your investigation in today's lesson will lay the groundwork for tomorrow's study, so be as thorough as you can in your research.

**Faithful (4:2)**

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? Hebrews 2:17; Matthew 24:45-46; 25:21, 23; Luke 16:10; Revelation 2:10 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Think above (beyond) (4:6)**

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? Romans 12:3, 16; 1 Corinthians 8:2; 10:12; Galatians 6:3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Puffed up** (4:6, 18, 19)

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? Colossians 2:18; 2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Corinthians 8:1; 13:4 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Fools** (4:10)

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? 1 Corinthians 1:25, 27; 3:18 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Imitate (be followers)** (4:16)

Dictionary definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What does the Bible have to say? 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7a; 2:14; Hebrews 6:12; 1 Peter 3:13 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

❖ Write your own definition: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***Fifth Day:***

***Heartsearch***

*Are you walking worthy of your high calling? Are you applying the wisdom of God to your daily life? Get ready for some self-discovery! This portion of the lesson will give you the opportunity to examine your heart, express your mind, and experience your lesson, by applying what you are learning to everyday circumstances.*

**Becoming Spiritually Wise**

***“For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.”***

1 Corinthians 4:20

Pride is a very destructive thing in the life of the believer and in the church; but particularly concerning the ministry, there is no place for it in the life of God’s servant. If the greatest apostle who ever lived—Paul—considered himself a fool and on display, where does that leave the rest of us? If the rest of the apostles were the leaders of the church, but were debased and despised in the eyes of the world, what did that say about the boasting Corinthians?

We are learning in our lesson this week that we cannot measure ourselves or others by anything besides the standard that God has laid out in His Word. The Corinthians were *puffed up*—wise in their own estimation. They were looking to and depending on the world for their wisdom, but in God’s eyes they were actually fools. Their religion was in words only; they had no problem bragging, but they were unable to back up their talk with their walk.

Paul emphasized in verse twenty that, *“the kingdom of God consists of and is based on not talk but power, moral power and excellence of soul”*(Amplified Bible).

1. Can you think of one of the ways that pride has damaged the church as a whole?
  - a. How about the church you attend?

The sin of pride had convinced the Corinthian believers that Paul’s bark was worse than his bite. They did not immediately take to heart Paul’s words, nor did they feel accountable for their words, as we read in his second letter to them.

2. Read 2 Corinthians 10:8-18 and answer the following questions.
  - a. From these verses, what was their perception about Paul through his letters?
  - b. Summarize Paul’s focus, his goal.

- c. What familiar words do we read in verse 17? (See again 1:31.)
  - d. According to verse 18, what happens when people boast about themselves? Who then is to be commended?
3. Paul emphasizes in his letter that his words did not stand in the wisdom of men, but rather in the power of God. Why do you think this was so?
- a. Would you say that your *walk* matches your *talk*? Are there some changes that need to be made?

Don't worry about tuning in to what those around you are saying. The only way to become *spiritually wise* is to become a *fool* in the eyes of the world. Wouldn't you rather have the commendation of the Lord rather than men?

4. Ponder for a moment the words of Jim Elliot, who was martyred for his faith: "*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*" Personalize this quote by rewriting it in your own words.

***Heartsearch:*** Briefly look back over your *entire lesson* before filling in the following.

❖ *Examine your heart*

What has God put His finger on through your study and brought to light in a new way? (What did you learn about yourself?)

❖ *Express your mind*

What change has this week's study brought about in your thought process? What difference will this make in how you view your current circumstances?

❖ *Experience your lesson*

What nugget of wisdom from your lesson do you plan to apply to your life?

*Sixth Day:*

## ***Laying Up Treasure***

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.  
For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:19-21*

The highest calling of the believer, and the most important way to lay up treasure in heaven, is through intercessory prayer. You will want to give thoughtful consideration to what you record on this page, as it will be the basis for your prayer during group time. The format for this day of your lesson is based upon the ACTS method of prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. In addition to these four, there is space provided for you to keep track of answered prayers, people and things you want to pray for in the coming week, and also a place to write out this week’s Scripture verse from memory.

Using the lesson as your focal point, write out your prayer for each of the following:

*I praise God for* (an aspect of His marvelous character) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I confess to God that I* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I thank God for* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*I am asking God* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Praise for answered prayer:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*People/things I want to pray for this coming week:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Pearl of Great Price:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## *Notes*