

Chapter 4

Paul the servant 4:1-5

v1 This is how people should think about us. We are Christ's servants. We are stewards (keepers) of the secrets that God shows to his own people. v2 Now people who have received a trust must prove that they are loyal people. v3 It matters very little to me what you or any human court thinks about me. I do not even judge myself. v4 I do not feel that I have done anything wrong. But that does not mean that I am innocent. It is the Lord who is the only true judge. v5 Therefore judge nothing before the time that God has decided. Wait until the Lord returns. He will bring to light everything that people have hidden in the dark. He will show the real reasons for people's actions. At that time, each person will receive his praise from God.

Verse 1 Paul uses two words to describe how the Christians at Corinth ought to think about him and his friends. The words are 'servants' and 'stewards'.

1. The word in this verse for 'servants' meant slaves who had to work very hard in a Roman ship. Paul was like a slave. He wanted to work hard to please his owner.

2. A steward was responsible to the owner of a big house. He was responsible for his affairs. He ordered supplies. And he told the slaves what to do. But he himself was responsible to the owner of the house. So whatever position of authority a Christian may have in the church, he is still Christ's steward.

Verses 2-4 The master must be able to depend on his steward. Paul speaks about three judgements:

1. Other people may judge whether someone has worked well. Some of the Christians at

Corinth did not like what Paul said. Some people had refused to believe that he was an apostle (2 Corinthians 10:7-10). But Paul says that he does not worry about their opinion about him.

2. A person may judge himself. However, he may feel satisfied with his own behaviour even when he has made a mistake.

3. God is the only true judge. God knows what circumstances have affected someone's actions. God also knows the intentions that caused a person to act. Someone may do a good action but have a selfish desire. They may want someone to praise them. Or they may want some other benefit.

Verse 5 So people should not judge other people before the time when Jesus returns. Then God will show whether someone has done his duties in a loyal way. God alone is the perfect judge. He will reward the people who have been loyal stewards in his 'house', the church.

The need to be humble 4:6-13

v6 Brothers and sisters, I have used myself and Apollos as examples. I want you to learn to live as scripture tells us to live. I do not want you to be proud that one person is your leader instead of another person. v7 You are not different from anyone else. You received everything that you have from God. And if you received things you should not boast. You speak as if you achieved it yourself. v8 Already you have all that you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings - and you have left us outside the kingdom! How I wish that you really had become kings. Then we could rule with you! v9 I think that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the

procession. We are like men that a ruler has chosen to die in front of a crowd. We have become a show. The whole of what God has created will see. We are a show to angels as well as a show to people. v10 We are fools for Christ. But you are so wise in the Christian faith. We are weak, but you are strong. People give you honour. But they think that we have no value. v11 Up to this very hour, we are hungry and we have nothing to drink. We have no clothes that can keep us warm. People behave badly towards us. We have no homes. v12 We work hard with our own hands. When other people insult us, we bless them. When they hit us, we suffer patiently. v13 When they say bad things about us, we answer in a quiet way. Up to this very moment, we have become like dust that people walk on. We are everyone's rubbish.

Verse 6 Paul and Apollos were humble. They knew that they were God's servants. God would judge them. In the same way, the Christians at Corinth must be humble. God's word makes it clear that false pride is wrong. They should not go beyond God's word. They should not boast about who was their leader.

Verse 7 It was God's love that had saved the Christians at Corinth. They had forgotten that. Any gifts that they had came from God. They were no different from anyone else whom God had blessed. They were behaving as if they earned their own salvation or their spiritual gifts. They were not grateful to God.

Verses 8-9 Paul makes fun of the opinion that the Christians at Corinth have about themselves. They think that they have no need to learn any more spiritual truths. He says 'You have all that you want.' He means that they are like people who have eaten more than enough food. They think that they have all the spiritual gifts that they need. They think that they have already begun to

rule in God's kingdom. Paul knew that the kingdom is in the future as well as in the present.

Paul used the picture of a procession. The Romans had a procession after they had defeated an enemy. The prisoners were at the end of the procession. The Romans used them for public entertainment before they died. The prisoners would have to fight wild animals. Crowds of people would come to watch them. Paul and the other apostles were like those prisoners. They were ready to die for Christ. The people in the world and the angels were like the crowd who watched.

Verses 10-13 Paul contrasts the life of the apostles with the life of the Christians at Corinth. The Christians at Corinth thought that they were wise. Paul was 'foolish' because he believed the simple truth of the gospel. The Christians at Corinth believed that they were powerful. They did not like the way that Paul preached. He did not use clever words. So they decided that Paul was 'weak'. They were very proud about themselves. They imagined that people respected them. The Christians at Corinth did not give honour to Christ. So they did not give honour to the apostles.

Paul describes the difficulties that real apostles had to suffer. He had often been hungry and wanted a drink. His clothes were poor. He had often had nowhere to sleep at night as he travelled from one place to another place. He had worked hard with his own hands. He had earned money so that he could live. We know that he was a skilled worker with leather. He made tents and other goods (Acts 18:3; 20:33-34). Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 9:14-18 that the Christians at Corinth did not agree with his decision to do this. So he says, 'We work hard with our own hands', in this list of difficulties. He therefore emphasises that he

was a disciple of Christ. Christ had also suffered so that he could serve other people.

The Greek word for ‘hit’ describes the way that a master might hit his slave. Paul took the position of a slave to please Christ his master.

Paul then replies to those who had behaved badly towards him. Paul knew what Jesus taught. And he knew what Jesus did (Luke 6:28; 23:34). So, when people insulted him, he prayed that they would be happy. He forgave them. Paul was like Jesus. During his trial and crucifixion, Jesus had accepted patiently the cruel attacks. People told lies about Paul. But he made a humble appeal to them. He asked them to stop and to be like Christ.

Finally, Paul says that the apostles are like the dust. People swept up dust from the floor. Or they are like the dirt that someone washes from the body. This picture language is similar to Lamentations 3:45. It described anything that people thought had no value at all. Isaiah said that people would think that God’s servant had no value (Isaiah 53:2-3). Paul and the other apostles were like this. People thought that they had no value.

Paul’s love as a spiritual father 4:14-21

v14 I am not writing these things just to make you ashamed. Because you are my dear spiritual children, I want to warn you. v15 You may have ten thousand Christians who are looking after you. But you do not have many fathers. I became your spiritual father when I told you the good news about Jesus Christ. v16 So I am urging you to be like me. v17 For this reason, I am sending Timothy to you. He is like a son that I love very much. He is loyally serving the Lord. He will remind you about my way to live as I serve Christ Jesus. And that way to live agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. v18 Some

of you have become proud. So, you behave as if I were not coming to you. v19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord wants me to come. Then I will find out what these proud people are saying. But I will also find out what power they have. v20 The kingdom of God is not a matter of words. It is about how Christians live. v21 I could come to blame you with angry words. Or I could come to you with gentle love in my mind. I would like to know which you would rather have.

Verses 14-16 Paul was writing like a father. A father wants his son to do what is right. Paul described other Christians who taught them. They were like the slave who looked after a child. He took the child to school. He taught him how to behave. A child might have more than one of these slaves to look after him. But he could have only one father. Paul was like a father who loved his child. He had become the spiritual father of the Christians in Corinth. He had helped them to trust in Jesus Christ. He told them the good news about salvation. So, he wanted them to behave in the same way as their ‘father’ behaved.

Verse 17 Because he loves them, Paul is sending Timothy to visit them. Timothy is Paul’s spiritual son whom he loves. He knows that Timothy is a loyal servant of Christ. Paul practised what he taught. Wherever he went, he behaved in the same way. This was how he lived while he was at Corinth. Timothy will remind them about that.

Verses 18-21 Some proud Christians in Corinth did not believe that Paul would visit them himself. But Paul intended to visit Corinth as soon as possible. He would go if Christ wanted him to go. Then Paul would discover whether the Christians had the power to live in the right way. They had plenty to say. But they must show by their actions that they belonged to God’s

kingdom. Jesus had said, ‘You will know them by their fruit’ (Matthew 7:16). A person might say that he belongs to Christ. But his actions will prove whether his words are true. Paul asked whether he should come to punish them. He could be like a father

whose child had not obeyed him. Or they could change their behaviour because of Paul’s letter and Timothy’s visit. Then Paul could come gently to share his love with them.

© 1997-2004, Wycliffe Associates (UK)

This publication is written in EasyEnglish Level B (2800 words).

December 2004

Visit our website: www.easyenglish.bible