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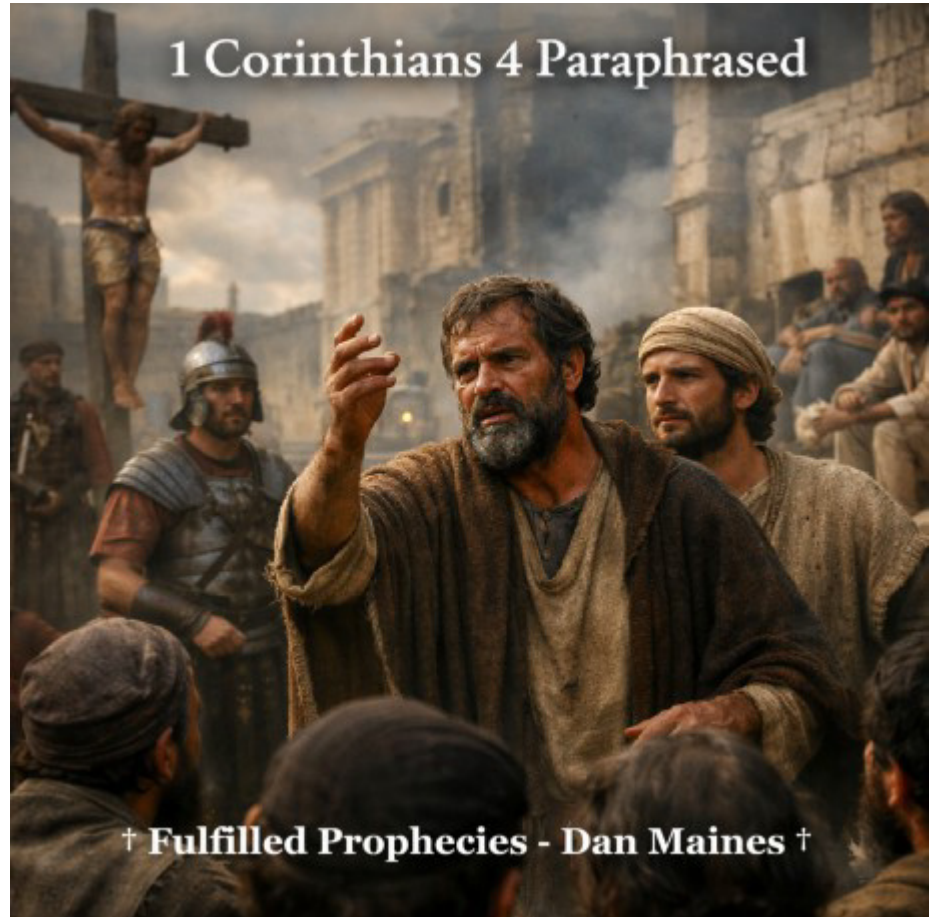
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1 Corinthians 4 Paraphrased



By Dan Maines

1 Corinthians 4 Paraphrased

Introduction

† Paul continues correcting the pride and division that had grown inside the Corinthian church. Some believers were elevating certain teachers and judging others as if they themselves were the final authority. Paul reminds them that apostles were not celebrities but servants entrusted with God's message. Their responsibility was faithfulness to Christ, not the approval of human opinion (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

† This chapter exposes spiritual arrogance. The Corinthians

believed they had already reached maturity and authority, but Paul shows the opposite. True apostles suffered, endured persecution, and served humbly. Their example stands in sharp contrast to the pride of the church (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

† Early Christian writers also recognized this humility in the apostles. Clement of Alexandria wrote that the apostles lived lives of hardship and sacrifice as faithful stewards of Christ's teaching, not rulers seeking honor.

1 Corinthians 4:1

People should think of us as servants of Christ and caretakers entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.

† Paul shifts the focus away from personality worship. Apostles weren't leaders competing for followers but servants entrusted with God's truth (Colossians 1:25-27).

† The word steward refers to a servant managing a household on behalf of a master. The authority belonged to Christ, not to the steward himself (Luke 12:42-43).

† Ignatius of Antioch also described church leaders as servants entrusted with Christ's teaching rather than masters over believers.

1 Corinthians 4:2

When someone is trusted with a responsibility like this, the one thing required is that he proves faithful.

† Faithfulness is the true measure of ministry, not popularity, success, or public recognition (Matthew 25:21).

† God's servants are judged by their loyalty to Christ's message, not by the opinions of people (Galatians 1:10).

† Tertullian wrote that the apostles preserved the teachings of Christ faithfully and passed them down without altering them.

1 Corinthians 4:3

As for me, it matters very little if I'm judged by you or by any human court. I don't even judge myself.

† Paul isn't dismissing accountability, he's showing that human judgment is limited and often misguided (Romans 14:4).

† Even self-evaluation can be flawed because people often misunderstand their own motives (Jeremiah 17:9).

† The final authority belongs to God alone, who sees the heart.

1 Corinthians 4:4

I may not be aware of anything wrong in myself, but that doesn't make me innocent. The one who judges me is the Lord.

† A clear conscience isn't the same as complete innocence because only God knows the full truth of every action (Psalm 139:23-24).

† Paul acknowledges that ultimate judgment belongs to Christ alone (2 Corinthians 5:10).

† This humbles both teachers and believers because no one stands above God's evaluation.

1 Corinthians 4:5

So stop judging before the proper time, wait until the Lord comes. He'll bring hidden things in darkness to light and reveal the motives of every heart. Then each person will receive praise from God.

† Human judgment often focuses on appearances, but God reveals hidden motives (1 Samuel 16:7).

† The coming of the Lord in judgment exposed the true condition of Israel and vindicated the faithful apostles (Matthew 16:27-28).

† Eusebius recorded how early Christians believed the destruction of Jerusalem revealed God's judgment against those who rejected Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:6

Brothers, I've used myself and Apollos as examples so you can learn not to go beyond what's written. Then none of you will become proud by favoring one teacher over another.

† Paul deliberately uses himself and Apollos to demonstrate humility and prevent the church from forming factions (1 Corinthians 3:4-6).

† The phrase not to go beyond what's written reminds believers

to stay grounded in Scripture rather than human pride (Isaiah 8:20).

† Irenaeus warned that division in the church often comes when people elevate personalities above truth.

1 Corinthians 4:7

What makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that wasn't given to you? If everything was given to you, why do you boast as if it wasn't?

† Every spiritual gift, position, and blessing comes from God, not personal greatness (James 1:17).

† Pride forgets that everything we have is received, not earned (John 3:27).

† Augustine later echoed this same truth, teaching that grace leaves no room for boasting.

1 Corinthians 4:8

You already think you're full. You already think you're rich. You've begun reigning like kings without us. I wish you really were reigning so we could reign with you.

† Paul uses sarcasm to expose their arrogance. They believed they had already arrived spiritually (Revelation 3:17).

† The kingdom wasn't about self-exaltation but about suffering with Christ (Romans 8:17).

† True reign with Christ comes through faithfulness, not self-appointed authority.

1 Corinthians 4:9

It seems to me God has placed us apostles last, like men sentenced to death. We've become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to people.

† Apostles experienced suffering and public humiliation as they carried the gospel (Acts 5:40-41).

† The image of a spectacle refers to condemned prisoners displayed in Roman arenas (Hebrews 10:33).

† Tacitus and other historians recorded how Christians were

publicly displayed and persecuted in Roman society.

1 Corinthians 4:10

We're fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We're weak, but you are strong. You are honored, but we are dishonored.

† Again Paul uses irony to contrast the suffering apostles with the self-satisfied Corinthians (2 Corinthians 12:10).

† True Christian leadership often appears weak to the world (1 Corinthians 1:27).

† The apostles embraced humility while others sought prestige.

1 Corinthians 4:11

Even now we go hungry and thirsty. We're poorly clothed, beaten, and have no stable home.

† Apostolic ministry involved constant hardship and sacrifice (2 Corinthians 11:27).

† Their suffering reflected the same rejection Jesus endured (John 15:20).

† Early Christian writings confirm that apostles lived lives of extreme hardship while spreading the gospel.

1 Corinthians 4:12

We work hard with our own hands. When we're insulted, we bless. When we're persecuted, we endure it.

† Paul worked as a tentmaker to support himself while preaching the gospel (Acts 18:3).

† This attitude reflects Jesus' command to bless those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44).

† Christian endurance became a defining testimony to the watching world.

1 Corinthians 4:13

When we're slandered, we answer kindly. We've become like the garbage of the world, the dirt everyone wipes off their feet, even until now.

† The apostles were treated as worthless by society despite

carrying the truth of Christ (Hebrews 11:36-38).

† The phrase garbage of the world reflects how the world rejected those proclaiming the gospel.

† Yet this rejection fulfilled Jesus' warning that his followers would be hated.

1 Corinthians 4:14

I'm not writing these things to shame you, but to warn you as my beloved children.

† Paul's tone shifts from sarcasm to pastoral care. His goal is correction, not humiliation (Hebrews 12:6).

† Spiritual leaders correct believers out of love and responsibility (Proverbs 27:6).

† Clement of Rome also emphasized that correction within the church should always come from love.

1 Corinthians 4:15

Even if you had countless instructors in Christ, you don't have many fathers. I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

† Paul isn't claiming superiority but acknowledging his role as the one who first brought them the gospel (Acts 18:1-11).

† Spiritual fatherhood refers to nurturing believers in the faith.

† Early Christian leaders used similar language to describe discipleship relationships.

1 Corinthians 4:16

So I urge you to follow my example.

† Paul calls them to imitate his humility, sacrifice, and faithfulness (Philippians 3:17).

† Christian leadership leads by example, not by dominance (1 Peter 5:3).

† The apostles modeled a life centered on Christ.

1 Corinthians 4:17

That's why I've sent Timothy to you. He's my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he'll remind you of my ways in

Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

† Timothy served as Paul's trusted representative (Philippians 2:19-22).

† The message taught in Corinth was the same message taught everywhere.

† Unity in doctrine was essential for the early church.

1 Corinthians 4:18

Some of you have become arrogant, thinking I won't come to you.

† Pride had led certain believers to challenge Paul's authority.

† Arrogance often grows when people believe accountability is absent (Proverbs 16:18).

† Paul confronts this directly.

1 Corinthians 4:19

But I'll come to you soon if the Lord wills, and I'll find out not just what these arrogant people are saying but what power they actually have.

† Words alone mean little without genuine spiritual fruit (Matthew 7:16).

† True authority comes from the power of God's Spirit, not persuasive speech (1 Corinthians 2:4).

† Paul's coming would reveal the difference between empty boasting and real faith.

1 Corinthians 4:20

The kingdom of God isn't just talk, it is power.

† The kingdom is demonstrated through transformed lives and God's active work (Romans 14:17).

† The gospel produces real spiritual change, not merely theological debate.

† Early Christians emphasized that faith must be lived out, not only spoken.

1 Corinthians 4:21

What do you want? Should I come with discipline, or with love

and a gentle spirit?

† Paul leaves the choice to the Corinthians. Their response would determine how he addressed them (Galatians 6:1).

† Loving correction is sometimes necessary to restore believers.

† Church discipline existed to protect truth and restore unity.

Historical References

† Clement of Alexandria taught that the apostles lived lives of humility and suffering as faithful servants entrusted with the message of Christ.

† Irenaeus wrote that the apostles faithfully preserved and transmitted the teaching of Christ without altering it.

† Eusebius recorded the hardships and persecutions endured by early Christians and apostles while spreading the gospel.

† Tacitus described the public humiliation and persecution Christians faced under Roman authority.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Spiritual pride still destroys churches today just as it did in Corinth. Everything we have comes from God, so there's no room for boasting.

† Faithfulness matters more than recognition. God measures servants by loyalty to Christ, not popularity.

† Christian leaders should imitate the humility of the apostles rather than seeking influence or status.

† The kingdom of God is demonstrated through transformed lives and real spiritual power, not just words.

† Believers must remember that judgment belongs to the Lord, and our role is to remain faithful stewards of what he has entrusted to us.

Q & A Appendix

Q Why did Paul call himself a servant rather than a leader?

A Because apostles were stewards entrusted with God's truth, not rulers seeking personal authority (Colossians 1:25).

Q Why does Paul say not to judge before the time?

A Because only God can reveal the hidden motives of the heart and judge rightly (1 Samuel 16:7).

Q Why did the apostles suffer so much?

A Their suffering reflected the rejection Jesus said his followers would experience (John 15:20).

Q What does it mean that the kingdom of God is power?

A The kingdom produces real transformation through God's Spirit rather than empty speech (Romans 14:17).

Q Why did Paul send Timothy to Corinth?

A Timothy was a faithful helper who reminded the churches of Paul's teachings and example (Philippians 2:19-22).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† 1 Corinthians 4

† Clement of Alexandria, Stromata

† Irenaeus, Against Heresies

† Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

† Tacitus, Annals

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