

Lesson 4:

Division over preachers:

"that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written"

1 Corinthians 3:1 – 4:13

"...for you are still carnal" [1 Cor 3:1-4]

1) Paul continues speaking here of the revelation of the word as he brought it to the Corinthians from the beginning. In what way does Paul say he "*could not* speak" to them? [3:1; notice that the word "people" is in italics (it was added by the translators) – he actually uses the word "pneumatikos", the same word that he used to describe the "deep" spiritual things of God in 2:13 and for spiritual "gifts" in 1 Cor 12:1 and 14:1]

-- In what way, then, did Paul need to speak to them? [3:1]

-- Why does Paul say he needed to speak to them in this way? [3:1-2; cp Hb 5:13; 1 Pt 2:1; etc]

2) Is Paul saying it was *wrong* for him to have to speak that way to them at the outset? [3:2]

-- However, what does he say is their problem now? [3:2b-3]

-- Go back in 1 Cor 2:6 and look at what Paul said about the "wisdom" he and the apostles speak from God: to whom is it to be spoken? [3:2; see 2:6]

3) What does Paul say is evidence of a carnal mind that is unable to receive "spiritual" words? [3:3]

-- Based on this, what does Paul then offer as proof that their minds are still carnal? [3:4]

The Corinthians as "God's field", planted and watered by Paul and Apollos [1 Cor 3:5-9a]

1) Since (in Paul's example here) the Corinthians are so interested in himself and in Apollos, what does Paul ask them to consider regarding himself and Apollos? [3:5]

-- Who (or, literally, "what") are these men, after all? [3:5]

-- Who does Paul say "gave" the Corinthians to these men (as opposed to these men "taking" the Corinthians for themselves)? [3:5]

2) What was Paul's role (given to him by God) among the Corinthians? [3:6]

"...there are contentions among you" – 1 Corinthians 1:10 – 6:20

- What was Apollos' role (given to him by God) among the Corinthians? [3:6]
- And *through* both of these men, what was God's role? [3:6]
- What is Paul's conclusion regarding these men (himself included!) that the Corinthians have divided themselves to follow? [3:7]

3) Are Paul and Apollos divided as they do their work? [3:8-9]

- What does Paul say is the basis for each servant's "reward"? [3:8]
- In the context here of his argument against the Corinthians' division, what is Paul thus emphasizing as *not* being the basis for his and Apollos' "reward"? [3:8]

4) In this relationship of Paul and Apollos workers (servants!) on behalf of the Corinthians, how many different "fields" were sown in Corinth? [3:9]

- And whom does Paul say that he and Apollos were working together with? [3:9]
- Was God's purpose among the Corinthians meant to divide them? [3:9; cp John 17:20-23]

The Corinthians as "God's building", built on a foundation Paul helped to lay [1 Cor 3:9b-17]

1) To continue emphasizing the unity of the Corinthians in God's purpose for them, what does Paul now describe them as? [3:9b]

- What is the basis of Paul's ability as a "wise master builder"? [3:10; note that Paul is not claiming credit for the "wisdom" behind the design!]
- What was Paul's part in the construction of God's "building"? [3:10; cp Eph 2:19-22]
- What, then, did Apollos (and others) do from there? [3:10]
 - Where must all the other builders who come after the foundation is laid do their work? [3:10]
 - How many foundations does one building have, after all? [3:10-11; cp Eph 2:20]
 - How many "foundations" were the Corinthians attempting to build on (or to be built upon)? [3:10-11; cp 1:12-13; 3:4]

"...there are contentions among you" – 1 Corinthians 1:10 – 6:20

2) What is the "foundation" on which Paul began building the Corinthians? [3:10-11; cp 2:2]

-- When other builders come along, what type of materials does Paul say they might use in their work of continuing the construction? [3:12]

- What is the obvious (and stark!) contrast between these two small lists of building materials? [3:12]

- What type of construction would these brethren (both the Jews and the Gentiles) be familiar with that would be made of "gold, silver, (and) precious stones"? [3:12; cp 3:16; Rm 2:22; 1 Kings 6:21-22; etc]

3) Remember that our context is of division based on men. Paul's argument has been that the gospel is not a message from man's wisdom, but from God's. Nevertheless, the Corinthians have divided themselves over supposed differences in the men who taught them, rather than uniting themselves in the wisdom of the one message that they all had believed. In light of this particular posture, Paul seeks to have them analyze the problems that result from bad construction, considering the points of view of both the builders and the construction itself. Examine 3:10-15 and answer the following:

-- What should be the builder's concern as he builds on the one foundation? [3:10]

-- What does Paul say will happen with "each one's work"? [3:13]

- *When* does Paul say this will happen? [3:13]

- *How* does Paul say this will happen? [3:13; note that most buildings are not built with a view to this happening, but with a hope that it will not! However, Paul and the others who built this "structure" in Corinth should have been building with an acute understanding that a Day of testing would certainly come! cp Matt 7:24-27]

-- What will happen with regard to the builder if his work survives the test? [3:14; cp 3:8]

- What will happen with regard to the builder if his work does not survive? [3:15]

- What will happen *to* the builder in the event that his work does not survive? [3:15]

- Even so, what will be the true test of the builder himself? [3:15]

4) Some see the "materials" here as doctrines of men, but for several reasons that does not properly fit the context. It is more likely that Paul uses the construction "materials" to describe the Corinthians themselves, seeing as they are the "living stones" in this building. [3:10-16; cp 1 Pt 2:4-5] With this in mind, consider again our context of the Corinthians' being divided over men.

-- What type of "building" are the Corinthians, after all? [3:16; cp Eph 2:19-22]

"...there are contentions among you" – 1 Corinthians 1:10 – 6:20

- How many "temples" of the living and true God are there? [3:16-17; cp Dt 12:10-14; etc]
- What were the two main ways that the temple of God could be "defiled"? [3:16-17; cp Josh. 22:10-34 (esp v29!); 1 Kings 11:4-8; Mark 9:4-7; 2 Chronicles 33:1-9; etc]
 - How has the Corinthian division over men essentially brought these brethren to the point of doing the same thing and thus defiling themselves as the "temple of God"?
- What does Paul say will happen to anyone who defiles the temple of God? [3:17; cp 3:15]

"Therefore let no one boast in men" [1 Cor 3:18-23]

1) How does Paul's admonition "let no one deceive himself" fit in with the context here? [3:18]

- What had the Corinthians become "wise" about? [3:18; cp 1:10-13; 3:4]
- But what did Paul say they really needed to do? [3:18; cp 8:1-2; contrast Rm 1:22!]

2) What does Paul then remind them? [3:19-20; cp 1:18-25]

3) What is the conclusion that Paul now draws from his parables about the "field" and the "temple" of God – the Corinthians, who have been planted and watered, built and sanctified? [3:21; cp 1:30-31]

- What reason does Paul give for not boasting in (specific) men, and thus being divided over them? [3:21-22]
- Again, what is the great reason they have for being united? [3:23; cp John 17:20-23]

"Let a man so consider us...stewards of the mysteries of God" [1 Cor 4:1-5]

1) Since Paul and Apollos both belong to the Corinthians (not exclusively, but together! cp 3:21-22), then what should the Corinthians really see them as, instead of seeing them as "party" leaders? [4:1]

- Though Paul has emphasized the service that he and Apollos did among the Corinthians, for whom does Paul indicate they are really working? [4:1; cp 3:5-6, 9-11]
- Though Paul has mentioned both planting and building, what does he say is the service he is really performing? [4:1]
- And what is the well-known requirement for such service? [4:2]

"...there are contentions among you" – 1 Corinthians 1:10 – 6:20

2) What does Paul say is not important to him, regarding the "position" of the Corinthians? [4:3; cp 2 Corinthians 10:10; etc]

-- What is Paul's own "position" regarding himself? [4:3-4]

-- Who is the only real judge of the apostle Paul (and of everyone else!)? [4:3-4]

3) Therefore, what is Paul's exhortation toward the Corinthian brethren, regarding their "judging" and thus following men based on some perceived difference in their styles? [4:5]

-- What will the Lord Himself do when He comes? [4:5]

-- What will be the end result of this, both for those who taught and for those who received the message? [4:5; cp 1:31; 3:5, 14; 4:1-2]

"that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written" [1 Cor 4:6-13]

1) What does Paul say is the reason he has exposed himself and Apollos to such a degree in these examples? [4:6]

-- What does Paul say he hoped the Corinthians would learn from these examples? [4:6]

-- What does Paul hope will be the result of their learning this? [4:6; cp esp 3:5-10]

2) Paul now asks another series of questions, in the hopes that they will honestly analyze the answers and see their own condition. Examine 4:7 and answer the following:

-- Who has caused this division among the Corinthians (made them "differ")? [cp 1:10-12]

-- How did all of the Corinthians come to know these "deep things of God"? [cp 2:10-13; see also 1:4; 2:1-2; 15:1-11; etc]

-- In all of this division, what does Paul say they are really doing? [cp 1:31; 3:21; 4:5]

3) In light of their current condition, what does Paul declare about them? [4:8; this text should be understood as ironic speech. Paul does not actually believe this, but draws a "logical" conclusion about them in hyperbolic form, just to over-emphasize the impact of where their thinking may lead them. It is as if they have become "too smart" for God and His servants!]

4) What is Paul's personal assessment of his own (and the other apostles') "position"? [4:9]

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-- What does Paul say is the state of the apostles in the world (in the whole of creation)? [4:9; cp Mk 16:15; Rm 8:19-22; Col 1:19-20; etc.]

5) In 4:10, Paul continues with his ironic tone, contrasting himself (and other servants) with the high esteem the Corinthians, in practice, were giving themselves. Consider the following:

-- As the apostles (and other servants) became "fools" (preaching a message that is "foolish"; cp 1:18), what did the Corinthians become? [cp 1:24; 2:4-7, 10-13, 16; etc]

-- As the apostles (and other servants) became "weak" (preaching the "weakness" of God in the cross, and also humbling themselves as servants instead of masters; cp 1:25-2:3), what did the Corinthians become? [cp 1:18, 24, 30; 2:4-5; etc]

-- As the apostles (and other servants) became "dishonored", what did the Corinthians then seem to be setting themselves up to be? [cp 4:3, 5]

6) Before (v 9), Paul gave his personal assessment of himself and other servants like him. Now he lays out the proof behind his assessment in 4:11-13:

-- Because of their decision to preach the gospel, what does Paul say he and the other servants personally suffer? [(“we” repeated in 4:6-13 refers to Paul and Apollos specifically, but also to all similar servants); 4:11; cp 2 Corinthians 11:22-30; Philippians 4:11-13; etc]

-- What are he and the other servants occupied with, and how do they do it? [4:12a; cp Paul’s arrival in Corinth in Acts 18:1-4; see also Acts 20:32-35; etc]

-- What is their response when reviled? [4:12b; cp 1 Peter 2:19-23; etc]

-- What is their response when persecuted? [4:12c; cp 2 Cor 4:7-12; 1 Peter 2:19-23; etc]

-- What is their response when “defamed” (literally, “blasphemed”)? [4:13a; cp 1 Pet 2:19-23]

-- What are the apostles and other servants like them considered to be in the eyes of this world? [4:13b; cp 1:23; 4:9; etc]