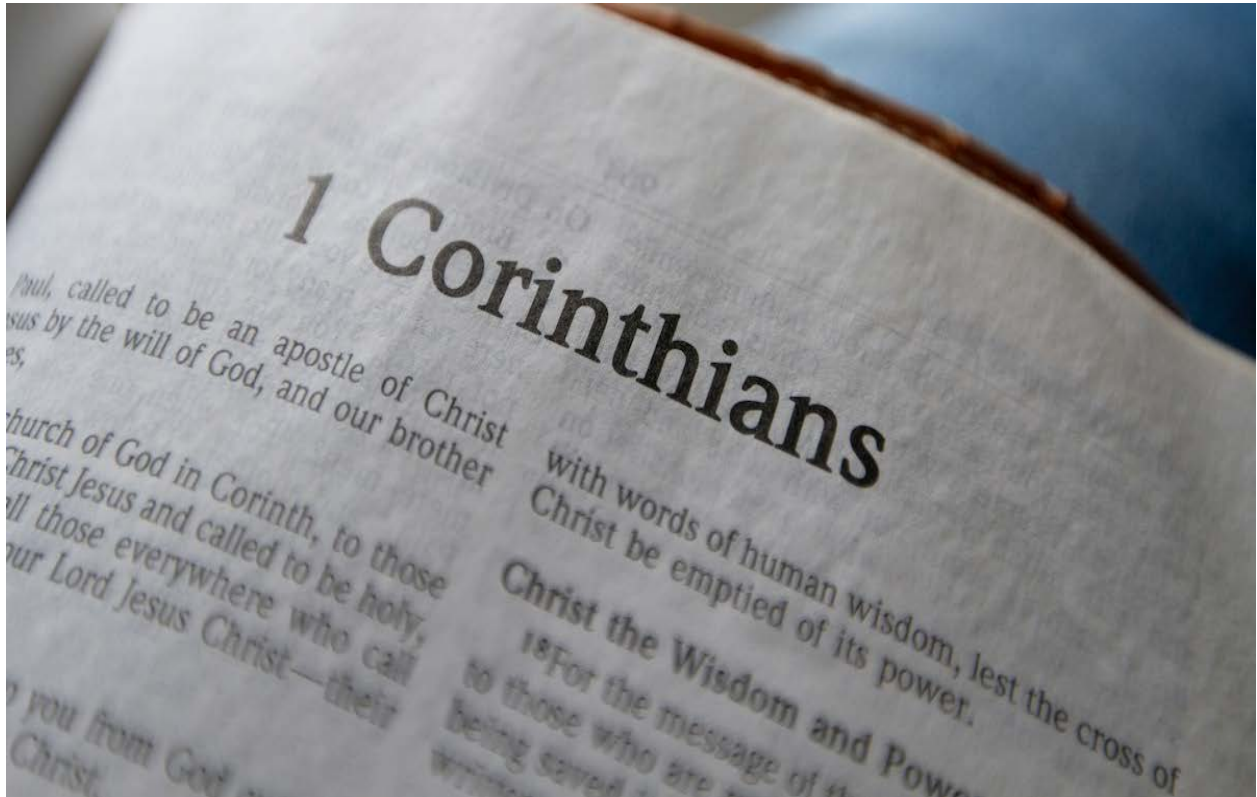


# The Mind of Christ

1 Corinthians 4

1 and 2 Corinthians Part 5



T. M. AND SUSIE MOORE

*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

The Mind of Christ: 1 Corinthians 4  
1 and 2 Corinthians Part 5  
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## Introduction to *1 Corinthians 4*

In 1 Corinthians 1-3 Paul exposed the problem that lay at the root of all the issues plaguing the Corinthians: They had allowed pride to divide the Body of Christ. By comparing themselves with one another and vaunting their sect as supreme, they showed that they were thinking with the mind of natural men, not with the mind of Christ.

So in chapter 4 he began to redirect them, to get them back into the groove of Christ's way of thinking. He explained that they must not put him and Apollos or any other of the apostles in competition or opposition. They should regard them as stewards of God's gifts and the least of all men. That way they would remember that God gives gifts to men, and He alone should be exalted (vv. 6, 7).

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We hope you find this study instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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## 1 Thinking with the Mind of Christ

*Pray Psalm 119.20-22.*

My soul breaks with longing  
For Your judgments at all times.  
You rebuke the proud—the cursed,  
Who stray from Your commandments.  
Remove from me reproach and contempt,  
For I have kept Your testimonies.

*Sing Psalm 119.20-22.*

(Open My Eyes: *Open My Eyes That I May See*)  
My soul with longing breaks for You;  
all of Your judgments I would do.  
For You rebuke the proud and the cursed,  
who from Your Law have strayed, and worse.  
Take from me all contempt, O LORD,  
for I have kept Your holy Word.  
Lift all reproach from me, O LORD —  
my soul renew!

*Read and meditate on 1 Corinthians 4.1-5.*

*Preparation*

1. How did Paul want the Corinthians to regard him?
2. To whom must we look for all judgments?

*Meditation*

In chapter 4 Paul continued to correct the thinking of the Corinthians, showing them how they ought to use the mind of Christ, and not their own best ideas, to practice belonging to the Lord.

Rather than put him or Apollos or anyone else on a pedestal, they must think of them as stewards who have been invested with a trust from God (vv. 1, 2). That trust was the ministry of the Word, and their duty as stewards was to be faithful to God and His Word.

Some, however, had judged Paul as not faithful, at least, not as faithful as Peter or Apollos. That didn't bother Paul, that is, not for his own sake. He knew his heart before the Lord. He kept a constant watch over his soul, so that he could hear when the Lord brought something to mind which was not according to His Word (v. 3). Thus, he knew that he walked the Lord's path and that he was not compromised in his stewardship (v. 4).

God alone is judge. We need to make decisions about things and, yes, about people. But we must only do so with the mind of Christ, which is His Word. Otherwise, we must reserve all judgment—and here Paul intended *final* judgment, judgment which condemns—to the Lord. He will bring all hidden sins to light and reveal the depths of each person's heart (v. 5). Then each will receive the praise they are due—from Him Who judges righteously.

Since we're not able to judge like that, we must think with the mind of Christ about others—charitably, positively, humbly, generously, and according to God's Word.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.*

“Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it;

unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Ps. 127.1). Warned.

Paul wasn’t looking for approval from people; he was only focused on God’s opinion. So, he was able to say wholeheartedly to the folks, Consider us: faithful servants of Christ and faithful stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4.1, 2). And he was so sure of his own sincerity that he turned the whole situation over to God, knowing full well that He would judge everybody’s thoughts, hearts, and behaviors in the end (1 Cor. 4.5). Warned and comforted.

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there” (Jms. 3.13-16). Warned and encouraged.

God, in His majestic mercy and grace, has been speaking to humanity, generation after generation, about His plan for His people. And day after day, time after time, we ignore His love, spurn His plan, and think we know better than He how to live our “Christian” life. But from the start, God has been telling us that we need a mind and heart reset based on the foundation of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Yes, He has warned us that we will not be able to manage this life in any other way.

Make no mistake, we will all be judged one day. When Jesus returns, He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness; and He will reveal the counsels of the hearts (1 Cor. 4.5). Warned.

But again, God’s mercy and grace: “each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Cor. 4.5). Loved.

Rewarded for thinking with the mind of Christ.

*For reflection*

1. In what ways had the Corinthians *not* been thinking with the mind of Christ?
2. What can we do to make sure that we are more consistent in thinking with the mind of Christ?
3. What would suggest to you that you were thinking more with the mind of a natural person than with the mind of Christ?

*Paul did not mean to reprove every kind of judgment without exception, but only what is hasty and rash, without examination of the case. For the Corinthians did not mark with unjaudiced eye the character of each individual, but, blinded by ambition, groundlessly extolled one and depreciated another, and took upon themselves to mark out the dignity of each individual beyond what is lawful for men.* John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4.5*

*Pray Psalm 119.17-19, 23, 24.*

Pray that God will give clearer and deeper insight to His Word, to understand all His ways, and to counsel you by His Word and Spirit throughout the day.

*Sing Psalm 119.17-19, 23, 24.*

(Open My Eyes: *Open My Eyes That I May See*)

Open my eyes, LORD, let me see  
wonderful truths to transform me.

I am a stranger here in the earth;  
hide not from me Your glorious worth.

Deal with Your servant graciously  
that I may live obediently.

Open my eyes, LORD, let me see

glory divine!

Princes oppose me day by day,  
for I continue in Your way.  
I will Your statutes hold in my mind.  
What great delight in them I find!  
LORD, let Your testimonies be  
light on my path to counsel me.  
LORD, what delight You bring to me  
out of Your Word!

## 2 Train Your Mind

*Pray Psalm 119.41, 42.*

Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD—  
Your salvation according to Your word.  
So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me,  
For I trust in Your word.

*Sing Psalm 119.41, 42.*

*(Dix: For the Beauty of the Earth)*

Let Your mercies come to me, Your salvation by Your Word.  
From reproaches set me free, for I trust in You, O LORD.  
Let my life an answer be for those who may question me.

Let my words be Your words, LORD; strengthen me to keep Your Law.  
All my hope is in Your Word, and I seek Your precepts all.  
I will ever keep Your Word, for I trust in You, O LORD!

*Read 1 Corinthians 4.1-7; meditate on verses 6, 7.*

*Preparation*

1. What did Paul say about “what is written”, that is, the Word of God?
2. Where do our differences and gifts come from?

*Meditation*

Paul was helping the Corinthians do a bit of a mind-check. He wanted them to stop thinking like people in the world—about themselves and their prestige or views—and begin seeing things the way Jesus does. He has already told them that seeing with the mind of Christ means seeing each other as servants, not inferiors. And seeing ourselves as temples of the Lord, not edifices of our own design and making.

Here he reminded the Corinthians that, like it or not, our thought life needs parameters and constraints. That’s what the Word of God does. It reveals the mind of Christ to us and works to shape our mind to think as He does. So we shouldn’t go beyond the Word in any of our thinking (v. 6). Let the Word teach and show and shape us for thinking with the mind of Christ.

As for the differences we recognize in one another, they must not be allowed to divide us. After all, where do these differences come from, if not from God (v. 7)? If God makes us different, we should celebrate our differences—as He does—rather than let them divide us. All that we have comes to us from the Lord (v. 7). We’re not thinking with the mind of Christ when we vaunt our knowledge or supposed piety or spiritual gifts or social status or anything else. God has given us all these gifts. We should receive all gifts with thanksgiving and celebrate God’s lavish grace and kindness. We’re not thinking with the mind of Christ when we compare our gifts with others, whether to our advantage or detriment. We boast not in our gifts nor those of anyone else. Like our differences, our gifts should point us to God and so enhance and deepen our oneness.

We’re thinking with the mind of Christ when we see things as He does. And when we do, we overcome the things that divide us with love that binds, to one another and to the Lord.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

“There are three things which are majestic in pace,  
Yes, four which are stately in walk:

A lion, which is mighty among beasts  
And does not turn away from any;  
A greyhound,  
A male goat also,  
And a king whose troops are with him” (Prov. 30.29-31).

But for all their majesty, 3 out of 4 will never be able to knit.

“For who has despised the day of small things?” (Zech. 4.10). Surely not the people of God. Kingdom work is accomplished when all the parts work together as a whole. All participants are working toward the goal of the honor and glory of God and the growth and edification of His Church. The Kingdom needs the lions, greyhounds, goats, kings, and knitters.

And for all the work to be accomplished, we need different gifts. We dare not judge and expect the same work out of every person. God has given each one the specific gifts He chooses: “For who makes you different from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4.7).

Understanding this truth gives us an appreciation for the gifts we have been given and the gifts God has given others. And truly, if “God makes us different, we should celebrate our differences—as He does—rather than let them divide us.”

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...speaking the truth in love, [that they] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ...by which every part does its share, [and] causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4.11-13, 15, 16).

Whatever gifts He has given you, rejoice in those, and use them for His honor and glory and the edification of others. There are no insignificant gifts, and there are none that shine brighter than others in God’s eyes. You, and only you, can do what you have been called and gifted to do in your Personal Mission Field.

Train your mind to rejoice in that.

“For the word of the LORD is right, and all His work is done in truth” (Ps. 33.4)

*For reflection*

1. What gifts and other resources has God given you for serving Him?
2. How would you describe your stewardship of those gifts and resources?
3. Whom will you encourage today to use their gifts and resources for the Lord?

*The people who boast imagine that they are justified by their own efforts, and therefore they glory in themselves, not in the Lord.*  
Augustine (354-430), *Letter to Valentine*

*Pray Psalm 119.43-48.*

Pray that God will embed His Word more firmly in your soul, and that He will empower you to live within the framework of His teaching. Pray also that God will give you greater love for His Word.

*Sing Psalm 119.43-48.*

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

LORD, take not Your Word from me, for I trust it day by day.



*The Mind of Christ: 1 Corinthians 4*

I will walk in liberty as Your precepts I obey.  
I shall keep Your truth, O LORD, for I hope in all Your Word.

I will speak Your Word to kings, and I will not be ashamed.  
In Your Word my glad heart sings, as Your truth I have proclaimed.  
In Your Law will I delight, which I love with all my might.

To Your Law I lift my hands to embrace and hold it dear.  
In Your truth my glad heart stands, knowing You are ever near.  
I will meditate, O LORD, on Your statutes and Your Word.

### 3 Think Like the Apostles

*Pray Psalm 118.7-9.*

The LORD is for me among those who help me;  
Therefore I shall see *my desire* on those who hate me.  
*It is* better to trust in the LORD  
Than to put confidence in man.  
*It is* better to trust in the LORD  
Than to put confidence in princes.

*Sing Psalm 118.7-9.*

(St. George's Windsor: *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*)  
For the LORD stands next to me; He will give me victory!  
Over all who hate my life I will triumph through the strife!  
In His grace I refuge find, in His steadfast love so kind.  
Trust not princes, trust not men—Christ shall be our haven then!

*Read 1 Corinthians 4.1-10; meditate on verses 8-10.*

*Preparation*

1. How did Paul describe himself and the other apostles?
2. What did he say about the Corinthians?

*Meditation*

Sometimes you can feel the indignation, even outrage, rising in Paul as he dictated his letters to the churches.

Especially in 1 Corinthians. Here is a perfect example. He takes the Corinthians mindset in his sights—their sense of fullness, richness, and superiority over their brethren—and blasts away at it: “If only it were true!” (v. 8) The Corinthians considered themselves so wise, strong, and distinguished (v. 10). But they were so only in their own worldly eyes.

If Paul was livid about this, how do we think Jesus feels?

This is no way to think about being a follower of Christ. We should learn to think like the apostles, like Paul and thus, like Jesus (1 Cor. 11.1). The world will regard our faith as folly, our worship as weakness, our disinterested service as dishonoring. We must not be dismayed or deterred by this. The apostles were greeted with such despite and denunciation wherever they went, yet they stayed the course, following the path of Jesus rather than the praise of men.

Paul will calm down a bit by the time we reach verse 14. But here he is explosive, passionate, and withering in his contempt for Corinthian small-mindedness. Would he say the same to us? Are we thinking with the mind of Christ, the mind of self-denial, mutual service, and Christlikeness in all things? Let the mind of the apostle guide us into the mind of Jesus as we take up our work each day in His Name and for His glory.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

What a joy to hear a Christian leader endeavor to set his congregants straight on important issues of the faith! Good for you, Paul. He was helping the Corinthians then; he is helping us now. Do we want to learn what he has to teach?

“You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us...” (1 Cor. 4.8). He almost

sounds like Miracle Max in *Princess Bride*, “Whoo-hoo-hoo, look who knows so much.”

The Corinthians—suffering from self-aggrandizement and captivity to sin—could not see how their attitude was causing divisiveness within the body of Christ. They were the problem, not the unbelievers.

When we become Christians, we want our old nature to be crucified with Him, so that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Rom. 6.6). When this truly happens, we then can only serve our risen Savior. And if we are serving Him, we are living with His mind (1 Cor. 2.16). We completely belong to Him. Just as Jesus completely belongs to God (1 Cor. 3.23).

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2.20).

And when this is true of us, we will set aside wrong attitudes and embrace being fools for Christ’s sake. Putting off former thoughts and conduct, being daily renewed in the spirit of our new mind, and gratefully becoming the new person, “which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4.22-24).

“So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90.12).

*For reflection*

1. How can we learn to think like the apostles, like Paul?
2. Why is it important that we learn to do so?
3. If we’re not thinking with the mind of Christ, what mind are we using?

*Paul said these things in order to provoke the Corinthians to consider that they should zealously seek to emulate the apostles in their dangers and their indignities, not in their honors and glories. For it is the former, not the latter, that the gospel requires. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 13.1*

*Pray Psalm 118.14-29.*

What will be required of you to live as a fool for Christ today? Ask the Lord to provide it all.

*Sing Psalm 118.14-29.*

(St. George’s Windsor: *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*)

In the Savior we are strong! He is all our strength and song!

To His grace now raise your voice; in His righteousness rejoice!

For the LORD does valiantly; we shall live eternally.

Praise His works with all your breath, you whom He redeems from death.

All who know Christ’s righteousness, His great Name now thank and bless!

Through His gate the righteous pass, He our saving mercy has.

Cast aside and left alone, Christ is now our Cornerstone!

God has made His Son and Word our salvation: Praise the LORD!

Blessed are they who in His Name come and Jesus’ grace proclaim.

God His light upon us shines in the Savior’s sacrifice.

Praise and thanks to You, O LORD; we extol Your holy Word!

Thanks to You for You are good! Thanks to our great loving God!

## 4 The Real Life of the Apostles

Pray Psalm 71.1-3.

In You, O LORD, I put my trust;  
Let me never be put to shame.  
Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape;  
Incline Your ear to me, and save me.  
Be my strong refuge,  
To which I may resort continually;  
You have given the commandment to save me,  
For You *are* my rock and my fortress.

Sing Psalm 71.1-3.

(Solid Rock: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*)

In You, O LORD, I refuge claim; O let me never be ashamed.  
In righteousness deliver me; incline Your ear and hear my plea.

Refrain v. 3

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;  
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

Read 1 Corinthians 4.1-13; meditate on verses 11-13.

Preparation

1. How did Paul describe his experience as an apostle?
2. How did he respond to these trials?

Meditation

By exalting one or another of the apostles—“I am of Paul!” “I am of Apollos!” “I am of Cephas”—the Corinthians were doing like all the political groups and religious sects of their day. Choose a group, rally around the charismatic leader, and hope to gain a bit of his esteem or status, if only by identification.

Obviously, the Corinthians had no idea what it was like to be Paul or Apollos or Peter. Paul set them straight in these verses. Deprivation, hardship, homelessness, abuse, rejection: Sign me up for that, right? Plus—and here Paul inserts a pique he will elaborate on in chapter 9—they not only had to do the work their stewardship required, but to supply all their needs by working with their hands as well (v. 12).

Yet throughout their trials they did not complain, revile, blame, or falter. Instead, consistent with their true calling and mission, they blessed, endured, sought the Lord in prayer, and stayed the course (vv. 12, 13). They knew that the world regarded them as people to be rejected (v. 13), but that changed neither their calling nor their stewardship. God had called them to serve, and they weren’t seeking anything for themselves. They kept their focus on the Lord and remained faithful in their calling.

And that’s good advice for all who follow Jesus.

Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Paul used an *inclusio* of time to bring gravitas into the moment. He began this passage with “To the present hour” and ended it with “until now” (1 Cor. 4.11, 13). He wanted to make sure that they understood the relevance of what he was saying. The hardships endured were not something from the past that he had mastered and come through. No, what he was writing about was happening to him right then. Even as he was amidst this suffering, he responded with blessings, endurance, and kindness.

He was living what he talked and wrote about. So, when he tells us to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 4.16; 11.1), we can do that wholeheartedly and without question. A real, living, breathing, human being, filled with the Holy Spirit, who obediently did what God had called him to do.

Right at that very moment he was hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, reviled, persecuted, defamed, and told he was the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things that had ever been offscoured up to that very minute. All included.

Paul's circumstances never affected his Kingdom work or his outlook.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4.13).

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1.21). Paul's perfect perspective.

"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3.8, 9, 10, 11).

Paul, without the gift of salvation and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, was a man "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9.1).

But Paul, experiencing the gift of salvation and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, was a man we would all do well to appreciate, follow, and imitate. What a difference the Lord Jesus makes!

"O God, who is like You?

You, who have shown me great and severe troubles,  
shall revive me again..." (Ps. 71.19, 20).

Paul invites us to walk in his footsteps, to experience the gift of salvation and the empowering of the Holy Spirit through all our circumstances—the Real Life of a follower of Christ and fellow-worker with God (1 Cor. 3.9)

*For reflection*

1. How should you prepare for the kind of suffering Paul wrote about?

2. When trials come, how do you respond to them?

3. God sends us trials, as He sent trials to Paul, to strengthen us in our service and stewardship. How have you experienced this lately?

*They must be content, with him and for him, to be despised and abused. It is much better to be rejected, despised, and ill used, as St. Paul was, than to have the good opinion and favor of the world. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4.7-13*

*Pray Psalm 71.14-18.*

Pray about the day ahead, that God will give you courage to live and bear witness for Him, and that you will stand up against any opposition and bless the Lord for His salvation.

*Sing Psalm 71.14-18.*

(Solid Rock: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less*)

But as for me my voice I raise to sing in hope and constant praise!

With saving grace my voice will swell Your never-ending grace to tell.

*The Mind of Christ: 1 Corinthians 4*

*Refrain v. 3*

A Rock of habitation be; command Your Word to rescue me;  
my Rock and Fortress ever be!

O LORD, I praise Your righteousness Who me from youth have taught and blessed.  
Forsake me not when I am old, 'til I Your mercies all have told!

*Refrain*

## 5 Admonished

*Pray Psalm 119.65-67.*

You have dealt well with Your servant,  
O LORD, according to Your word.  
Teach me good judgment and knowledge,  
For I believe Your commandments.  
Before I was afflicted I went astray,  
But now I keep Your word.

*Sing Psalm 119.65-67.*

(Open My Eyes: *Open My Eyes, That I May See*)  
You have dealt well with me, O LORD,  
just as You promised in Your Word.  
Teach me good judgment, help me to know  
all that I need to love You so.  
Let Your commandments light my way.  
Send sweet affliction when I stray,  
that I may walk Your holy way  
and keep Your Word.

*Read 1 Corinthians 4.1-17; meditate on verses 14-17.*

*Preparation*

1. Why did Paul write to the Corinthians about their divisions and immaturity?
2. What did he urge them to do?

*Meditation*

The NKJV's "warn" is rather too strong here (it's the least used translation of this verb). More to the point is some combination of "rebuke" and "admonish." The Corinthians had fallen into bad thinking, taking their cues more from the ways of the world than the Word of God. They had gone beyond the Word as Paul had taught it to them, and as a result, their churches were in a mess.

So he rebuked them for being so easily led astray from the mind of Christ and admonished—solemnly encouraged them—to recover themselves. If they felt shame for being thus chided, that was not Paul's intention (v. 14). He loved them like a father (v. 15). After all, he had led them all to the Lord. They should have held fast to his teaching rather than try to be Christians on the world's terms.

So he called them back to himself, to imitate him in his humility, faithfulness, stewardship, affliction, and devotion to the Word of God (v. 16). And maybe here's the "warning": Timothy was on the way (v. 17), and they could expect that he would be resolute in reminding them of Paul's teaching and ways, just as he taught everywhere in all the churches. They must listen to Timothy, return to Paul's teaching and the Word of God, recover their unity in the mind of Christ, and get on with the good work of growing in Him.

Paul was not content for his churches to be divided and immature. We should take heed to his admonition.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Part of Timothy's pastoral on-the-job training was to go to Corinth and set things back in order.

Paul was preparing another son in the faith for the Kingdom work set before him.

Later, when Timothy had his own church, he received letters from Paul. Part of one said this: “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers [perhaps ten thousand? 1 Cor. 4.15]; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Tim. 4.1-4).

For my money, pastoral training schools, seminaries, graduate schools, Bible schools, all who are preparing men for the professional work of ministry should use this passage as the syllabus for all their teaching. It is clear to see, from all of Scripture, that there are certain ways the enemy likes to ensnare pastors and divide churches, and for that warfare, ministers must be prepared and ready.

What? Do we think that things are any different now than they have ever been? Solomon warned of that eons ago: “That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl. 1.9) He ended that book with equally wise words: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl. 12.13, 14).

Even if the six basic story types can be crunched into three: happy ending, unhappy ending, tragedy; the plot lines are not that many. God knows that. When will we ever catch on?

Paul was rebuking, admonishing, and warning the church in Corinth of the problems they needed to overcome to live like their earthly spiritual father, or better yet, their heavenly Father.

Paul is still warning the churches today of the very same problems. Admonished, we need to take him seriously and stop falling into the same traps.

*For reflection*

1. What is the role of admonition in the life of discipleship? Who should admonish? When?
2. Every believer should have a Paul, a Barnabas, and a Timothy. Is that true in your life?
3. Do you have any role models, like Paul, to whom you look for guidance in your walk with the Lord? How do they help you?

*Paul’s real aim was that the Corinthians should imitate Christ. But because of their weakness, he presents himself as an intermediate model to follow. It is only because he imitates Christ that he exhorts the people to imitate him. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 13.5*

*Pray Psalm 119.68-72.*

Call on the Lord to help you test all that you see or hear by His Word.

*Sing Psalm 119.68-72.*

(Open My Eyes: *Open My Eyes, That I May See*)

LORD, You are good, and good You do;  
teach me that I may do good, too.  
Wicked men my true pathway distort;  
I keep Your Word with all my heart.  
Their heart is dark with sin’s cruel blight,  
but in Your Law is my delight.



Let me not turn from Your sweet Light,  
nor from Your Word.

All my afflictions, LORD, I turn  
to You that I Your Law may learn.  
Teach me to hold Your Word in my heart,  
never from its true way to part.  
Your Law is better far to me  
than any wealth could ever be;  
open my eyes and let me see  
more of Your Word!

## 6 Puffed-Up or Powerful?

*Pray Psalm 40.4, 5.*

Blessed is that man who makes the LORD his trust,  
And does not respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.  
Many, O LORD my God, are Your wonderful works  
Which You have done;  
And Your thoughts toward us  
Cannot be recounted to You in order;  
If I would declare and speak of them,  
They are more than can be numbered.

*Sing Psalm 40.4, 5.*

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

Blessed are all who trust in You, turning both from lies and pride.  
Countless wonders, LORD, You do, and Your thoughts with us abide.  
LORD, Your worth who can declare? None with You can e'er compare.

*Read 1 Corinthians 4.1-21; meditate on verse 18-21.*

*Prepare*

1. Of what does the Kingdom of God consist?
2. What option did Paul give the Corinthians?

*Meditation*

Paul has a masterful way of summing-up and pointing ahead, even as he is introducing a new idea. We see this here, where Paul points back to the Corinthians' sectarianism and exposes the problem of pride that lay at the heart of it. The people were "puffed-up" about their cliquish behavior (v. 18); they were like children, boasting in the school yard. So Paul points back to chapters 1-3 and ahead to chapter 8.

The rod is for children, as Solomon reminds us (Prov. 13.24). The Corinthians were acting like children. Did they want Paul to treat them as such (v. 21)? Or were they willing to be admonished (v. 14) so that, when he came to them again he might be positive, encouraging, and gentle (v. 21; 2 Corinthians)?

The issue is not what we think we can boast about but whether the power of the Kingdom of God is at work in us (v. 19). Where the Kingdom of God has come and Jesus is sorting things out for His glory, power for righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit abounds (v. 20; cf. Rom. 14.17, 18). This is what Paul is looking for in the churches, evidence that the Kingdom has come and is coming in the power of God's Spirit. Their boasting is not good, as he has already told them (1 Cor. 3.21; 4.7). And the only way to power is by submitting to Jesus and His Word, not going beyond it. Where the power is, the churches will flourish as believers, filled with the Spirit, receive and exercise gifts for loving God and one another (1 Cor. 12).

The new idea introduced here is the power of the Kingdom—the power of God's grace. On their own strength, the Corinthians had made a mess of things. Boasting about their "achievement" had only made things worse. They needed power from on high to get back to living and serving like mature believers in healthy, growing churches. Paul will have more to say about how to access that power in the chapters that follow. Here, he whets their appetite for it, as hopefully he does in us.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.*

“Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Ps. 119.18).

And as Elisha prayed for his servant, “LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” “Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kgs. 6.17).

The psalmist and Elisha were both praying for sight beyond normal seeing. One was praying that the Spirit would open his understanding to see beyond the written word, into the heart of God. And Elisha was praying that God would open the young man’s eyes to see beyond the temporal into the spiritual and eternal that is alive and working all around us.

Paul wanted the eyes of the Corinthians to be open to the potential, powerful work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Kind of like the song, *If You’re Happy and You Know It*, you’ll clap your hands, stomp your feet, and say “Amen”.

He was saying that if they lived in a way that they didn’t recognize—their usual puffed up, self-serving, captive, divisive, sinful way—but in an obedient and powerful way, they would be living in the power of the Spirit, and they would know it, because it was so antithetical to their normal behavior. Clap. Stomp. Amen.

We are told the same. “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1.7). “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 2.22, 23). None of those glorious attributes come “naturally” to any of us. So, when we see them, after we have asked God for them, we know it is His Spirit. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2.13).

Paul, and God, have given us a choice. “Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Cor. 4.21).

Puffed-up or powerful? Loved and encouraged or judged? You choose.

*For reflection*

1. How can you keep from becoming “puffed-up” about where you are in your walk with and work for the Lord?

2. At this time, what are you asking God to do in your life beyond where you are at this point? How do you hope to know His power today?

3. Knowing the power comes from living by faith. What does this mean for you?

*Whenever the gospel is effectual, it comes not in word only, but also in power, by the Holy Spirit, quickening dead sinners, delivering persons from the slavery of sin and Satan, renewing them both inwardly and outwardly, and comforting, strengthening, and establishing the saints, which cannot be done by the persuasive language of men, but by the power of God. Matthew Henry (1662-1714), Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4.14-21*

*Pray Psalm 40.1-3, 6-10.*

Thank God for the way His power has worked in you, how His Spirit has worked to transform you into the likeness of Jesus and make you a witness for Him. Call on Him for the Kingdom power you will need to serve Him today.

*Sing Psalm 40.1-3, 6-10.*

(Dix: *For the Beauty of the Earth*)

*The Mind of Christ: 1 Corinthians 4*

I waited patiently for God; He inclined and heard my cry,  
lifted me up above the sod, set me on a Rock on high!  
New songs in my mouth He gave; may He through me many save.

Offerings You do not require – open now my ears, O LORD!  
What from me do You desire? Firm delight to do Your Word.  
Take my life in ev'ry part; write Your Law upon my heart.

LORD, Your truth will I proclaim to Your people gathered 'round,  
nor will I my lips restrain – let Your precious ways resound!  
Of Your saving grace and Word I would speak, most loving LORD.

## 7 Antidote to Pride

*Pray Psalm 119.7, 8.*

The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul;  
The testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple;  
The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart;  
The commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes

*Sing Psalm 19.7, 8.*

(St. Christopher: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure;  
the simple man God's wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.  
God's Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;  
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

*Review 1 Corinthians 4.1-21; meditate on verses 6 and 7.*

*Preparation*

1. Why did Paul point to himself and Apollos?
2. What did he want the Corinthians to do?

*Meditation*

In 1 Corinthians 1-3 Paul exposed the problem that lay at the root of all the issues plaguing the Corinthians: They had allowed pride to divide the Body of Christ. By comparing themselves with one another and vaunting their sect as supreme, they showed that they were thinking with the mind of natural men, not with the mind of Christ.

So in chapter 4 he began to redirect them, to get them back into the groove of Christ's way of thinking. He explained that they must not put him and Apollos or any other of the apostles in competition or opposition. They should regard them as stewards of God's gifts and the least of all men. That way they would remember that God gives gifts to men, and He alone should be exalted (vv. 6, 7).

Rather than judge one another by worldly criteria (vv. 1-5), they should submit to the Word of God and let it guide their thinking (v. 6). That way they would rediscover humility and service and be more truly like the apostles (vv. 8-13). Paul instructed them not to exalt him but to imitate him (v. 16). He was preparing to come to them soon, so he sent Timothy ahead to help the Corinthians get things in order again by correcting their thinking about Paul, his teaching, and his ways (v. 17).

In their sinfulness and immaturity, the Corinthians had gone beyond the Word of God. They must remember what Paul taught them and come back under the shelter of Scripture. There they would overcome their pride and divisiveness and rediscover gratitude, humility, service, stewardship, and true Kingdom power (v. 20).

From here on, Paul will show them how only the Word of God can overcome their pride to help them join in redressing the problems and issues reported to him.

*Treasures Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162*

Divisiveness has been striking at the heart of God's people for a long time.

David wrote of the pain of infighting and unkindness. He was a man well aware of what fighting against enemies was like; but this was different, this warring from within:  
"For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it.

Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me;  
then I could hide from him.  
But it was you, a man my equal,  
my companion and my acquaintance.  
We took sweet counsel together,  
and walked to the house of God in the throng” (Ps. 55.12-14).

And Jesus, of course, dealt with the murderous jealousy of the Pharisees; and those who longed to please the leaders of organized religion, rather than the Light of the world. “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (Jn. 12.42, 43).

Does the church today fall into these traps?  
Have you ever experienced poor treatment from other believers?  
Have you ever been unkind to a fellow Christian?  
Do you care more about keeping your church friends happy than standing for righteousness?  
Do you have a favorite Bible teacher that you find more “reliable” than the Word of God?  
Do you ever feel puffed up over something you’ve been given from the Lord?  
Are you ever tempted to boast about it? As if it was something that just naturally emanated from yourself?

These problem areas go straight back to our concept of salvation. God made it exceedingly clear that we cannot earn it, nor can we do anything exceptional to gain it. It is all a gift that we received (1 Cor. 4.7). “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Eph. 2.8, 9).

“But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me,  
that I AM the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.  
For in these I delight’, says the LORD” (Jer. 9.24).

We can, every day, start anew, cleansed, forgiven and ready to live under the “shelter of Scripture” and therein overcome our pride... “and rediscover gratitude, humility, service, stewardship, and true Kingdom power.”

*My faith has found a resting place, Not in device nor creed;  
I trust the Ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead.*

*My heart is leaning on the Word, The written Word of God,  
Salvation by my Savior’s name, Salvation through His blood.*

*I need no other argument, I need no other plea,  
It is enough that Jesus died, And that He died for me.*  
(Lidie H. Edmunds, 19<sup>th</sup> century)

*For reflection*

1. What do you learn about thinking with the mind of Christ from 1 Corinthians 4?
2. How can you know that you are not thinking with the mind of Christ? What is the role of your daily devotional time in helping you to think with the mind of Christ?
3. Whom will you encourage today to think more with the mind of Christ?

*The word of God is the best rule by which to judge as to men. Pride commonly is at the bottom of quarrels. Self-conceit contributes*

*The Mind of Christ: 1 Corinthians 4*

*to produce undue esteem of our teachers, as well as of ourselves. We shall not be puffed up for one against another, if we remember that all are instruments, employed by God, and endowed by him with various talents.* Matthew Henry (1662-1714), *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 4.1-6*

*Pray Psalm 19.9-14.*

Give praise and thanks to God for His Word. And praise and thanks for His Spirit, Who empowers us to live within the framework of His Word. And praise and thanks for Jesus, to Whom all the Word of God points, that we may be made more like Him.

*Sing Psalm 19.9-14.*

(St. Christopher: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.

His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.

O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;

be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

Who, LORD, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!

Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.

O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight

be pleasing to You, gracious LORD, acceptable and right.

*The Mind of Christ: 1 Corinthians 4*

*Questions for Reflection or Discussion*

1. In what sense or ways had the Corinthians gone beyond the Word of God?
2. How should we think about one another in the Body of Christ?
3. How should we expect the unbelieving world to think about us? Should that trouble us?
4. Thus far in our study in 1 Corinthians, what have you seen of Paul that you need to imitate?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study of 1 and 2 Corinthians?

*For prayer:*



## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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