

1 Corinthians 4:1-21: Live to Serve

Tommy Meador / General

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Introduction

- <https://www.foxnews.com/travel/airport-tray-aesthetic-goes-viral-some-travelers-halt-security-checkpoints-photo-ops> - Can you imagine waiting in line at TSA behind someone who is arranging their stuff for a photo?
- “Everyone stop and serve me - indulge me the time to make my mark on social media.”
- We live in a “look at me” and “serve me” culture. If we’re honest, some of us struggle with an overwhelming desire to have others serve our needs, and we have an underwhelming desire to serve others.
- In [1 Corinthians 3](#), Paul reminded the church that one of the marks of a mature follower of Jesus is that a mature follower of Jesus understands that he/she is a servant. One of the marks of a healthy church as the members of the church see themselves as servants of God.
- If you were honest with yourself, would you say that you have an overwhelming desire to serve? Or, do you have an overwhelming desire to be served? Is your life self-centered, or is your life God-centered?
- In this passage, Paul once again reminding us that he is a servant of God. This passage calling us to find joy and satisfaction in living as faithful servants of God.
- Three ways to live as servants:

Be far more concerned with pleasing God than pleasing people.

- The church at Corinth divided over leaders. They are acting like the world around them that chooses sides based on personalities. The church can't move forward because of the deep division - instead of rallying around Jesus they rally around either Paul, Apollos, or Peter. Because of this, Paul calls them babies. They need to grow up.
- Paul has already said a lot about this, but he's not done yet. He wants to make sure that the believers know his motives and Apollos' motives, and he wants them to follow his example.
- vs. 1-2 - Paul wants to be thought of as a servant AND a manager (steward) NOT as a public speaker to be admired.
- The church at Corinth have varied opinions of Paul. E.g., he's not eloquent, intelligent, sophisticated, etc. Paul could spend his time trying to convince people to like him, or he could spend his time living for His master.
- Paul a steward - knows the charge that God has given him - to "manage" the household of God. In Greco-Roman household, common for the master (father) to hire a "steward" to care for the home. That's how Paul sees his role - to care for the people of God. If Paul didn't know his role and didn't care for his people, he would have given up on them.
- vs. 3-4 - A steward is accountable to his master, not the members of the household. The members of the household can judge the steward all they want, but the steward ultimately answers to the master.
- Paul doesn't even judge himself - his own opinion of himself does not matter. What matters is God's appraisal of his life.

- vs. 5 - Paul knows the believers judged him. Certainly, the criticism hurt Paul, but ultimately, Paul knew that one day Christ would return, and he would bring everything to light. The intentions of his heart, as well as the heart of the Corinthians, would be revealed. They would all answer to Jesus.
- **Are you more concerned about what people think of you than you are concerned about pleasing God?**
- We have a tendency to want to please people, because if we please people, then maybe they will give us what we want. (I do for you, and you do for me mentality. I serve you and expect you to serve me in return.)
- Some of us are exhausted, stressed out, and constantly anxious because we're constantly worried about what others think about us. We care about what people think of us, but do we care about what God thinks of us? On the final day - you will not give an account of your life to others.
- In an attempt to be liked, do you find yourself compromising, can't say no, telling people what they want to hear instead of speaking truth in love, overcommitting to others instead of committing to God, etc.
- **Are you constantly reminding yourself of who you belong to?** People are fickle. Opinions change quickly. BUT... God is not fickle. He has set His love on you. His opinion of you is not going to change. His desire for your life is not going to change. He is constant, and you belong to Him. You belong to God, and you are His servant.
- Seeing yourself as a servant of God rather than a pleaser of people frees you to serve people without the expectation of people serving you in return.

Be far more concerned with how you treat others than how you are treated by others.

- vs. 6 - Paul explained that he and Apollos were fellow servants (coworkers) for their benefit so they would not go beyond what was written - or not to go beyond what was written in the OT - the call to boast not in wisdom of the world, or human leaders, but to boast only in the Lord. Paul does not want the believers to favor one leader over another, but instead boast in God.
- Vs. 7-8 - Paul's biting sarcasm. The church at Corinth judging him, but who are they to judge him? What makes them superior? What did they actually have that wasn't given to them by the Spirit? (Nothing) And, if everything they have is a gift from God, why do they boast in themselves and not God? (vs. 7) Paul continues the sarcasm... "You think you are so full! You think you are so rich! You are already reigning!" Paul referencing the end - when we will reign and rule with Christ - Corinth already thinking that they have arrived - they have it all figured out - that they had reached their destiny.
- vs. 9-10 - Since they thought they had arrived, then they thought they knew enough to be able to judge Paul. Paul was used to that. Paul lists examples of how he had suffered for Jesus or had been judged by the world. He had been treated miserably for his faith in Jesus. He felt like he was last, a spectacle to the world - To Paul, it seemed like everyone - men and angels - watched with glee as he suffered.
- Corinthians think they are kings. They can judge who's better. They are to be served. Paul's life looks radically different than theirs. Paul seems foolish, while they seem wise. Paul seems weak, while they seem strong. Paul seems dishonored, while they seem honored.
- Paul's present reality was hunger, naked, treated poorly, homeless, reviled, persecuted, and slandered - scum of the earth - like garbage.

Yet, Paul continued to serve the Lord in spite of his mistreatment because of the power of the Gospel.

- If you ever feel mistreated, even by those you love, you are in good company. Paul was mistreated by those he loved, and so was Jesus. Paul endured friendly fire from the Corinthians - believers in Jesus criticizing him. You've probably endured some friendly fire as well. It's one thing to be mistreated by a world that doesn't embrace the Gospel, it's another to be mistreated by people who claim to follow Jesus. You've had other followers of Jesus criticize you, treat you unfairly, or not take you seriously. You've had other followers of Jesus deeply wound you.
- What comes out of you when you suffer or treated poorly? Anger? Bitterness? Unforgiveness? Strife? Not if you are servant of God. Paul shows us what comes out of servants of God when they suffer:
- **Servants of God endure when they suffer.** Temptation to give up on the church when you suffer or to walk away from the faith. Servants of God know better - servants of God know they live in a broken world where people can be hurtful, but servants of God remain confident in the goodness and faithfulness of God.
- **Servants of God bless when they suffer.** Temptation to curse others when they cause us to suffer, but servants of God bless those who curse them. We pray for those who hurt us. We encourage, we bless with the truth in love, we give of ourselves because we want the best even for those who mistreat us. (Could be that you are mistreated by a family member, close friend, etc. Don't give up on them, don't repay evil for evil - overcome evil with good. [Romans 12:21](#).)
- **Servants of God remain gracious when they suffer.** Temptation to be judgmental and think there's no hope for the people who have mistreated you. Instead, continue to love and forgive.
- A servant of God knows he/she is going to be mistreated by those who are outside the faith and those who are inside the faith. But a servant of

God is far more concerned with how they treat others than how they are treated by others - because we know that how we treat others speaks volumes about who we are in Christ and how we are growing in Christ.

- Jesus was mistreated, yet He endured, He blessed, and He extended grace.

Be far more concerned with leaving a godly example than leaving a name for yourself.

- Paul had been mistreated by the people he loved, but their mistreatment of him didn't change his desire to serve them.
- Paul was not as much concerned about what they thought about him - his ability to speak eloquently, lead, etc. as he was with the Corinthians imitating his example.
- What Paul wanted for the Corinthians was not so much that they thought well of him as much as he wanted them to walk well with Jesus. He saw himself as a spiritual father to the Corinthians. He knows they don't have many who can influence them and help them to walk with Jesus. So Paul is sending Timothy to them to share with them Paul's teachings and way of life.
- Paul's encouragement: "Imitate me." Paul not perfect, but he was so confident in his walk with the Lord, that he knew he was a good example to the believers of Corinth of Christlikeness. What about you? Could you say to the people you love, "Imitate me." This wasn't a prideful statement. It was a humble longing for the Corinthians to live well for Jesus.
- vs. 18-20 - Paul was coming to see them again. Some were arrogant thinking he would never come again. He wanted to see just how arrogant they were and if they were walking in the power of the Spirit to back up their claims. If they were walking with the Spirit there would be

powerful evidence because the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power (vs. 20). Paul, as a spiritual father, would come to them and minister to them as they needed (vs. 21).

- **What in your life is worth imitating?** The goal of the Christian life is not for people to admire you for who you are, the goal of the Christian life is to lead others to follow Jesus well. If the people you love imitated your Christian faith, what would their faith be like? What if they imitated the way you pray? Study Scripture? The way you interact with people? etc. Asking this question reveals areas where you need to grow.
- **What in your life is not worth imitating?** Your bad attitude? Anger issues? Sinful habits? These are areas where you need to repent and ask God to change you.
- Everyone of us have influence. We are teaching someone how to live by the way we live.
- This morning, make a renewed commitment to live to serve by putting Christ first and putting the needs of others above your own.
- If not a follower of Jesus, know that Jesus is the greatest servant. He served you by going to a cross and dying the death you deserve only to rise again three days later. Turn to Him in faith and repentance and find life.