

Worksheet 4: 1 Corinthians 4:1–5:13

Introduction: In this week's passage, Paul concludes his discussion of the competing factions within the church at Corinth (1:10–4:21), and then moves on to discuss the problem of the Corinthian's toleration of immorality within the assembly (5:1–13).

In last week's passage, Paul has just explained the proper way for an individual to view themselves, challenging them not to boast in themselves but instead to rejoice in their riches in Christ (3:18–23).

Now, beginning in 4:1, Paul challenges the Corinthians to have a proper view of those who serve God. Any individual who serves God, Paul argues, will ultimately be evaluated by God Himself (4:2–3).

Accordingly, rather than evaluating God's servants according to human wisdom, Paul challenges the Corinthians to await the final judgment (4:4–5). In 4:6–13, Paul uses himself and Apollos as an example, arguing that just as it is foolish and wrong to exalt either Paul or Apollos over the other, so it is equally wrong and foolish to exalt any leader in the church over another. Paul then challenges the Corinthians to imitate him as their father in the gospel, and warns them that he will set things in order when he returns (4:14–21).

In chapter 5, Paul takes up a new, but related, topic. The spiritual arrogance at Corinth (mentioned in 4:18) has led the church to tolerate a man in the assembly who is flagrantly involved in odious sin (5:1). Rather than exercising church discipline (5:2), the Corinthians have boasted in their tolerance (5:6) of sin offensive even to pagans (5:1). This arrogance shows that they had ignored a previous letter of Paul's, where he exhorted them to avoid sexually immoral people (5:9) and to take responsibility for discipline within the church (5:12–13).

Abbreviated Outline¹ (current passage in bold):

- I. Introduction (1:1–9)
- II. Response to Oral Reports (1:10–6:20)
 - A. A Proper Perspective on Christian Ministers and Ministry (1:10–4:21)
 - 1. The Problem of Disunity (1:10–17)
 - 2. The Sin of Dependence on Personal Abilities (1:18–25)
 - 3. The Sin of Personal Boasting (1:26–31)
 - 4. Paul, a Model of Dependence on God (2:1–5)
 - 5. Spiritual Wisdom versus Worldly Wisdom (2:6–16)
 - 6. The Immaturity of the Corinthians (3:1–9)
 - 7. God's Evaluation of Christian Ministry (3:10–17)
 - 8. Final Argument Against Human Boasting (3:18–23)
 - 9. Paul's Example of Christian Ministry (4:1–21)**
 - B. Immorality in the Church (5:1–13)**
 - C. Disputes Between Believers (6:1–11)
 - D. Limitations on Freedom in Christ (6:12–20)
- III. Responses to a Letter from the Corinthians (7:1–16:4)
- IV. Conclusion (16:5–24)

¹ The complete outline is available on the Meadowlands Baptist Church website (www.meadowlandsbaptist.ca). Adapted from Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 482–483.

Interpretation: Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.

1. Paul says in 4:3 that he is not very concerned about how other people evaluate him. Instead, he focuses on how God will judge him (4:4). How does Paul's perspective influence your definition of faithfulness (4:2)?

2. In 4:7, Paul asks "who makes you differ *from another*?" Other ways to read this phrase are "who made you so special?" or "who defines you?" Do you think Paul is saying that the Corinthians are special, or that they are deceiving themselves about their superiority? Why?

3. Identify the problem with the Corinthians' thinking described in 4:8–13. Then, attempt to explain Paul's solution.

4. Why is it important for Paul to state his motive in 4:14?

5. What problem concerns Paul the most in 5:1–5? Is it the individual sin (5:1) or the attitude of the church (5:2)? How does 5:6–8 influence your answer?

6. What is the significance of seeing Christ as "our Passover" to Paul's argument in 5:6–8?

7. If Paul "certainly did not" mean that the Corinthians should separate themselves from the sexually immoral of the world, why is he concerned about separating from those who sin in the church (5:9–11)?

8. What is the significance of Paul's list of disciplinary offenses in 5:11?

Application: Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.

9. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?

10. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?
