



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians

Chapter 4

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Introduction

- People at Corinth were into four groups
- In the previous chapters St. Paul explained the foolishness of such division
- With this chapter St. Paul brings to a conclusion his treatment of the problem of division
- He describes the proper estimate one should have of those who serve God
- He also explains why we should leave the ultimate evaluation of such men to God (1-5)



Introduction

- Having already used himself and Apollos as examples to help them see the errors of their arrogance, St. Paul also uses the example of the apostles in the following passage (6-13)
- His purpose is not to shame them, but to warn them, for he is sending Timothy to remind them of what is proper, and he himself is coming to deal with those who are "puffed up", if necessary (14-21)

The Proper Estimate of St. Paul & Others (4:1-5)



- The apostles are to be regarded as ministers of Christ, as servants
- The church is like a ship; Christ commands; the rowers only obey orders
- Since they have no right to give orders, no parties should be formed about them
- The church is like the house; Christ is the Master; the apostles are stewards in charge

The Proper Estimate of St. Paul & Others (4:1-5)



- The mysteries of God: the sacraments and the revealed knowledge
- The mysteries are not their own but given to them as stewards, so they must faithfully dispense them to the household
- The supreme qualities required in a steward are faithfulness and wisdom
- The essential matter with St. Paul was, not that the Corinthians should judge him a faithful steward

The Proper Estimate of St. Paul & Others (4:1-5)



- Or even that he should be faithful in his own judgment, but that the Lord shall count him faithful
- In his own judgment he had been a faithful steward at Corinth, but that did not justify him, for he must be judged by the Lord
- Therefore, let no one form premature judgments

The Proper Estimate of St. Paul & Others (4:1-5)



- Only when the Lord comes, all secrets will come to light, and the motives of hearts will be manifest
- Then when just judgments are given, shall every man shall have praise from God
- Each shall be judged as he deserves
- Only then can the Corinthians form a correct estimate of their religious teachers



Lessons In Humility (4:6-13)

- I have used the my name and Apollos to illustrate lessons that I wished to emphasize; especially the lesson not to think of men too highly
- The word of God is the best rule by which to judge concerning men
- One of you may be puffed up for one against another
- Exalting one preacher and making him a leader, while seeking to pull down another



Lessons In Humility (4:6-13)

- He shows a good way to overcome pride
- First, consider how it is wrong for you to think of yourself as different from others
- Second, if you consider that you have something more than other men have, yet you only have it as a gift from God
- A wise man should not brag of another's goodness
- There is nothing in us that is worthy of commendation since all what we have is of grace



Lessons In Humility (4:6-13)

- St. Paul has just rebuked their glorying over gifts bestowed upon them
- Though receiving all the grace they had, they boasted as if they had it of themselves
- The apostles had spiritual gifts, but were poor and persecuted
- The Corinthians had these gifts, but were puffed up and felt as though they were full, had all things; were rich, well supplied



Lessons In Humility (4:6-13)

- They held their heads high as though they were made kings
- If they were only exalted to be kings, as they seemed to think themselves, perhaps then those who had imparted to them all that they boasted of might become kings also
- The apostles were in the suffering period, but these converts had got to the reigning period
- In contrast, the state of the apostles is given



Lessons In Humility (4:6-13)

- The figure is drawn from the Roman amphitheater
- At last, near the close of the games, Romans used to bring forth and show to the spectators, those persons doomed to die, either to fight with each other, or with wild beasts
- So the apostles were doomed to reproach, suffering and to death
- For Christ's sake they chose a path of sorrow that made the world call them fools



Lessons In Humility (4:6-13)

- But you think you are wise and have found means to make the world think you so too
- We are weak in infirmities, in sufferings, but you believe that are strong because you do not suffer
- We are despised because do not use worldly philosophy but you are so honorable by the world because you are using its wisdom
- All through our ministry we suffer want for the needs of life



Lessons In Humility (4:6-13)

- We are often in want of food and drink and clothing, are beaten, and, like the Master, have no certain home
- We support ourselves by our own hands
- We return good for evil, we do not return reviling, persecution, defamation; nothing but blessing and we entreat God for our defamers
- We are accounted by the world as utterly worthless

St. Paul's Paternal Care (4:14-21)



- I do not contrast your pride and glorying with our humiliation to shame you
- But, as my beloved sons, to warn you
- As a fatherly admonition to beloved children
- They might have many tutors, who sought to train them as children
- But St. Paul was their father who had begotten them through the gospel; that is, converted them

St. Paul's Paternal Care (4:14-21)



- So they ought to imitate him in his lowliness and self-denial
- Children should seek to be like the parent, rather than like the tutor
- Timothy is St. Paul's son in the gospel
- Timothy will revive their remembrance of St. Paul's ways in Christ (his life, conduct and teachings), as he teaches the churches everywhere, so that they can the better follow him

St. Paul's Paternal Care (4:14-21)



- Some of those who were puffed up, as St. Paul was sending Timothy, thought that he would not come himself, and this encouraged them to continue in their pride
- If God permitted, he would soon follow, and would put to the test those puffed up
- He will confront these vain boasters, and see what power is behind their words

St. Paul's Paternal Care (4:14-21)



- He here shows his fatherly authority
- He will know not the big, empty speech of these vain boasters, but how much of the power of God be present at them
- For in the kingdom of God it is not words or professions which avail, but the power of God in the heart

St. Paul's Paternal Care (4:14-21)



- When he comes, how shall he come?
- With a rod?
- Will it be necessary to rebuke and exert his apostolic authority?
- Or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?
- Or will the condition of the church be such that only love and gentleness will be called for?



Conclusion

- What two terms properly describe preachers of the gospel?
- Who is to be the judge of those who serve the Lord?
- Why was St. Paul writing these things?
- Who did St. Paul use as an example of humility?
- How had St. Paul become like a "father" to them?
- Why was he sending Timothy to them?
- What one phrase is used repeatedly in this chapter to describe some at Corinth?
- What choices did St. Paul leave them as to how he might come to them?