

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **God's Eternal Reign**

August 2023

Summer Quarter

**August 19, 2023**

**Lesson #3 – Judgment in the Kingdom**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – 1 Corinthians 4:1-6, 17-21

**ICE BREAKERS-**

1. What steps can we take to mentor a spiritual “child” regarding their spiritual growth and formation?
2. In what ways can you ensure that your self-image of “I know better” gives way to “I am no better”?

***Key Verse: “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.” —1 Corinthians 4:5***

**LESSON BACKGROUND –**

The apostle Paul planted the church in the city of Corinth while on his second missionary journey of AD 52–54 (Acts 18:1–8). Indeed, he spent the majority of that time with this one church (18:11). But after Paul left town for Ephesus and locations farther east (18:18–23), problems in the Corinthian church became known to him.

The problems in Corinth had become many and serious. They included factionalism (1 Corinthians 1:10–17; 3:1–9), gross sexual immorality (5:1–13; 6:12–20), lawsuits between believers (6:1–11), misunderstandings about marriage and singleness (7:1–16, 25–40), divisions over foods (8:1–13; 10:14–33), selfish behavior in the worship assembly (11:2–22), improper understanding and exercise of spiritual gifts (12:1–31; 14:1–25), a focus on self-glory to the exclusion of love (13:1–13), and false views of resurrection (15:1–58).

Paul spoke directly, eloquently, and with authority on these issues, leaving no doubt regarding the way forward on each one. As he did, a common thread that ran through all the Corinthians’ problems could be seen. The solution to that poisonous thread is the subject of today’s lesson.

**LESSON COMMENTARY**

4:1–5. Paul turned from the privilege each of the Corinthians had in all of their leaders to discussing how the leaders should be viewed by the church. They were servants (“helpers,” “assistants”) and stewards (slaves who had authority in their master’s households) (v. 1), workers whose lower positions garnered little respect

outside of their connection to their superiors. And this was Paul's point. The Corinthians mistook the slaves for the Master. Trustworthy means "one who is reliable" (v. 2). While accountable to the church (1Tm 5:19–20), the church leader is primarily accountable to God (1Co 4:3–4), and his job is to please Him, not to impress the churchgoers. Paul was reluctant to engage in too much self-evaluation because only God can know objectively how a minister is performing, though on occasion he analyzed his own performance and was conscious of nothing against himself (v. 4). The tendency of those who serve Christ is either to be too hard on themselves or too lenient, and surely both are problematic. A comprehensive and objective evaluation of one's own ministry, and certainly that of another's, should be left to the Lord in that future day (cf. the comments on 3:10–15). God will commend one who serves Him faithfully, in a way conducive to church unity. This commendation constitutes part of the believer's future rewards (see the comments on 3:14).

4:6–7. The party leaders in Corinth needed to listen less to their admirers, and their admirers needed to jettison their gratuitous zeal for their leaders. It is not at all clear what Paul meant by what is written (v. 6), but it may refer to what Scripture teaches about the need for humble servant leadership. No Corinthian party was superior to any other, at least not in God's estimation. These believers and their leaders were not the source of their own spiritual enrichment, and they had no reason to boast (v. 7).

1 Corinthians 4:17–21 (MBC): For this reason (v. 17)—so that they could better follow Paul's pattern—Paul sent ... Timothy to them while Paul was in Ephesus (Ac 19:22), but apparently he had not yet arrived (1Co 16:10). Some had become smug thinking that they could further their own agendas without fear of recourse from Paul (v. 18). But he planned to visit them when God permitted, and when he did, he intended to find if the "wise" had any power, i.e., if they had accomplished anything worthwhile, or if they were just windbags (v. 19). Verse 20 does not mean that the Church equals the kingdom of God. The Church manifests some of the spiritual effects of the kingdom during the present era, but the kingdom awaits a climactic future arrival (cf. 1Co 6:9–10; 15:50; Gl 5:21; Eph 5:5; Col 1:12–13; cf. Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993], 106–110). One of those effects was the spiritual progress of Christians through the work of Paul and others, and which should have been evident in the ministries of the Corinthian leaders and their fans. Paul hoped that they might change their arrogant ways so that his visit might be less confrontational (v. 21).

**LESSON NUGGET** - Life is a stewardship, so be faithful. We judge ourselves, and others judge us; but the final judge is the Lord. Live to please him alone. Always remember life is a school, so be teachable. Paul saw himself as a Father in the Lord, who had to instruct and discipline his children. Our father in heaven

uses many hands and voices to teach us, and we must be willing pupils as we go through life.

**Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Handbook of Bible Application and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***