

**Men's Sunday Night**  
**The Book of 1 Corinthians**  
**Christian Conduct**  
**Lesson 4 - 1 Corinthians 4:1-21**  
**"The Christian Ministry"**

In this section, Paul now presents three pictures of the minister; a steward, a spectacle, and a father. He wanted his readers to understand how God measured and evaluated a Christian's service. 1 Corinthians 4:6 explains Paul's purpose: "*That no one of you be puffed up for one against another.*" Paul presents three characteristics of a true minister of Jesus Christ.

**The Steward of God's Wealth (4:1-7)**

A steward owned nothing; he was a slave who managed his master's wealth. The pastor is a servant who is a steward. The word "servant" in verse 1 is literally "the slave who rows on the lowest level of a boat." It means to be the "under-rower."

A steward's responsibility is to be faithful to the Master, and the pastor's responsibility is to be faithful to teach the things of the Lord, especially those truths that relate to the mystery of the church.

**A Spectacle to the World (4:8-13)**

What a spectacle a true servant of God must be to the world. Paul could have been a great Jewish rabbi, with authority and esteem; yet he gave it up for Christ's sake to have hunger, nakedness, peril, and death. The world cannot understand this attitude and calls such a person a fool. How convicted these Corinthians should have been when they compared their carnal living to the sacrifices Paul and the other apostles were making.

**A Spiritual Father (4:14-21)**

Jesus warns us that we should call no man on earth "father" (Matt. 23:9), but it is still true that those who lead souls to Christ are, in a sense, "fathering" them. Paul had been their spiritual father in that he gave them the Gospel and helped to lead them to Christ. A sinner is born into God's

family through the Spirit of God and the Word of God, but God uses human instruments to bring sinners the Gospel.

There must never be in a church a worldly attitude of exalting men and ministries. The pastor ministers the Word, sows the seed, builds the temple, dispenses the mysteries of God, suffers shame before the world, and lovingly fathers the church family. These are great responsibilities, and only the sufficiency of God enables anyone to fulfill them.

**Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-7. Pray and answer the following questions:**

1 Corinthians has been called “the problem letter” because in it, Paul deals squarely with one problem after another. But though the apostle’s words are strong, he writes as a father to his dear children. This chapter shows us how such a relationship calls for tough love, encouragement, warning, teaching, and even discipline.

1. In verse 1 how does Paul describe the apostle’s role in the church?
  
2. What does this passage teach about the life of an apostle?
  
3. Why should we judge “*nothing before the appointed time*”?
  
4. Note the apostle’s series of questions in verse 7. What abilities do Christians tend to boast about?

**Read 1 Corinthians 4:8-17. Pray and answer the following questions:**

Paul’s warning back in chapter 3 does not imply that human leaders are unimportant. He was very clear that people are only saved by Jesus Christ, and there is no other basis for salvation. Church leaders are to build on this

foundation. From this thought, Paul now appealed to the Corinthians to act on what he had written. Paul's key points in this section include: 1. The responsibilities of church leaders and the importance of their example to other believers. 2. The "secret things of God" granted to leaders are things that human wisdom cannot discover, but can only be revealed by God.

5. Paul saw evidence of spiritual pride in the early church. Why did that trouble him?

6. Our abilities and talents are gifts from God. How should knowing that keep us from thinking that we are better than others?

7. In 4:16, Paul says to "*imitate me.*" Is this statement arrogant? Why or why not?

8. Would it be arrogant for us today to say this? Why or why not? How should this statement affect our actions?

**Read 1 Corinthians 4:18-21. Pray and answer the following questions:**

9. How does the example of Paul's lifestyle in this chapter challenge your own way of living?

10. Paul gets firm with the arrogant members of the Corinthian church who are questioning his authority. What does he mean by saying, "*the kingdom of God is not in word but in power*"?

11. What is the Kingdom of God? (See Luke 4:18-19; 11:14-20; 17:20-21)

12. How is the kingdom a matter of power?

### **Summing Up this Week's Study**

Many Christians have never become spiritual fathers. They have never produced any spiritual offspring. They have never led a person to Christ and helped train him in the ways of God. A Christian is one who has been given new life in Christ, and one of the most important characteristics of life is reproduction. Yet many believers have never reproduced believers. In a sense they are contradictions to what a Christian is. Every believer should be a spiritual father, God's instruments for bringing new lives into His kingdom. *John MacArthur*

### **Life Application**

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk. Write your insights down for review and group discussion.