

## **Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 4:6-21**

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**Introduction:** In 1 Corinthians 1:1-4:21, Paul is discussing the great problem that that church faces, division among themselves. In chapter 3:1-10, he explains that these divisions come from their failure to think spiritually. They are not mature in their faith and as a result do not think with the mind of Christ. They do not know or act on the basis of God's word. In chapter 4, Paul gives practical advice about how the church should regard its leaders and how its leaders should act. In this passage, Paul is very blunt with the Corinthians. He closes this chapter by warning divisive people to change their way of thinking. If they do not change, he threatens to deal with them harshly.

### **1 Corinthians 4:6-21**

#### **Verses 6-7**

***Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. <sup>7</sup> For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?***

- Christians must learn to think with the mind of Christ and not as the people of the world who do not know Christ do. They must "not go beyond what is written." They must follow the Bible, the word of the Lord, that which is written. They must not alter the word of the Lord according to the standards set by the world. Christians must follow the word of the Lord. For those who knew Paul then, the word of the Lord was the Old Testament. But now, the very words which Paul wrote to the Corinthians, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have become the word of the Lord. Paul's words are our guide helping us learn to think with the mind of Christ.
- Paul says that when we learn to think with the mind of Christ, we will not become "puffed up," conceited, by our association with people. When we

think with the mind of Christ, we will understand that all we have and what we are has come to us from God. So, we will boast only in our relationship to God through Christ.

### Verses 8-13

***<sup>8</sup> Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! <sup>9</sup> For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. <sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! <sup>11</sup> To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. <sup>12</sup> We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; <sup>13</sup> when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.***

- In these verses, Paul speaks with biting, perhaps bitter, irony. He compares his place as an Apostle with the place the Corinthian Christians believe they hold in God's esteem and that of the world.
- He says that the Corinthians already have all they need. They already reign with Christ. Their sanctification is complete. They have overcome.
- Paul says that the Apostles are like defeated enemies in the parade in Rome. They come at the end of the parade shackled, humiliated, to be killed in the arena.
- He says that the Corinthian Christians are wise in the ways of the world, but that in the eyes of men the Apostles are fools.
- He says that the Corinthians are strong, but the Apostles weak.
- None-the-less, the Apostles set the correct example to give honor to God. They bless those who curse them; they endure what the world throws at them; they answer kindly. They think with the mind of Christ and because they do, they are treated as scum and garbage even by some in the church.

### Verses 14-17

***<sup>14</sup> I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. <sup>15</sup> Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the***

***gospel. <sup>16</sup> Therefore I urge you to imitate me. <sup>17</sup> For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.***

- Paul tells the church at Corinth that his purpose in writing to them as he has is not to put them down or to shame them. He is acting as their spiritual father to advise them to correct their behavior before they are defeated by their worldly thinking.
- He urges them to be like him. Some have understood this urging to be arrogant and conceited on Paul's part. It is not so? He is urging them to "stop thinking like mere men and to think more like Christ." If they follow his example, they will become more like the one he follows, Jesus. To this end, he is sending Timothy to help them. Timothy will teach them how to follow the word. He is in agreement with Paul's teaching.

#### **Verses 18- 21**

***<sup>18</sup> Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. <sup>19</sup> But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. <sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. <sup>21</sup> What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?***

- Paul concludes this section on divisions by reminding the Corinthians that he is planning to visit them in the timing of God. If the divisions persist until he comes, he will deal with the arrogant people who cause them harshly when he gets there. He will confront them and oppose them according to the word of God.
- The church cannot be divided. Those who cause divisions must be held accountable for their worldly thinking and stop it.

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