

LESSON 8: 1 CORINTHIANS 4:1-21

Apostles of Christ

1. In 4:1, the word that NIV renders as “those entrusted with” is *oikonomos*, meaning steward, estate manager, deputy; this person was usually a slave entrusted by the master to manage his estate. Explain the relationship between this person, the master, and the other slaves. How is the church to regard these men? With what are they entrusted? What therefore is the sphere of their responsibility? Linking this section to what we’ve just discussed in the preceding chapter, in what way are each of us stewards of the gospel, and for what are we responsible?
2. What is required of those who have been entrusted much (v. 2)? What is the relationship of “faith” to “faithfulness,” and how would you explain this to someone in helping them to understand the dynamics of Christian life?
3. Why does Paul “care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court” (v. 3)? Should we not be concerned with how others adjudge us? If not, why not? If so, to what extent? And what point is he making by claiming that “I do not even judge myself”? What’s his point here? What are some of the possible shortfalls of basing our assurance in the affirmation of others? Of ourselves?
4. Explain the connection between his point in verse 3 and that of verse 4. What point is he making about the connection, or lack thereof, between our conscience and our ultimate standing before God? How and why should this be important to each of us as Christians?
5. What is the conclusion that Paul makes in verse 5? Again, what is the point here? What significance would these words have had for the Corinthians? For us?
6. What do you think Paul means in verse 6 when he declares that he has written these things so that they might learn the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written” (literally, “that you may learn in us the “not beyond-what-is-written”)? How does this connect to not taking “pride in one man over against another”?

7. What does Paul intend to bring out with his three questions (v. 7)? What is it that he condemns in verses 6-7? Return to 1:31. How do you think the Corinthian Christians have been going beyond “what has been written”?

8. What point is Paul making in verse 8? What significance were they (and we) to take in his comments that they had “all you want” and had become “rich” and “kings”? (Read and compare Matthew 5:6; Revelation 3:17; Romans 8:17.) Does he really wish that “we might be kings like you”?

9. The language Paul uses in verses 9-13 is that of the arena: the apostles are like “men condemned to die in the arena,” a “spectacle to the whole universe.” What point is Paul making in this, and in his comments in these verses that the apostles are “fools for Christ,” weak, dishonored, and brutally treated, all in contrast to the Corinthians? How do you imagine the Greeks thought of people who “work hard with their own hands,” who when slandered answer kindly? Connect all this to Paul’s theme so far.

10. What tone does Paul take in verse 14? What subsequent command does he make (vv. 16-17), and on what is it based (v. 15)? When Paul writes there that he “became your father in Christ Jesus,” is he contradicting all that he has been saying about leaders and party strife? If not, why not?

11. Not only have some in the Corinthian Church been boasting about other leaders, but they have also been putting Paul down (vv. 18-21). How does Paul choose to fight back? What does he mean when he says that “the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power” (v. 20)?

12. Chapters 1-4 form the first major section of 1 Corinthians. What have Paul’s chief concerns been in this section?