

CHAPTER 4



A problem St. Paul is addressing is that the Corinthians Christians are judging his stewardship: many of them are saying that he is an inadequate steward of the mysteries of God, and therefore they reject him and follow another. In response, St. Paul says that he is unconcerned not only with their opinion, or even the opinion of a human court, but even his own opinion - he is concerned only with the judgment of the Lord (4:3-4). Humans should refuse to be judgmental, because we are unable to see into another person's heart. Only God can do this, and therefore He will ultimately be the one to give true praise (or, conversely, offer true condemnation) (4:5).

St. Paul notes that his discussion about Apollos himself was not about any rivalry the Corinthians may believe exists, but rather is simply intended so that the Corinthians Christians can learn from their example (4:6). By looking at St. Paul and Apollos' united work, as well as to the writings of the Old Testament about humility (which he refers to as "what is written"), the Corinthians Christians learn that they should not be pridefully claim to follow one teacher or another.

The apostle points out that the Corinthians have little room for boasting, because the riches in Christ that they've received were given to them (rather than taken or earned) (4:7). He then uses sarcasm to reinforce his point. To listen to the Corinthians, St. Paul argues, one would think that they were kings who ruled over everything without the apostles' help. In fact, he goes one, he wishes that they were kings, because then perhaps the apostles would reign with them, instead of being displayed for God's sake as condemned men and fools (4:8-10)! How mighty the Corinthians must be, because while the apostles and teachers were dishonored fools, the Corinthians must be wise and distinguished (4:10)!

Despite what some of the Corinthians claim, St. Paul intends to revisit the church in Corinth (4:18, 19). When he comes, he will see whether the lives of his critics measure up to their claims about themselves, because the kingdom of God is found not in mere words but in the power of the transformed Christian life (4:20). The Corinthians therefore have a choice: do they want St. Paul to visit them with "a rod," meaning that he will excommunicate those who continue to tear apart the Corinthian church, or do they want him to come in a spirit of unity with them (4:21)?

St. John Chrysostom concludes, "Paul leaves it up to the Corinthians to decide how he should come to them. We too have a choice. Either we can fall into hell, or we can obtain the kingdom."



*Have You Read 1
Corinthians 4 Yet?*

TODAY'S SPECIAL: AVOIDING JUDGMENTALISM

Judgmentalism is a form of sinful pride: you judge others because you think you are better than them. The solution to this problem, according to the saints, is to focus on your own failings instead of the failings of those around you. St. Ambrose of Optina, a nineteenth century Russian saint, tells us, "You need to pay such close attention to your own internal life, that you not focus on what is happening around you. Then you will not condemn." Another nineteenth century Russian saint, Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow, similarly says, "He who sufficiently knows and judges himself has no time to judge others."

At the same time, while we avoid judging people themselves, we should not necessarily ignore (and certainly not accept) the evil that they do. St. Isaac the Syrian, the sixth century bishop of Ninevah (now Mosul in modern Iraq), makes a statement that may sound familiar to you: "Love sinners, but hate their works; and do not despise them for their faults, lest you be tempted by the same trespasses." We are called by God to love the people, but hate their sins and avoid committing them ourselves.

The key to identifying, avoiding, and overcoming sins is discernment - the ability to know the difference between good and bad. St. John Cassian explains that discernment is vital for a Christian: "What, I ask, could be more dangerous or awkward than for a man to lose his power of judging of goodness, and his standard and rule of true discernment?"

