

Outline:

- I. Verses 1-5:
 - a. servants of Christ and stewards. Let Christ examine people
 - b. Verses 1-2: stewards
 - c. Verses 3-5: examining me
- II. Verses 6-13:
 - a. Contrast apostles with them
 - b. Verses 6-7: don't be arrogant
 - c. Verse 8: You are rich!
- III. Verses 9-13: contrast of apostles with them
- IV. Verses 14-21:
 - a. I am your father in the faith
 - b. Verses: 14-16: I am your Father in the faith
 - c. Verse 17: I am sending Timothy
 - d. Verses 18-20: arrogant people
 - e. Verse 21: how shall I come

Detailed analysis:

- I. Verses 1-5:

1 Corinthians 4:1–5 (ESV)

4 *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ²Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.*

- a. Let's put this in context:
- b. Beginning in 1 Cor. 3:5 Paul was writing about divisions in their church. In 1 Cor. 3:22ff Paul was continuing to address this division.
- c. In 1 Cor. 3:23 he says that they are Christ and Christ is God's.
- d. That brings us to 1 Cor. 4:1.
- e. This is how we should be regarded...
- f. *Servants of Christ* and stewards. Let Christ examine people.
- g. Verses 1-2: stewards
- h. Stewards must be found faithful.

Witherington III:

This section brings to a climax the first major argument of Paul in 1 Corinthians. From the standpoint of rhetoric the first six verses are especially important. In them Paul explains the

covert allusion(s) to himself and Apollos that he has introduced in ch. 3. 4:6 suggests that the major function of ch. 3 was “that you may learn from our example.” Paul is seeking to do for the Corinthians what Plutarch advises in another context: “It is your duty to reduce this man’s swollen pride and restore him to conformity with his best interests” (eis to sympheriton, Lives, Cato Minor 65.5). It is the task of any deliberative speech to show what is to the audience’s advantage, benefit, or profit.¹ So Paul’s point is to change the climate of overinflated rhetoric and self-congratulation in Corinth by holding up the example of a suffering sage and his coworker so that the Corinthians will come to their senses and see what is truly to their benefit.²¹

i. Notice that word “mysteries.”

j. Mysteries: *Since Paul uses the plural here (see also 13:2; 14:2), he probably has in mind not only the gospel itself (see also Eph. 6:19) but also other truths that God has revealed. See, e.g., Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:51; Eph. 3:4, 6; 5:32; Col. 2:2. A “mystery” (Gk. *mystērion*) in Paul’s letters is something that people, in their human weakness, could not understand unless God graciously revealed it to them (Dan. 2:18–19, 28; Eph. 1:7–9), but now Paul does explain these mysteries.²*

k. *Witherington III shares: The “mysteries of God” are probably not the sacrament but the apocalyptic secret that Paul has spoken of—that salvation is to be had by faith in Christ crucified. The main thing one is looking for in a steward is faithfulness (v. 2). A good steward is one who does what the master expects.³*

l. Verses 3-5:

m. In verse 1, the Greek says “assistants of Christ” and “Managers of the mysteries of God”

n. Remember that in the last chapter Paul was confronting the divisions in the church. He still on this topic.

Lives Lives of the Sophists

¹ The main function of this section is not that of an *apologia* defending Paul’s apostleship. Paul could hardly hold himself up as an example to the Corinthians if he thought his status as God’s agent was seriously in question.

² Paul’s references to boasting and arrogance in ch. 4 may themselves be a clue to the social location of the real culprits in Corinth. So J. V. P. D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (London: Duckworth, 1979), pp. 170f.: “The higher a Roman’s rank, the worse he suffered from the disease which the Greeks called *hyperēphania*, bossiness, arrogance, the sense of innate superiority.”

¹ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 136.

² Crossway Bibles, [*The ESV Study Bible*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2195.

³ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 139.

- o. Now he is referring to “us” meaning Apollos and himself as servants and as stewards
- p. In 1 Peter 4:10 Peter talks about being stewards
- q. Titus 1:7 there is instruction for the overseer: above reproach, etc
- r. Verse 2: stewards or co managers must be trustworthy
- s. In verse 3: why would Paul tell them not to examine him?
- t. Witherington III makes the case the judgement he is referring to would be them judging him in his rhetoric:
- u. *All of this is prepared for by 4:1–5, where Paul speaks of being judged by the Corinthians. This surely refers to judgment of his speech and example as a rhetor. In their minds it was their right to judge Paul, since that is what audiences did with rhetoricians and their oratory. The reference to judgment has to do not so much with whether Paul was a legitimate agent of God as with the form of his ministry—both his words and his personal presence. In short, he was rhetorically uncouth. But he was not interested in conforming to their expectations for a rhetor. Indeed, his anti-Sophistic strategy amounted to using rhetoric to burst the bubble of their rhetorical chauvinism. Vv. 1–5 are not so much a defense of Paul’s ministry as Paul’s preparation for setting himself up as an example for the audience, as v. 16 makes abundantly clear.*⁴
- v. Immaturity: refer back to 1 Cor. 3:2, and 3
- w. **This is a major issue that I must speak to:** We cannot take this to mean not to confront sin. Matthew 7:1ff is referring to a very critical judgment. Jesus is speaking in to the Pharisees who applied legalistic standards to themselves that they could not hold to. You must look at other verses. Refer to Matthew 18:15-17. 1Cor 5 Paul does judge this man and tells them to throw him out of the church. Verses 9-12 make it clear to judge those inside the church. James 5:19-20
- x. **Paul must not be looked upon as arrogant cause of these few verses. He is defending himself in these passages.**
- y. Verse 4: Paul does want to be examined by the Lord.
- z. In Acts 23:1 Paul talks about the way that he has conducted his life under God. In 2 Cor 1:12 Paul refers to their desire to conduct themselves in holiness.
- aa. Verse 5: look at the context. We cannot take this to mean that we are not to confront sin.
- bb. To judge is different than to confront sin. To judge is to judge the motives this means to say--- you are not even a Christian! Also, this context is that the Corinthians are baby Christians and shouldn’t be looking upon others at all. **They are not right themselves.** Jesus does tell us to look at others faith: **Matt 7:17-20; Eph 4:13: Speak the Truth in Love**
- cc. In verse 5: Paul is once again writing about the 2nd coming of Christ. The Lord will bring to light.
- dd. Notice that Paul is saying that God will judge our motives as well as our actions.
- ee. Witherington III: *One thing that may have fostered their attitudes regarding eschatology was the imperial eschatology, which flourished in Roman colonies and*

⁴ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 137.

which suggested that the emperor was already the dispenser of the blessings of the gods in this life, as was proved by his having brought the pax Romana, peace throughout most of the empire.¹¹ This could easily have nurtured the idea that “already we reign” (cf. v. 8).^{12,5}

ff. Heb 6:10: God remembers our work

gg. 1 Cor 4:5 deals with the idea that when the Lord comes He will bring things to light.

hh. Matt 10:15; 1 Cor 1:8; 2 Thess 1:7–10; 2 Tim 1:12, 18; 4:8⁶: All deal with the day of the Lord. Should read 2 Tim 4:8 and 2 Thess 1:7-10...

ii. The idea of already but not yet in New Testament....

jj. In Thessalonica the concern of loved ones who had died before the rapture....

The IVP: *In Jesus’ kingdom, where the greatest is the least and the King died for his people, no one is more important than anyone else. Indeed, true apostles take the lowest role, not the greatest; they should not be objects of a celebrity cult.⁷*

II. Verses 6-13:

¹¹ See the comments below on ch. 15 and the discussion there of J. R. Lanci’s unpublished paper, “Roman Eschatology in First-Century Corinth,” given at the 1992 national meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

¹² It is possible that this attitude was exacerbated by the numerous spiritual gifts in Corinth as well.

⁵ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 140.

⁶ *New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Ge 1:1). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

kingdom ***Kingdom**. This term means “rule,” “reign” or “authority” (not a king’s people or land, as connotations of the English term could imply). Jewish people recognized that God rules the universe now, but they prayed for the day when he would rule the world unchallenged by idolatry and disobedience. The coming of this future aspect of God’s reign was generally associated with the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead. Because Jesus came and will come again, Christians believe that the kingdom has been inaugurated but awaits consummation or completion. “Kingdom of heaven” is another way (Matthew’s usual way) of saying “kingdom of God.” “Heaven” was a standard Jewish way of saying “God” (as in Lk 15:21).

apostles ***Apostle**. The term applies literally to a sent or commissioned messenger; in Judaism such messengers acted on the full authority of their sender, to the extent that they accurately represented the sender’s message. The closest Old Testament equivalent to God’s “apostles” in this sense was the prophets, although the apostles seem to have added an overseeing and evangelistic function that prophets (both Old Testament and New Testament) did not always incorporate. Those prophets commissioned with special authority to oversee prophetic awakening (e.g., perhaps Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah) or to judge Israel (e.g., Deborah, Samuel) may provide the best Old Testament models.

⁷Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 4:5). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

1 Corinthians 4:6–13 (ESV)

⁶ I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. ⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

⁸ Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!

- a. **There is a contrast of the apostles with them.**
- b. **Verses 6-7: don't be arrogant!**
- c. He has applied all of “these things,” what are “these things”?
- d. It would be what he had been writing about. He has been talking about unity and how they are dividing by who they follow.
- e. MacArthur shares: *Paul is referring to the analogies he used to depict those who minister for the Lord, including himself and Apollos: farmers (3:6–9), builders (3:10–15), and servant-stewards (vv. 1–5).*⁸
- f. He applied them to himself and Apollos for their sake.
- g. Again, MacArthur: *Paul's humility, expressed in light of God's judgment on the greatest apostles and preachers, was useful to teach believers not to exalt any of them (cf. Ge 18:27; 32:10; Ex 3:11; Jdg 6:15; Mt 3:14; Lk 5:8; Jn 1:26, 27; Ac 20:19; 2Co 3:5; Eph 3:8).*⁹
- h. Witherington III: *First, Paul says in v. 6 that he has “applied” (metaschēmatisa) to himself and Apollos the metaphors of ch. 3 about building and planting. This is surely an allusion to the logos eschēmatismenos or covert allusion much favored by rhetors (cf. Martial 3.68.7; Quintilian Inst. Or. 9.1.4ff.).*^{3,10}

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*](#). (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 1 Co 4:6.

⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*](#). (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 1 Co 4:6.

Inst. Or Institutio Oratio

³ This was quickly recognized by the older commentators who knew rhetoric. Cf. J. B. Lightfoot, [*Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul \(Winona Lake: Alpha, reprint\), p. 199*](#). It is only recently that this sort of understanding of this passage has been revived; cf. B. Fiore, “‘Covert Allusion’ in 1 Corinthians 1–4,” *CBQ* 47 (1985), pp. 85–102. Unfortunately, Fiore misses Paul's reason, in defiance of good Sophistic or ornamental rhetoric, for explaining his “figure.” Paul wishes to wean the audience away from their love for ornamentation and to make clear to them that they are immature.

¹⁰ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 136.

- i. Witherington III continued: *This form of “figured speech” was used not just because a rhetor wanted to speak in an indirect manner but often because he wanted to use irony. In fact, this whole section of Paul’s letter is loaded with irony, as the detailed studies of J. Fitzgerald and K. Plank have shown.^{4,11} Dionysius of Halicarnassus says that there are three sorts of “figured speech,” and Paul is using in 4:6 the sort where one simply expresses oneself indirectly, while in v. 8 we have an example of pure irony—of saying one thing and meaning another.⁵ Quintilian warns in Inst. Or. 9.2.69 that if a figure is perfectly obvious, it ceases to be a figure. More importantly, covert allusion is successful “because the listener takes pleasure in detecting the speaker’s concealed meaning, applauds his own penetration, and regards the other’s eloquence as a compliment to himself” (Inst. Or. 9.2.78). He concludes that the use of such a figure is a sign of weakness or perhaps jesting. **But Paul here is interested not in boosting the Corinthians’ image of themselves as clever connoisseurs of rhetoric but in portraying himself as a suffering sage. To make it clear that he regards his audience as immature, he explains his meaning as one would with a small child. This comports with what he said in 3:3: They were still not ready for solid food.**¹²*
- j. Don’t go beyond the Scriptures!!!
- k. That is very applicable today. THE IVP: *Philosophers advocating harmony often warned people not to “go beyond what is written” but to comply with a prior agreement; Paul may thus summon them to unity, reminding them of a contract implied in their acceptance of Christ. Some commentators have suggested that “not beyond what is written” refers to the learning of schoolchildren, who learned how to write by imitating what was written. Others think Paul refers to Scripture, perhaps texts he has cited so far in 1 Corinthians on the worthlessness of human folly.*¹³

⁴ J. T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); K. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987). *The ancient rhetorical handbooks say that one may use such an allusion out of respect or possibly out of fear of condemnation for what is being said. But if using the “figure” is a way of honoring the rhetorical acumen of the audience, then explaining it is a way of taking them down a peg or two.*

¹¹ Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 136–137.

⁵ Compare Dionysius *Technē rhetorikē* 9 *peri eschēmatismenon* 2.1.323; 7.341; and 8.2.281f. to Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 9.2.66.

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¹² Ben Witherington III, [*Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 137.

¹³ Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 4:6). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

- l. We get puffed up when we go beyond what was written.
- m. MacArthur shares: *Pride and arrogance were great problems in the Corinthian church (see vv. 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; 2Co 12:20).*¹⁴
- n. Verse 7: every blessing that you have, you have received; therefore we cannot boast.
- o. Again, MacArthur: *Pride is deception, since everything a person possesses is from God's providential hand (cf. 1Ch 29:11–16; Job 1:21; Jas 1:17).*¹⁵

Piper:

Picture salvation as a house that you live in.

It provides you with protection. It is stocked with food and drink that will last forever. It never decays or crumbles. Its windows open onto vistas of all-satisfying glory.

God built it at great cost to himself and to his Son, and he gave it to you free and clear.

The “purchase” agreement is called a “new covenant.” The terms read: “This house shall become and remain yours if you will receive it as a gift and take delight in the Father and the Son as they inhabit the house with you. You shall not profane the house of God by sheltering other gods nor turn your heart away after other treasures, but find your contentment in the fellowship of God in this house.”

Would it not be foolish to say yes to this agreement, and then hire a lawyer to draw up an amortization schedule with monthly payments in the hopes of somehow balancing accounts and paying for the house?

You would be treating the house no longer as a gift, but a purchase. God would no longer be the free benefactor. And you would be enslaved to a new set of demands that he never dreamed of putting on you.

*If grace is to be free — which is the very meaning of grace — we cannot view it as something to be repaid.*¹⁶

- p. **Verse 8: You are rich!** There is sarcasm here, again, MacArthur: *In a severe rebuke, Paul heaps on false praise, sarcastically suggesting that those Corinthians who were self-satisfied had already achieved spiritual greatness. They were similar to the Laodiceans (see Rev 3:17). Cf. Phil 3:12; 2Ti 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1Pe 5:4.*¹⁷
- q. **Another source shares:** *With a strong dose of irony, Paul says the boastful disposition of the Corinthian believers made them **full and rich**, as if their*

¹⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*](#). (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 1 Co 4:6.

¹⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*](#). (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 1 Co 4:7.

¹⁶ from *Future Grace*, page 45; https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/grace-must-be-free?utm_campaign=Daily%20Email&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=94146513&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8H1ONCpe-nx773ZOpe2s7qrccAFd3OVe0KyG3mpio56foWS2SwLr7hxWIK8qEU6XbvFiqX04GQ2vKjGSiV-5ZHbHADA&utm_content=94146513&utm_source=hs_email

¹⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*](#). (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 1 Co 4:8.

glorification was complete and they were already reigning as kings in eternity. In part Paul wished all of this were true, for all believers are destined to reign with Christ (2Tm 2:12).¹⁸

- r. **Witherington III:** *One could view the four short sentences in v. 8 as either exclamations or questions since there was no punctuation in the original Greek text, though the second of these sentences makes it more likely that they are all sarcastic exclamations or statements.¹⁹*
- s. *Already the Corinthian Christians have become gorged, already they are rich, already they have begun to reign even without the help of their “father”! Should these exclamations be taken literally or figuratively? Is Paul talking about their social status or about something else?*
- t. *...the irony is such in this section that it is quite impossible to take these statements as straightforward social commentary.²⁰*

III. **Verses 9-13: contrast of apostles with them**

1 Cor. 4:9-13:

⁹ For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. ¹¹ To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹² and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

- A. Verse 9: apostles: what were the apostles life like: Paul was stoned and lived. Died by being beheaded. Peter-crucified upside down. James-stoned.
 - A. 2 Cor. 11:23 a little bit of Paul’s resume.
 - B. Matt. 5:10
 - C. Angels? This may be a term that means a type of family or spiritual policeman.
 - D. ESV SB: *Paul is probably thinking of the Roman triumphal procession in which captured enemy soldiers were paraded through the streets before being publicly executed. Or he may be thinking of gladiators condemned to die in an arena. See also 2 Cor. 2:14 and, for the image used in a different way, Col. 2:15.²¹*

¹⁸ F. Alan Tomlinson, [“1 Corinthians,”](#) in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1817.

¹⁹ Ben Witherington III, [Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 141.

²⁰ Ibid, 141–142.

²¹ Crossway Bibles, [The ESV Study Bible](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2196.

THE IVP:

Stoic philosophers believed that they evoked the admiration of gods and mortals as they persevered through suffering; but Paul declares that the suffering apostles became a “spectacle,” objects of scorn in the theater of the world. The person in charge of games in amphitheaters would exhibit the gladiators who would battle wild beasts there; here God himself exhibits the sufferings of the apostles. “Last of all” means that they were the final show for the day—normally reserved for the most wretched criminal condemned to die in the arena. Corinth’s theater seated eighteen thousand.²²

B. Verse 10: notice the contrast:

- A. Fools vs prudent
- B. Weak vs strong
- C. Distinguished without honor
- D. 1 Cor 1:19 and 3:18 deal with wisdom of this world.

C. Verse 11: continuing the troubles that go with being an Apostle: Apollos and Paul

- A. 2 Cor 11:23-27

THE IVP:

(4:9–16). Everything Paul describes in 4:11 fits the typical ancient depiction of the wandering Cynic philosopher.²³

D. Verse 12: Acts 18:3 gives an example of Paul working with his hands

- A. 1 Peter 3:9 gives instruction on what to do when reviled. **Paul and Peter agree**

THE IVP:

4:12. *Here Paul distinguishes himself from most kinds of philosophers and from the more*

Stoic **Stoicism.** The most popular form of Greek philosophy in Paul’s day. Although most people were not Stoics, many Stoic ideas were widely disseminated. For more detail, see comment on Acts 17:18.

apostles ***Apostle.** The term applies literally to a sent or commissioned messenger; in Judaism such messengers acted on the full authority of their sender, to the extent that they accurately represented the sender’s message. The closest Old Testament equivalent to God’s “apostles” in this sense was the prophets, although the apostles seem to have added an overseeing and evangelistic function that prophets (both Old Testament and New Testament) did not always incorporate. Those prophets commissioned with special authority to oversee prophetic awakening (e.g., perhaps Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah) or to judge Israel (e.g., Deborah, Samuel) may provide the best Old Testament models.

²²Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 4:9). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

²³Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 4:11). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

aristocratic ideals of the higher-status faction within the Corinthian church. Philosophers might beg, charge tuition or be supported by a patron; to them, manual labor was the least honorable option. Because wealthy landowners also considered manual labor undignified, well-to-do people in the church would be embarrassed to invite friends of their own social circle to hear the teachings of Paul, who worked as an artisan (skilled laborer). Paul here supports the majority, lower-class faction in the congregation and boasts in his low social status.²⁴

E. Verse 13: notice that verse 11 starts with “Until this present hour and then verse 13 ends with “even until now.”

A. They have become like dirt, like trash for Christ sake.

B. This probably still has to do with Paul defending himself.

IV. Verses 14-21:

1 Corinthians 4:14–21 (ESV)

¹⁴ I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. ¹⁵ For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ¹⁶ I urge you, then, be imitators of me. ¹⁷ That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. ¹⁸ Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. ²¹ What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

a. I am your father in the faith.

b. Verses: 14-16: I am your father in the faith.

c. Verse 17: I am sending Timothy.

church ***Church.** The Greek term used in the New Testament reflects the terms often used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for the “congregation” (*qahal*) of Israel: “church” (assembly) and “synagogue” (gathering). Although some scholars have suggested that Jesus could not have spoken about the church during his earthly ministry, the Dead Sea Scrolls used the Hebrew term for God’s community; hence Jesus could use this word in talking about his future community (Mt 16:18; 18:17). The term was in common use in Greek culture for “assemblies,” especially citizen assemblies in cities. (The popular modern surmise that the Greek word for “church,” *ekklēsia*, means “called-out ones” is thus mistaken; that sense is actually more appropriate for “saints,” i.e., “those separated [for God].”)

patron ***Patron.** The social superior in the Roman patron-client relationship, who granted favors to and acted as political sponsor for his clients, or social dependents. The obligations in the relationship were viewed as reciprocal; clients were to grant the patrons honor as their benefactors.

²⁴ Craig S. Keener, [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 1 Co 4:12.

- d. **Verses 18-20: arrogant people.**
- e. **Verse 21: how shall I come.**
- f. Verse 14: Paul moves on. He doesn't want to shame them but to show disapproval.
- g. Notice the family language "my children" which will lead into the next verse.
- h. In both of these passages Paul does say things to their shame: 1 Cor 6:5; 15:34.
- i. Verse 15: through sharing the Gospel Paul became their father in the Spirit.
- j. The GK says "ten thousand tutors."

THE IVP:

4:15. *"Guardian" (NIV; better than "tutor"—NASB—or "instructor"—KJV) refers to a slave who would accompany a child on his way to school; although respected by the child and responsible to teach him manners, this guardian was not a teacher per se. Students could affectionately call and treat special teachers as "fathers"; that Paul here calls himself their "father through the gospel" somewhat demeans other teachers by comparison, because slave aides were nothing like fathers.²⁵*

- Verse 16: in 1Cor 11:1: Paul says "be imitators of me as I am of Christ."

THE IVP: Philosophers, rabbis and teachers in general were models to imitate as well as to listen to. This is one of the most common ideas in Greek literature.²⁶

- Verse 17: Paul is sending Timothy.
 - Notice the language about Timothy: beloved and faithful child in the Lord.
 - Timothy will teach or remind.
 - 1 Cor 16:10 references Timothy coming
 - Timothy is first mentioned in Acts 16:1
- Verse 19: 1 Cor 11:34 and 16:5 references Paul's plans to come to Corinth.

THE IVP:

NIV New International Version

NASB New American Standard Bible

KJV King James Version

²⁵Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 4:15). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

rabbis ***Rabbi**. Jewish teacher. Sometime after A.D. 70 the term became a technical one for those ordained in the rabbinic movement, which probably consisted primarily of Pharisaic scribes. (To accommodate customary usage this commentary sometimes applies the term to Jewish teachers of the law in general, although such common usage may have technically been later; it also applies the term to the teachings of Jewish legal experts collected in rabbinic literature.)

²⁶Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 4:16). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

4:18–21. *Paul continues in the role of “father” (4:14–17) in this passage. Fathers were often portrayed as gentler than mothers, but they also used the rod for discipline, and in Roman political rhetoric, the proper patriarchal figure was stern and uncompromising.*²⁷

The Bible Knowledge Commentary:

4:18-21. *Paul anticipated that not all would be moved by his appeal. **Some**, probably the unnamed party leaders (v. 5) or guardians (v. 15), were **arrogant**, which was the cause of the Corinthians’ division problem. They might not be swayed by exhortation. They required action. And that, Paul knew, he was capable of meting out in the power of the Spirit (Acts 13:9-11). When he had preached to the Corinthians, he had not depended on his own ability but on the **power** of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:4-5). He would rely on this same power for discipline (2 Cor. 10:4-6). This was the authority of God’s rule (cf. Acts 5:3-11). Though Paul loved the Corinthians he knew that a loving father did not shy away from discipline (cf. Heb. 12:7). If it were needed, he would wield **a whip** (*rabdos*, a “rod”). From the Greco-Roman point of view this “rod” was a symbol of discipline executed by one in authority. Paul himself had been punished by rods more than once (Acts 16:22-23; 2 Cor. 11:25). But he preferred a visit characterized by **love and . . . a gentle spirit.***²⁸

rhetoric ***Rhetoric.** The art or study of proper forms and methods of public speaking, highly emphasized in antiquity. Although only the well-to-do had much training in it, the rhetorical forms and ideas they used filtered down to the rest of urban society through public speeches, in a manner similar to that in which television permeates modern Western society.

²⁷Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary : New Testament* (1 Co 4:18). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

²⁸Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:513). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.