

Lesson 7
1 Corinthians 4:1-21

- Given the concluding exhortations in Chapter 3, and especially the crowning conclusion in verse 23, one might wonder why Paul continues his letter on into Chapter 4. He has addressed their misunderstandings about the gospel and the church and the role of their teachers – but at the heart of much of their problems is the attitude of many toward Paul himself. These people are not simply for Apollos or Peter, they are decidedly anti-Paul. They are rejecting both his teaching and his authority.

¹ Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

- If the Corinthians had a completely wrong view of Paul, Apollos, and Peter as leaders of sects or parties in the church, then what was the correct view? It was not the man-centered view of the Corinthians. Instead, it was a God-centered view in which Paul, Apollos, and Peter were simply servants and stewards.
- The Greek word for “servant” (translated “minister” in the KJV) is unusual. It literally means an “under-rower” – one who manned the oars while someone else steered the ship.
- The Greek word for “steward” is fairly common in the New Testament. It refers to a household servant (often a slave) who was charged with providing all of the requirements for a large estate. He was responsible not to his fellow servants but to his Lord. He did his Master’s bidding and looked after his affairs. Paul and his co-workers were underlings for Christ and overseers for God.
- These terms carried a dual message as used here. First, Paul was telling the Corinthians not to elevate and exalt men – Paul and his fellow preachers were merely servants. But second, Paul is also telling them that they were not the Corinthians’ servants – they were servants of Christ and stewards of God. Paul was not accountable to the Corinthians, and so their opinion of him was of little con-

cern compared to the real issue – what was God's opinion of Paul. It was that opinion that motivated Paul rather than the opinion of men.

- What are the mysteries of God? The term “mystery” occurs frequently in the New Testament, and particularly in the writings of Paul. Jesus used it once: “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” (Matthew 13:11 and parallel passages) Paul used it more than twenty times.

Romans 16:25-26 Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of **the mystery**, which was kept secret since the world began, **26 But now is made manifest**, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 But we speak the wisdom of God **in a mystery**, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: **8** Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

- Why did Paul write so frequently about the mystery of God hidden from the foundation of the world and now revealed in the proclamation of the gospel? Perhaps because it had been such a mystery to him! He could have been numbered among those who crucified the Lord of glory because they did not know the mystery. The good news – indeed the gospel – is that the mystery is a mystery no longer. God has revealed it through his Word.

² Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

- Paul's ministry was not going to be judged by the popularity of Paul. It was not going to be determined by the number of people who responded to his message. Paul's ministry was going to be judged by the one and only thing that mattered with a steward – faithfulness to his Master.
- Eloquence is not the primary requirement for a steward of God. Popularity is not the primary requirement for a steward of God. The primary requirement for a steward of God is faithfulness. A steward puts his own self-interests aside to remain loyal and faithful to his master. The very fact that the steward enjoyed so much independence and responsibility made it all the more necessary that his master should be able to absolutely depend on him.
- We are all stewards of God. (1 Peter 4:10) “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” Every Christian must demonstrate fidelity and dedication to his master. As an apostle, Paul was given more responsibility as a steward, and elders then and now have more responsibility as a steward, but to some extent we are all stewards of the grace of God.
- “True hearted, whole hearted, faithful and loyal.” Those are the words of a song that we don't sing much anymore, but if there is a more important message that the church needs to hear today I don't know what it is. God established his church to do good works, to glorify him, and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we are half-hearted and faithless, then who will do these things? God does not have a Plan B. If the church fails in its mission, then the mission will not be accomplished.

Luke 12:42-48 And the Lord said, "Who then is that **faithful and wise steward**, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? 43 "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. 44 "Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has. 48 ...

For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.

³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. ⁴ For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. ⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

- Paul started out in verse 1 using the plural to speak of God's servants and stewards, but here he switches to the singular. He is about to focus on their personal criticisms and judgments of himself.
- Paul frequently endured harsh judgments and examinations from the flock. It seems there were some members – and perhaps more than a few – of the Corinthian church who did not much like the Apostle Paul. If they had run a popularity contest in Corinth, Paul would likely not have finished at the top. The attacks on his apostleship tell us that there were members in the Corinthian church who did not want to submit to Paul. Did that mean that Paul was not qualified to be an apostle? Of course not. This group that had a problem submitting to Paul most likely had a problem submitting to anyone. In any event, Paul was not concerned with their judgment of him.

Luke 6:26 Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

- It is telling that Paul refused even to judge himself. If anyone could have become paralyzed with regret and self-judgment, it would have been Paul. He had persecuted the church and, no doubt, had caused some to die with blasphemy on their lips. He had been complicit in the death of Stephen, and he no doubt had preached to some he once persecuted. Peter and Paul had some differences,

but regret was something they had in common. But neither Peter nor Paul let regret keep them from their appointed work.

Philippians 3:13-14 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind**, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

- That verse from Philippians is a prescription for mental health that if followed would put many psychiatrists out of business.
- “Judge not that ye be not judged.” How many times have we heard that verse? But what does it really mean? Let’s start with what it does not mean. It cannot possibly mean that all human judgment is wrong. The verse we just read is from Matthew 7:1. Five verses later in Matthew 7:6 we read, “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” How are we to follow the command of verse 6 if verse 1 forbids all judgments? And how would we follow the command in John 7:24? “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” Jesus did not teach and Paul does not teach that all judgment is wrong. When we become so humble that we refuse to judge and reprove the unfruitful works of darkness then we have become too humble. Chesterton said that the Christians of his day were becoming too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table and sometimes I fear we are heading in the same direction. We can know right from wrong, and we must make judgments of words and deeds based on the standard we find in the word of God.
- Paul did not forbid all judgments. In 5:12-13 in this letter, Paul will tell his readers “to judge those who are inside” and to put away from them the evil person. In 6:5, he tells them they are expected to be able to judge disputes between church members.

- We must make some judgments – but what is the difference between a righteous judgment and a sinful judgment? Verse 5 gives us the answer. When Jesus comes again, the hidden things will be revealed and the counsels of the hearts will be made manifest. We are not in the place of God, and we do not know the hidden counsels of men’s hearts. We can judge words and we can judge deeds – but we cannot know what is in a man’s heart. We are not in the place of God. We may know that someone has sinned, but do we know how hard they struggled not to sin? On the day of judgment, many things that were hidden and unknown to believers will be made known, and we should not presume to know and understand those hidden things prior to that time.

Psalm 139:12 Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.

Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 **And there is no creature hidden from His sight,** but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

- So many of our problems come about when we start playing God. Satan tempted Eve in Genesis 3:5 by telling her she would be as gods. We think we can look into someone’s heart – but we cannot. We think we are all knowing – but we are not. We think we can be everywhere, do everything, and keep the universe under control – but we cannot. We need to stop being “God players.” Only God knows all of the circumstances and all the motives. And he does know them – we may think we have thoroughly hidden something under the carpet and whitewashed it, but nothing is hidden from God.

- In verse 3, Paul says he would also not be judged by any human court. In the Greek, the phrase literally reads “by any human day.” A human day is different from the day of final judgment mentioned in 3:13 and in 4:5. Paul would later face human judgments when he had his “day in court” – but those judgments count for nothing when compared with the judgment of God.
- Verse 4 is also interesting. It could be interpreted as “my conscience says nothing against me, but I am not justified on that basis.” By contrast, Greek and Roman philosophers such as Plato and Seneca regarded the conscience as passing final judgment on man.
- Paul may have had a clear conscience before God, but Paul more than anyone else knew that a clear conscience alone was no guarantee that he was following the will of God. He had a clear conscience before God when he was ravaging the church. (Acts 23:1) But Paul has more than just a clear conscience. He knows that he is following the will of God, and he is content to leave his case in God’s hands without regard to what the Corinthians might decide. Paul knew that at the judgment seat of Christ Paul’s own judgment of himself meant just as little in the final analysis as the Corinthians’ judgment of him.
- We should pause for a moment longer over this phrase “I am not aware of anything against myself” in verse 4. In the Greek, the word “nothing” is placed first for emphasis, and so Paul is saying emphatically that his conscience is clear. How could a former persecutor of the church ever make such a statement? Paul could make that statement because he knew Jesus Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul could make that statement because he understood the grace of God; he understood the forgiveness of God.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 **But by the grace of God I am what I am,** and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly

than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

- We have seen three judgments in these verses: (1) the judgment by our fellow man, (2) the judgment by ourselves, and (3) the judgment by God. Paul dismisses the first two because in the final analysis the only one that matters is the judgment by God. We can escape or shut our eyes to the first two judgments, but no one will escape his appointment before the judgment seat of Christ.

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

- Before we move on, we should note that not all self-judgment should be dismissed. If we are judging ourselves about past sins that have been forgiven, then we should forget those things that are behind and press on toward our goal. But if we judging ourselves about sins that remain in our lives and separate us from God, then we should listen to those self-judgments very carefully. God has given us each a conscience, and if properly trained it can be a wonderful gift to help keep us on that narrow road that leads to God. But it must never be our only guide on that road. Sadly, countless people have rejected the word of God in favor of Jiminy Cricket – let your conscience be your guide! Paul was following his conscience while he was persecuting the church of Christ. Our conscience can guide us straight to Hell!
- One last point – the application of these verses to our situation today presents two lessons. On the one hand, we need to be careful that we aren't forever examining and judging our ministers on grounds other than their fidelity to the word. But on the other hand, our ministers must recognize that they are stewards operating under trust. Paul would tell them, as he told Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:20, "Guard what was committed to your trust." On that final day, none of our self-

evaluations at to our worth in the kingdom is going to count for anything – only our faithfulness to the gospel.

⁶ And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. ⁷ For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

- Verses 6-7 provide a summary of Paul's message in all of Chapters 3 and 4. Paul's analysis of Christian leadership applied to all congregations at all times, but here he was applying it to himself and to Apollos in particular.
- The Corinthians thought they lacked nothing, but there was a huge void in the life of that church – they lacked love. In 13:4, Paul will tell them that love is not puffed up. On the contrary, he will tell them in 8:1, love builds up whereas knowledge puffs up.
- Their so-called knowledge appears to have become a false wisdom that was taking them beyond what is written. The phrase “not to go beyond what is written” in verse 6 is the subject of much commentary. “Scholars have spilled much ink in an effort to explain this part of the text.” One commentator says it refers to “life in accordance with Scriptural precept and example.” It may refer to the Old Testament scriptures, but it may refer to the New Testament scriptures that the Corinthians were holding in their hands. (Peter referred to the writings of Paul as scriptures in 2 Peter 3:16.) As for the Old Testament scriptures, there are 17 Old Testament quotations in 1 Corinthians and 10 in 2 Corinthians. We can learn much about the love of God, about Jesus, and about His church in the Old Testament scriptures. In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul said the Old Testament scriptures are “able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”
- One commentator has speculated that the phrase “going beyond Scripture” was a characteristic and watchword of the Christ-party we talked about in Lessons 2

and 3. They may have seen the scriptures as a thing of the past that “mature” Christians had left behind. That attitude is with us today. How often has a departure from the word of God been characterized as “growth”? “You might still believe that baptism is essential, but we have grown beyond that. We have increased in knowledge beyond your simple understanding.” Growth away from God is not the type of growth we need. (2 Peter 3:18) “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

- In verse 7 Paul asks the arrogant and boastful Corinthians three questions: (1) Who makes you different from anyone else? (2) What do you have that you did not receive? (3) If indeed you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?
- What do you possess that you did not receive? In that single sentence, Augustine saw the whole doctrine of grace. The first question marks the Corinthians as presumptuous, while the second question marks them as ungrateful. With grace, nothing is deserved; nothing is earned. Those who have experienced the grace of God should have unbounded gratitude. Their boastful ingratitude is a sure sign that they have misunderstood the gospel of grace. Grace leads to gratitude; worldly wisdom and self-sufficiency lead to boasting and judging. Grace has a leveling effect; boasting has a self-exalting effect.
- All that we have comes from God and belongs to God. Whatever talents and gifts we have all come from God. We are stewards of the blessings that he has given us, and, as with any steward, we are expected to use those blessings for the benefit of our master. At the end of Chapter 6 Paul will tell us that not even our own bodies belong to us. We have been bought with a price.

⁸ Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. ⁹ For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable,

but we are despised. ¹¹ Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; ¹² And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: ¹³ Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

- “At the heart of the boasting at Corinth was the conviction that they were really a very successful, lively, mature, and effective church. The Corinthians were satisfied with their spirituality. They had settled down into the illusion that they had become the best they could be. They thought they had arrived.” “With rhetoric full of sarcasm and irony, Paul goes for the jugular.” The irony is devastating: how they perceive themselves (masterfully overstated in verses 8 and 10) is undoubtedly the way they think Paul ought to be. But the way he actually is, set forth in verses 11-13, is the way they all ought to be.
- The Corinthians’ high opinion of themselves was apparently combined with a certain degree of embarrassment about what they perceived as Paul’s lack of wisdom and lack of eloquence. And we can only wonder what this haughty group would have thought of Jesus had they known him in the flesh.

Isaiah 53:2-3 He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

- It is to this self-sufficient but deluded group that Paul addresses the ironic statements in verse 8 – “Now” ye are full, “now” ye are rich. This could be translated as “already” you are full; “already” you are rich. He is not telling them that fullness and richness are not part of the Christian message. Instead, he is about to remind them that the richness and fullness of Christ will never be fully experienced on this earth. The theology of glory cannot be separated from the theology of the cross – and he is about to drive that point home with his own experi-

ences as an apostle of Christ. They may have arrived, but Paul had not. With scathing irony, Paul is comparing their pride, their self-satisfaction, and their feeling of superiority with his life as an apostle.

- Most people don't like to be perceived as foolish, and yet Paul had become a fool for Christ's sake. No one would want to be weak and despised, and yet Paul had become both for the sake of Christ. He had become a spectacle in this world and out of this world. He lacked food and clothing, and he was reviled, persecuted, and defamed. He had become as the filth of this world – all for the sake of Christ. The world thought he was a fool to put his life on the line for a crucified Jew, and worse than a fool to then proclaim that crucified Jew the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- Paul was like a Roman captive being paraded through the city after having already been sentenced to death. God had placed the apostles last, as it were in a victory parade, in which the conquerors appear first and the conquered last. When a Roman general won a great victory, he was allowed to parade his victorious army through the streets of the city with all the trophies he had won – the procession was called a Triumph. But at the end there came a little group of captives that were doomed to death. They were being taken to the arena to die. The Corinthians in their blatant pride were like the conquering general; the apostles were like the group of condemned captives.
- We can assume here that Paul is referring specifically to what he had recently endured in Ephesus. He wrote this epistle close to the time of the riot that occurred in Acts 19. The Greek word for “spectacle” in verse 9 is theatron, from which we get theatre. That same Greek word appears twice in Luke's account of the riot in Acts 19 when Gaius and Aristarchus were dragged into the theatre. The phrase “unto this day” in verse 13 also suggests that Paul was referring to the then current events in the city of Ephesus.
- We sometimes hear people say that the Christian life is the easiest life and that even if there were no God everyone would be happier and better off if they fol-

lowed the precepts of the Bible – and in a sense they are right. Many sins have very harmful consequences in this life, and by avoiding those sins we spare ourselves those consequences. But living a Christian life also has consequences. We might be ridiculed at work or at school when we stand up for the truth of God’s word. We might miss out on a promotion when we refuse to go bar-hopping after work. Paul did not think the Christian life was an easy life – and if we see it that way it could be that the life we are living is not really a Christian life. A servant is not above his master. (John 15:20) Those who follow Christ must carry a cross. (Matthew 16:24) “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2 Timothy 3:12) In fact, later in this very letter Paul will tell us that apart from Christ, the Christian life is – not the most happy life – but the most miserable life. (1 Cor. 15:19)

- The world may view us as foolish and weak and filthy – but God does not, and it is God’s view that counts. We may see ourselves as rich and in need of nothing, while God sees us as poor, blind, and naked. (Rev. 3:17) Or the world may see us as poor and blind and naked, while God sees us as a royal priesthood blessed with all spiritual riches. In the end, the world’s view of us will count for nothing, which should tell us just how much value we should place on the world’s opinion.
- Being reviled, we bless. (Verse 12) We may not realize just how surprising that statement would have been to the pagan mind of Paul’s day. Aristotle had described one of the virtues of a man with a “great soul” as not enduring to be insulted. To the ancient world, Christian humility was a virtue that was altogether new.
- The world has never and will never understand that part of the Christian message – and there are few aspects of the Christian life more difficult to follow in a world whose motto is “Don’t get mad; get even.” And yet the New Testament opens with Jesus telling his disciples in Matthew 5:44 to “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” If we really want to appear dif-

ferent to the world around us, this would be a very good place to start. Not only would we be considered different, we would probably be considered insane! Or perhaps we would be considered fools for Christ.

- As we read these verses, we desperately try to identify with Paul, when in fact we are probably much more like the Corinthians than we would dare to admit. As one commentator noted, “one feels a certain sense of personal dissonance commenting on these verses while sitting at a word-processor surrounded by books and other modern conveniences.” Perhaps if we were more like Paul and stood more often in opposition to the status quo of this world, we too would know what it means to be considered scum in the eyes of the world’s beautiful and powerful people.
- While these verses speak of the apostles in particular, they can be applied generally to all desiring to follow Christ. In fact, the whole point of the next section of the letter is to have the Corinthians imitate Paul and to follow his way of life in Jesus Christ.
- The reference to angels in verse 9 is interesting. Angels have always been fascinated by the gospel. (1 Peter 1:12) And the church has been commissioned to make the principalities and powers in heavenly places aware of God’s wisdom in the cross of Christ. (Ephesians 3:8-11) There is a great unseen world that is very much interested in what we are doing, and it makes for an intriguing study – that we do not have time for now.

¹⁴ I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. ¹⁵ For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. ¹⁶ Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

- With the closing verses of this chapter, Paul brings to an end the section of his letter dealing directly with the dissensions and divisions at Corinth. With all of the weighty subjects in this letter, it is telling that he placed this one first.

- In verse 14, Paul appears to realize that his sarcasm might have been taken the wrong way. His intent is not to shame them, but to warn them. But with that said, his need to make this statement at all is evidence that he realized they *should* feel ashamed. Later in 6:5, Paul will openly admit to trying to make them feel ashamed. Perhaps they had forgotten how to blush. (Jer. 6:15)
- When properly used, sarcasm can sometimes get people's attention better than almost any other form of communication. It can often shake people and cause them to wake up and see the absurdity of their present position. Paul was a master in its use, as were many of the Old Testament prophets. Paul was using irony and sarcasm to get the Corinthians to see their own arrogance.
- Paul told his readers to follow his example. We can preach to people all day long, but the lesson really begins when people start looking at us as an example of how to live. We should live so that our unspoken examples are just as powerful a proclamation of the gospel as our spoken proclamations – which we must do as well. The converse is also true – we can grow in Christ by following the examples of Godly men and women as long as we constantly compare those examples with what we read in the Word of God. The Corinthians had not seen Jesus and they had not seen a New Testament, but they had seen Paul, and Paul told them to follow his example.
- Paul saw himself as the father of the Corinthian church because he had proclaimed the gospel to them and he was on a human level responsible for their faith in Christ. For 18 months, Paul had labored to plant the church in Corinth. Paul was not using his fatherhood as a basis for his authority. We know from Matthew 23:9 that no one should ever use the title "Father" as a religious title. That title belongs to God. Instead, Paul wanted the Corinthians to follow his example as a child follows his father's example.
- And why should they follow Paul's example? Because Paul was following Christ's example. In verse 15 he says "for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you

through the gospel.” Later in 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul will tell them “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.”

¹⁷ For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

- Paul did not teach one thing in one area and a different thing in a different area. He did not seek favor with men by preaching what they wanted to hear.

Galatians 1:10-12 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. 11 But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. 12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

- Barclay describes Paul’s reference to Timothy as a “delicate compliment” to the Corinthians. Paul says that Timothy will remind them of how they should live. In effect, he is saying that their errors and mistakes are not due to a deliberate rebellion, but are due to a faulty memory. The same is often true today. So many of our problems could be corrected if we would just make a deliberate effort to live every moment in a conscious realization of the presence of Jesus Christ. It is not only during the Lord’s Supper, but at every moment of our lives that Jesus is saying “Remember me.” When we forget him and neglect his word is it any wonder that we go astray? Our responsibility is greater than that of the Corinthians. They literally had to remember what Paul had said because they did not have the written New Testament that we possess. Our life is an open book examination. What excuse do we have for not opening that book?

¹⁸ Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not in word,

but in power. ²¹ What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

- Some of the Corinthians were puffed up – that is, they were filled with pride and arrogance. And what does God think about human pride? When he listed in Proverbs 6:17 things that he hates, a “proud look” was the first item on the list.

1 Peter 5:5-7 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and **be clothed with humility**, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.

- Note that after addressing the group as a whole, Paul finally zeros in on a smaller group in verse 18. This group of arrogant troublemakers were the ones causing all of the turmoil and division. They no doubt constantly criticized and judged Paul to the other members of the church, undermining his authority and his teaching. They had influence but they very likely did not exercise that influence openly, preferring instead to operate from the shadows. It is to these cowardly malcontents that Paul says in verse 21 he may have to come with a rod.
- Verse 20 tells us that kingdom of God is not in word but in power. Taken in context, Paul's point is the same point he has been making all along – the Corinthians needed to stop their foolish boasting and grow up. He does not want them to be like those he wrote about in 2 Timothy 3:5 who had a form of godliness, but

denied the power thereof. Paul was not discounting words – he was writing words! But religion must be deeper than the tongue. Jesus never said, “By their words you shall know them.” The world is full of talk about Christianity – but Christian lives are much harder to locate. The power of a Christian life is not in words, but in deeds. Paul is telling this group of troublemakers that when he comes he will find out not just what they have been saying, but he will find out what sort of power they have. Will they be able to demonstrate the power of God in their lives, or will they be just all talk and hot air?

- And speaking of hot air, verse 20 is a favorite verse of the change agents. You pin them down with a verse from the word of God, and nine times out of ten they will try to wiggle out by quoting verse 20. I had this very verse quoted to me by two ACU graduates in Austin who tried to convince me that baptism was not necessary.
- Romans 1:16 tells us that the gospel of Christ is the power of God. How do we know anything at all about the gospel apart from the written word? John referred to Jesus as the Word. How do we know anything about Jesus apart from the written word? The gospel is the power of God and the only way to proclaim the gospel is with words.
- In verse 19 Paul said he would visit Corinth again – if the Lord will. Paul did make plans apart from God, and neither should we.

James 4:13-15 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.