

Day 86, 1 Corinthians 4

by David Servant

Paul reminds the Corinthians that only God's judgment matters, and that they should strive to be humble and imitate his ways in Christ.

Topics: "Church Unity", "True Discipleship"

Description

David Servant preaches about Paul's efforts to unify the Corinthian church by addressing factions and pride among believers. Paul emphasizes the importance of not judging others, as only the Lord's judgment matters. He challenges the Corinthians to imitate him in following Christ, highlighting the need for true discipleship beyond just words.

Transcript

What began as a relatively benign letter now grows somewhat passionate. Obviously, if there were factions in the Corinthian church, there were leaders of those factions. And those that were claiming to be "of Peter" or "of Apollos" rather than "of Paul" (1:12) were likely pitting themselves, not only against those who are "of Paul," but against Paul himself. So Paul had his work cut out to win back the affections of everyone in the Corinthian church, and to unify them once again. In this chapter, he goes right to work.

He first reminds the Corinthians that it is not their judgment of him that matters, or even his own judgment of himself. It is only the Lord's judgment of him that matters (4:3). This is something that is true for all of us, and it ought to help us when we are the victims of other people's judgments.

Paul slips in the fact that he does, in fact, judge himself, and by his own judgment he is not conscious of anything wrong that he is doing. (How many of us could make the same claim?) That was a subtle way of telling the Corinthian believers that if they have found a flaw in him, they were likely mistaken. And in regard to their judgment of his hidden motives, that is something that should be left to God alone. They can rest assured that He will one day reveal what is hidden in people's hearts, and then "each man's praise will come to him from God" (4:5).

Keep in mind that some people's hidden motives are not so hidden, and thus we are safe to judge them. In Paul's case, however, there was no evidence against him, and thus no rightful basis for forming judgments about his motives.

Pride is the root of most strife, so Paul attacks the root. He again reminds the Corinthians that he and Apollos are only Christ's servants and their servants, and nothing more. How foolish it was for any of the Corinthian believers to become arrogant over their favorite nobodies!

Moreover, the Corinthian believers had no right to be arrogant about anything or anybody, possessing only what God had given them (4:7). They had been blessed by God to a degree that far superseded what Paul and the other apostles, by virtue of their calling, had enjoyed. They were kings by comparison. To make his point, Paul elaborated on his lifestyle as it compared with theirs. He and his fellow apostles were a spectacle to the world, looked upon as fools. Even as he wrote his letter to the Corinthians, he and his band were hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, roughly treated, and homeless. Being reviled, persecuted and slandered was their regular fare. And they were the men who originally brought to the Corinthians all the blessings they now enjoyed in Christ. Yet some in the Corinthian church were speaking against them!

I'm sure Paul's Corinthian readers were ashamed as they read. Paul obviously realized that, writing, "I do not write these things to shame you" and then affectionately adding, "but to admonish you as my beloved children" (4:14). He then reminded them of their special relationship with him. Others might be their tutors, but he was their "father through the gospel" (4:15). Such words should have melted their hearts and vanquished any suspicion of his having wrong motives.

Finally, notice Paul's admonition, "Be imitators of me" (4:16). Every minister's goal should be to be able to honestly say that to his or her disciples. Yet such a statement is meaningless if a minister gives people nothing more to imitate than how he acts when he is in the pulpit. Paul was able to say that Timothy would remind the Corinthians, not of his sermons, but of His ways "which are in Christ" (4:17). Paul disciplined Timothy, and so Timothy was very familiar, not just with Paul's sermons, but his lifestyle. That is what true discipleship is all about. Keep in mind that making disciples is not just the task of ministers, but a commandment that is given to us all.

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