

Servants of Christ

By Warren Zehrung – July 9, 2011

Recently, we have been going through a series in the New Testament writings of the Apostle Paul. We are in the book of I Corinthians, and we come today to chapter 4, so this will be our text for today. This is where we take the title "**Servants of Christ**" from.

This week, July 8th, marks the 50th Anniversary of the congregations of the Little Rock, Arkansas, and the Memphis, Tennessee, churches of God. It is a nostalgic time, and it is interesting to pause, think back and remember what all that entails.

Five decades have gone by since the congregation came together for the first time. I had the opportunity to pastor both of those congregations earlier. But the church has scattered even farther yet.

In 1961, Herbert W. Armstrong had been preaching from Radio XEG in Mexico. It was a hugely powerful radio station, and it reached us here. Not only was Radio XEG bombarding this area with the World Tomorrow, but it was not long before Radio KAAY, here in Little Rock, picked up the broadcast. They began to boom it out straight south all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico, and even across to Florida. Radio KAAY was a 50,000 watt clear channel, in that nobody else anywhere in the United States had the same frequency. This was before television really got big. The Gospel message went out powerfully. They also had a letter writing campaign, of those who had written in or called with questions and so forth.

There was a pretty good turnout for the first services. We had 182 people in Memphis, and 180 here in Little Rock, Arkansas. They were there to see the first live speakers that most of them had ever seen in the Church of God. That was a big turnout, and it has always been that way with public Bible campaigns that we have held. That quickly settled down to a combined congregation of about 125 people weekly. Many of them were recently baptized, and starting to attend. It was not uncommon to find that many people traveled 200 and even 300 miles to attend Sabbath services. The word of God had been so rare, and it was so pure, and so true that the people were starving for it. It was a different breed of people that were called at that time. They were strong and hardy, and they were sacrificing. There are still about six people from that original service that are attending. There

were probably some that could not make it to the celebration as well. Initially, the congregation was served by one pastor, serving those fledging congregations. These congregations grew very fast. Mr. Armstrong used to say that the church was growing 30% a year. God was going to prune that later on, but it was growing nonetheless.

When I was transferred here to Little Rock, AR in 1992, there were 750 people in Little Rock alone. We had little congregations in Pine Bluff, as well as a few hundred over in Memphis. There were well over 1,000 people attending. But then terrible things began to happen. The Worldwide Church of God entered a terrible apostasy. We had false teachings that Christmas and Easter were okay, that the Sabbath was wrong, and that Sunday was better. The Ten Commandments were a nice set of rules to be talked about, but they need not be observed and kept, especially the Holy Sabbath day. So, what we saw (and experienced) was the disintegration of the church that had grown so fast and so mightily. The apostasy swept through the church, and there was a terrible devastation.

I can tell you, brethren, from firsthand experience, it is a terrible thing to see a thousand or more of God's people, right here in Little Rock and Memphis, being fed the tripe and the heresy that was coming out of Pasadena, and being unable to stop it, and deal with it. Indeed I did stand up and deal with it. When they sent out (literature) from Pasadena that Jesus Christ raised Himself, I spoke and showed two dozen scriptures where the scriptures clearly show that it was God the Father who raised Jesus Christ. Jesus did not raise Himself; if He had done so, He was not really dead.

Brethren, let me ask you this question, "When do you speak out against heresy?" It was horrible, it was a terrible thing. I came here from Chicago in 1992, by 1995 the Sabbath was ill spoken of from the pulpit, and the church became disintegrated.

Brethren at that time, it seemed to me, that if I was going to be a **servant of Christ**, I had to know what my responsibility was. My responsibility before God, and the brethren, was to stand strong in the faith. I saw it as a responsibility of the ministry to stomp out the fires of heresy that were sweeping through the church. There were many of them, and the church was becoming watered down, becoming lukewarm. Not only that, but there were brethren that needed to be rescued, and that is true to this day. The church exploded like a giant balloon and people went

everywhere. Thankfully, many of the people coalesced into mini groups, and some pretty good groups.

But there are some groups that are completely unchristian, even though they carry Christian-sounding names. They deny the love of the brethren, and they deny the truth. Just like Worldwide Church of God itself is no longer a representative of God's doctrine and God's truth. We have to be wise and discern those kinds of things.

At the same time some of the people coalesced into some of the larger groups. Some of the people were left, shattered and scattered, and all by themselves with nobody looking in on them. Some of them had been brutalized by ministers who were in the church. Some of them were disfellowshipped, marked and put away, and nobody came to their house, after things began to coalesce, and apologize to them. All of that was going on, and it seemed right, before God, that we were here, true pastors to be rescuing the survivors as the apostasy came to the full.

Let me point out one other thing that is easily forgotten. In those days, when the church was becoming unraveled, disfellowshippment was a powerful tool in the hands of the ministry. It was a very powerful tool also in the hands of the enemy. We had been taught not to question anything that came from the ministry, not to question anything that came from headquarters. That is part of the problem why the apostasy swept the church so much, because people were not doing like the Bereans, and searching the scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

I was disfellowshipped for continuing to teach that "*there remains a keeping of the Sabbath for the people of God.*" (Hebrews 4:9) I was disfellowshipped and marked from the pulpit. When they disfellowshipped someone they read their name out in services, and told the brethren not to have anything to do with them. Disfellowshipped meant that not only was I to be feared, but also to be rejected.

More than half of the people accepted the heretical change to Sunday. They accepted the pagan trinity doctrine. They were taught that you do not have to keep all ten of the Commandments, especially the Sabbath Commandment.

It was a satanic attack. Satan is more subtle than the beasts of the field. Satan is the one that brought this on. There was only a committed remnant of the brethren that remained faithful to the laws of God. And I speculate on these numbers, but

we had 150,000 people attending the Feast of Tabernacles. That would represent, in a lot of cases, a mother, father and a couple of children. I think it would be safe to say that one third of that number would have either been unconverted mates or children. So that says that we only had 50,000 or so baptized people in attendance in the Worldwide Church of God at the time of the apostasy. About three quarters of those failed to pass the initial test that came with the apostasy.

The church took a terrible beating, a terrible falling away. Brethren, let us always remember, "*we wrestle not against flesh and blood,*" (Ephesians 6:12) but we are fighting against powerful demonic forces in high places. This is something that I have not mentioned very much, but it is an understanding that we have had in the Church of God for a long time.

Luke, who was a student and prodigy, of the Apostle Paul, probably wrote the book of Acts. When that book is finished, (because it is an incomplete work), it is our understanding that there will be some closing words. I believe that when the book of Acts is finally completed, it is going to record the deeds of those brethren who overcame a hardship, and remained loyal to God and His truth. Those are the kind of things that I like to think of when we come to the 50th anniversary of these congregations of the Church of God. It is good to celebrate the 50th Anniversary, and it gives us pause to evaluate the enduring facets of our beliefs.

Do we test what we believe against the scriptures like the Bereans did? Let us just ponder an anniversary when brethren from different groups come together. It lets us ponder where we go from here. What does the future hold? It is a time of renewal and it is a concerted effort that we go forward. Brethren, another good thing that came from the 50th anniversary celebrations, is that the walls of separation are winked at on a weekend like this. Brethren who have been separated since the apostasy, into some of these groups that they have coalesced in, are told that they have to stay loyal and faithful to their little group, and not go to the 50th anniversary. The people who were free to come, it seems, were those who understand that all who are led by God's Holy Spirit are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are to love them.

It is good to be able to see old friends, and yes there are some pains, and there are some hurts, because when the splits took place there were feelings hurt. People were hurt terribly in many ways, when feelings of betrayal and unbelief took place.

It has been a difficult shake-up for the church. The good thing that comes out of it is that brethren are beginning to realize that all who are led by God's Holy Spirit are of the one true Church of God.

When Jesus Christ looks down from His heavenly throne, He sees one Body, and He does not see these divided groups that will not have anything to do with each other. In fact it is a sure test of conversion if a person says, 'I will not have anything to do with them, even though I know that they are led by God's Holy Spirit, and that they are called and are converted. I am still not going to have anything to do with them out of spite, hate, meanness, vengefulness' or whatever. That is a severe test on a person's conversion.

The faithful brethren have continued to preach the gospel to the world, and to feed the sheep. Brethren, let me reiterate that. It is the brethren that preach the gospel. We do not just preach it by sending in tithes to go out on radio or television. But, brethren, more importantly than that, we are to live the gospel in our lives, the gospel has to be a part of us, and that is how we spread the gospel to the world. How do we live? Are we humble? Do we smile? Are we kind and forgiving to the brethren? Do we put them on the hot seat, or do we try to understand that they may have come through some severe trials in life, and that is why they are the way that they are? Maybe we can be a light to them, and preach the gospel that way. Some of the scattered brethren continue to favor one group, while rejecting other brethren.

Clearly, we still have a long way to go in discerning the Lord's Body, and loving the brethren. What does it mean to discern the Lord's Body? To know who is really a part of the Body of Christ -- what does it mean?

I received an email this week, asking me a question, "What does it mean to love the brethren?"

The letter was not a simple letter. It said, "I know that we are to love one another in regard to the Ten Commandments, I understand that part". But the letter goes on to explain, "Even when I do that, there are these difficulties that arise. What does it mean?" It is a very pointed letter, and it is one that I am going to do a lot of thinking about, and give a very serious response. The good news is, as I mentioned, some of the brethren are beginning to make progress in 'building

bridges.’ That is not my phrase; another minister came up with that phrase about ‘building bridges’ between converted people in the various congregations. I have said that the walls have to come down, but I think this is a very good analogy. We have to make progress in ‘building bridges’ to our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are also converted, baptized and led by God’s Holy Spirit. They are keepers of the Commandments, and so forth.

One of the things that we are learning, is that we as individuals in God’s church, we as groups in God’s church, we are beginning to learn the biblical instruction that we are not to congregate in groups who look only to one man, or one corporate organization, to the exclusion of the other brethren. The Apostle Paul used himself in an analogy, and it includes Apollos. These men would go into an area, and God would give them the opportunity to speak, and they would preach Jesus the Messiah. Many of these people had always heard that a Messiah was coming, a new Kingdom was coming, and a new Israel was coming. But they had not heard that Jesus was that Messiah, who was officially recognized by God the Father, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

Paul used himself as an illustration of men who should not be held in more esteem than others. Do not look up to me because I am an apostle; do not look up to Apollos. It is not right to say I am of Paul or I am of Apollos. It is not even right to say I am of Christ, as though to reject Paul and Apollos. No, ‘because I am going straight to the source, and I am still better than you.’ There was a divisiveness in that, and brethren, we have touched on this many times -- I am including it today, because as we are going chapter by chapter in I Corinthians, today we come to Chapter 4, and this is what is being spoken of.

Paul said that you might learn about what I have said about us, speaking about himself and Apollos, not to think of men above that which is written. Paul was telling them that he and Apollos were just tools in the hands of God. ‘We are not out here doing our own thing. We are not out here as some super evangelist that you should kowtow to.’ That was not what Paul was trying to get across. He said also, that ‘not one of you should boast in favor of one man’s group over another man’s group’. He said that is wrong and carnal.

But what do we see brethren, let us be honest and truthful? What do we see? We see the Church of God doing this all over the place. Ministers come out and say, “I

am all for recognizing that there are brethren in other congregations", and then at the same time that they are saying that they are rejecting and turning their back on those others who are trying to be true to God, His word and the scriptures and not be with those who compromise and treat God's law lightly, who treat God's doctrine lightly. Those people are not to be rejected; they are to be prayed for. They are to be reconciled with. That is what we should be doing.

But if some man says, "I believe in the trinity, and the trinity is the truth, and let us feed it to the people of God a teaspoon at a time like sugar, so that they will buy into it". Then if that man does not turn away from his Trinitarian beliefs, then I believe that it is right to say to be careful of that leader. We are to be wise when it comes to those matters. We are to be discerning as to what we are being taught. Jesus Christ said, "*Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.*" (Matthew 10:16) That is others, brethren, we are sheep, and there are wolves everywhere. As we get closer and closer to the end time, the scriptures very clearly show that there are going to be more and more vicious wolves. Yes, it is true that we need to be ever mindful that there are many false ministers. But let us also remember, at the same time, that there are also many true sheep. That means to us, brethren, what it means is that there is a lot of responsibility on us to properly discern the fruits of a man's life, not just hear his words. Look at his life, and look at the fruit. In Louisiana we used to say, "I've got your number." If somebody stole from you, or they were a con artist, or somebody was deceitful in some way, that is what you would say. Yes, we forgive when people turn from their sins, we forgive when people repent, and yes we always have to be in an attitude of forgiveness. But as long as a man is teaching heresy, it is not time for forgiveness, but it is time for repentance and reconciliation to God. If a man feeds us, any of us, heresy, I believe it is correct to say "Fool me once, shame on you, fool me twice, shame on me." There has to be, on the offending party's part, some reasonable turning away from the sinful act. We do not forgive people in the action of their sin, while the sin is going on. While the heresy is going on, the man is not forgiven, but he must turn and return to the truth, before we can say, 'This man will be my teacher'.

Let us rejoice with those faithful brethren who are celebrating fifty years of loving one another. In the Church of God, some people were saying, we just need to "Pay and Pray." "Do not speak up, do not be seen, just send your money in." They

thought that everybody had to be a yellow pencil; everybody had to be exactly alike. That is not the way we are. We did not recognize in the days of the Worldwide Church of God how really different each of us were. What we have gone through, what our trials have been, what our experiences and knowledge base is. We did not know those things.

God wants us to be one people, and a loving people. It is very difficult, brethren.

Matthew 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

That means that the forces of death shall never triumph over the true church. The church will be extant at the return of Jesus Christ. It is good to celebrate a 50th Anniversary. There are true people of God here and there, and everywhere. It is small in number, yes, but still the church is alive. It is not talking about an organization, this is talking about the Church of God. The church built by Christ will not die. There will always be brethren who are our brethren.

In Little Rock this week, we had the various groups come together and recognize that the Church of God is still alive. It is fifty years since the brethren first congregated here, and it is still alive. It reminds me a lot of what happened on the Day of Pentecost. Shortly after Jesus Christ died, there were 120 names, and they assembled together. They were not converted people yet, they were not baptized for the most part, except for the apostles. They had not had hands laid on them, but God's Holy Spirit came on them because He was pouring out His Spirit. It was like putting an exclamation point, "This is My Church!!!!", was what God was saying. He gave His Spirit to those people. Every one of them was baptized, immersed under water, and they made their part of the commitment. They said that they were burying the old man of sin, and living anew, in the newness of God with the help of His Holy Spirit. That congregation flourished. The scriptures tell us in the first couple of books of Acts, that there were 120, then there were 3,000, then there were 5,000. The numbers blossomed and bloomed, and it grew and it grew. It was very much like we saw the congregations doing here, some fifty years ago. But the same thing happened to the first century church. The church grew and grew, but apostasies came in. The church was scattered, first of all by persecution, but also by false doctrine and false teachers, and I think that many of the people were tired and became confused. Satan is the enemy, and he is subtle, he knows

all of the tricks, and many fell away. I cannot imagine what it would have been like to be a Christian in the year 100AD, after the first century came to an end. It must have been a lonesome time. But there were scattered groups of brethren, maybe large families, or extended families, that held on to the truth. Because we know, for a fact, that the church did not die out.

I Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, subordinates of Christ, **servants of Christ** [just regard us as your servants, and **servants of Christ**] and stewards of the mysteries of God.

So, for the purpose of this sermon today, I have chosen the title: "**Servants of Christ.**"

Paul is saying, in this letter; just regard us as your servants. Not the man with the three piece suit and the big car, that flashes into town every week or so, and gives a sermon. And we are all to say, wouldn't it be great if we were all wonderful like him. Paul is saying, 'Do not look up to me that way. I am only one of the tools of God. I am a servant. Yes, it is an important tool, and I carry the gospel of Jesus Christ, I carry knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, and it is my job to bring that to you. But it is your jobs as parents and all of the different tasks and duties and responsibilities that God has put before you, those are just as important'.

Paul also says that they are '*stewards.*' A steward is like the servant that is in charge of handing out the commodities in the same way that a household steward dispensed the master's food to all the servants. The apostles were busy dispensing the knowledge of Christ to their brethren. He was saying that their job is to take of this basket of truth that we have, and pass it on to you. 'We are not in the equation, it is you and God, and it is you and Jesus Christ. He is your deliverer, He is your Master, and He is your Savior. I am just here to be a steward of the mysteries of God, and I am handing them out'.

I worked for a man in the Worldwide Church of God who said, "I gave that person the Holy Spirit". I submit to you that is a terrible lack of understanding. No man, whether he is a bishop, a pastor general, an apostle or a pastor, gives anybody God's Holy Spirit. That is in the realm of God, and God alone. Just because a minister baptizes somebody, and they get all wet, that is not a surety from our

carnal viewpoint as to whether that person has received God's Holy Spirit. We are well aware that there have been many who fell away from Worldwide. They had gone under the water, and were baptized, and had hands laid on them, and never received God's Holy Spirit. So Paul is saying that they (ministers) are just "*stewards of the mysteries of God.*"

As a steward, as a **servant of Christ**, Paul had his responsibilities, and he had to serve God according to the duties that God had given him. We all have duties, we all have responsibilities. It is the responsibility of the ministry to teach God's way and God's principles. You are not going to find the principles of God out in the world, or in Wal-Mart, or in college, no matter where you go. They are in the Bible, and it takes a while to put it altogether, line upon line, precept upon precept. It is the responsibility of the ministry to show God's way, and to be that kind of overseer.

Even in God's Church we are all too often creatures of habit. We do the things that we learned from our parents, we mimic them. As a result, as we grow up, we do not always carefully examine the customs that we grew up being familiar with. We think that is the way it is. Let us remember, brethren, that the way that it is in the world is not the way of God. The patterns and routines that we grew up with need to be measured against God's Word.

And it is the responsibility of a servant of God to bring these things out with the desire that God's Holy Spirit, working in the brethren, will cause them to rise to the occasion of going on to perfection. That is an important responsibility, but that has nothing to do with elevating the minister or apostle to some high and lofty position, where he is in a class, realm, clique, or class of his own. We are not supposed to do that.

Mark 9:33 And He [Jesus] came to Capernaum: and being in the house He asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way?

Have your Bible maps handy when you study the Bible. When I look at Capernaum I can just picture exactly where it is. Then, when I picture where it is, it also reminds me of other things that went on in Capernaum. It also helps you lock into the scriptures.

Did Jesus have a house in Capernaum? Did the apostles have a place where they met over in Capernaum? This house was more of a central office that they worked out of, but it was certainly was not anything what we would call a headquarters.

Jesus knew exactly what they were disputing about. He knew what was in the heart of all men, the scriptures tell us.

God is working wherever and whenever His Spirit is in action in the lives of men. There need not be a headquarters that is involved. God is directing our lives, Jesus Christ knows us. We are known of God.

If it came to light, today, exactly where that house was you know what the Catholics and Jews would do? They would turn it into a shrine, and build a tremendous cathedral over the top of it. So that people could come to the house of Jesus, the house of the apostles. That is not what our religion is about. Our religion is not about those superficial things. That is not what the Eternal, all powerful, Creator God of the entire vast universe is interested in. That is false religion, pure and simple. To place emphasis on the place or thing, and not on the message, the words, and the life of Jesus Christ, is not what our faith is about.

Mark 9:34 But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.

They would say, "I am better than you are... I heard Jesus Christ, I understand it better, I can say it better, I know it better, and I can repeat it better... I am better looking, I am taller." Who knows why they were saying that they should be the greatest. It was purely carnal infighting going on. The apostles were not to be held in high esteem above the rest of them. We are all to be the **servants of Christ**. Why would they not come right out and say, "Well Lord here is what we were arguing about, which one of us should be the greatest." It was because they knew, good and well, that that kind of behavior was totally out of line, and no one had to point it out to them. They were too ashamed to admit it in front of Jesus.

We are answering the question from I Corinthians 4:1, about the meaning of ministers (**servants**) **of Christ**, and we find the answer in the next verse:

Mark 9:35 And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, **the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.**

Jesus Christ spelled it out so clear. Why do so many men want the high positions in their organization, to the extent that they will not allow the people in their group to mix with the people in the other group? Is it because the grass may be greener on the other side, and they might lose some of their control and their power? They might lose a notch or two from the high esteem that they might see themselves in.

I Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards [apostles, ministers and anyone in a leadership position], that [they] a man be found faithful.

There is the connotation here that the steward has been proven to be faithful by his past conduct, and that he has a track record of being faithful to God's word. This clearly shows their responsibility to be "**servant of all**," and that is what they have been doing as a way of life.

I Corinthians 4:3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

What others think is of no significance, it does not matter.

Please be careful, brethren, when Paul says, "*I judge not mine own self.*" This verse is not saying that Paul did not examine himself, he did (examine himself) profusely. He measured himself against the word of God.

Paul fully understood that even when you have the most heartfelt good intentions in what you say and do, sometimes there are unintended consequences that are out of your control. Sometimes things go awry for whatever reason.

Thankfully God is the just Judge of those matters. As a steward, Paul gave it his best shot. He knew the scriptures and he applied the scriptures. He did not deviate from the scriptures one iota. But sometimes Paul would say that the word of God says this, and the person went out and tried to do it and things got worse. God is in control of those things. God is the one that sends chastisement, and we may not know why God is letting someone go through a trial. Sometimes we go through trials because we have lived our lives from the day that we left our parents' home saying this is the way to do it, this is the way I have always done it, and this is the way I am always going to be.

God is going, knock, knock, trying to get our attention, and saying, 'Have another look at my word, take a look at what I am saying'. We must ask ourselves: 'Am I

living according to God's word, or am I still living the norms I grew up with in my home, thinking that this is the way God wants it?' We can rest assured knowing that Jesus is the righteous judge – considering all things.

So Paul says he cannot even judge himself. Paul grew up in a split and divided home, with different nationalities. He had a very broad background, but he did not know why he was doing everything that he did.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened [certainly this refers to the Books of the Bible. And know this: God keeps a perfect record of all our deeds].

This verse is saying that God will judge righteously based on how we lived our lives in accordance with His Word.

Proverbs 27:23 Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.

We are all told this, not just the ministry. I used to tell the students in the 10th grade Bible study class in Pasadena that this was not written for the sheep, cows or the geese. That is written for us, and we are to be diligent to know the state of our flock. That is the job or duty of a **servant of Jesus Christ**. Brethren, we have to understand that we are to be responsible people. We do not want just to hear soft and smooth things. The ancient Israelites had kind of given up the ghost, and I hope that we have not come to that point in the Church of God. Ancient Israel did not want to face facts; they just wanted to be told that everything is good and nice.

I Peter 5:1 The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:

Peter knew that he was converted, and what God has in store for us.

Truth consists in teaching the brethren what they need to know. There are ministers that build their careers on flattering people, but that is not their duty.

This is what a **servant of Christ** is commanded to do:

I Peter 5:2-4 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.

What do you feed them? You feed them right spiritual food that they need. It is not because someone is twisting your arm, it should be willingly. A minister is to be an example to the flock.

I Corinthians 4:4-6 For I know nothing by myself [I've repented of every sin that I'm aware of - being faithful]; yet am I not hereby justified: but [I must be tried by the judgment of the Lord] - He that judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time [hastily], until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things [secrets] of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of [men's] hearts: and then shall every man have [receive His due] praise from God. And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; [I have represented in the persons of myself and Apollos that considering us] that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one [of us] against another.

Do not think of ministers highly as though they were some kind of super beings, or that you fall down and grovel at their feet, or that you can't talk to him or call him. Do not be respecters of persons is what he is saying.

The apostle Paul used himself, as well as Apollos, as illustrations of men who should not be held in more esteem.

Paul said, "...that you might learn from what I have said about us, not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you boast in favor of one man's cause over another's." (I Corinthians 4:6)

That has been a perpetual problem in the church. Men are still boasting in favor of one man's cause over another. They should be looking at what the word of God says, about loving all of the brethren, about getting on and treating all of the brethren as one flock. That is the minister's job, to treat all of the brethren as one flock. People want to put men on a pedestal, and it is just a part of human nature

that men say, I follow this man, and that puts your man down and my man up. It is God's Word that should be put on a pedestal.

Paul is saying, "Please do not be a part of any divisive faction on my account saying "I am of Paul.""

Everything we have received, everything that we have become, and who we are, has been given to us by God. The gifts that we have been given are for serving others, it is not ours to boast of, or to cash in on, or to use for advantage.

I Corinthians 4:7 "For who makes you to differ [superior] from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you [sing your own praises, toot your own horn], as though you had not [freely] received it?"

He is saying that there is something wrong in your thinking. You have got the big head. You have become entitlement Christians, or you are privileged royalty or some such thing.

I Corinthians 4:8 Now ye are full [completely satiated], now ye are [become] rich, ye have reigned as kings without us/me [Paul distances himself from their haughty attitude of thinking that they know it all]: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

God's truth should never give anybody a big head.

Paul says: "I want you to do well, and I want the entire Church to do well". But he says, "You think you are sitting pretty, but you are not in a Godly spirit with that attitude.

Paul is correcting them for their partisan, competitive, and arrogant behavior.

To come in and tell a congregation, you have done it right, you have survived the apostasy, you are the one, you are right on top, and you don't need to change. You know you have all of the brotherly love in your little group, don't let others come in and taint your congregation. That is not what people need to hear.

I Corinthians 4:9 For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

Paul is saying that our lives are a witness.

During Paul's ministry he was persecuted, and he was paraded as a common criminal for the amusement of the masses

Hebrews 10:33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

I Corinthians 4:10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye - you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye - you are strong; ye - you are honorable, but we are despised outcasts.

It is a shame, but people can get to thinking that they know everything, and that they see the situation more clearly than anyone. He tells them, and us, that is dangerous. Humility is being able to realize that we do not have all the answers.

Paul is saying that Christianity is a very difficult and demanding life.

I Corinthians 4:11 Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted [stripes], and have no certain dwelling place;

The people that Paul was preaching to had homes, they had family support, but Paul had given it all up for the gospel's sake. He left his people, he left his country and he left his family, for the gospel's sake. He was out there being a servant to all.

Brethren, these are examples for us.

Paul tells us that it doesn't matter how bad it gets, we keep on going.

I Corinthians 4:12 And [we] labor [toil], working with our own hands: [when we are] being reviled [cursed], we bless; and [when we are] being persecuted, we suffer it patiently: [we take it, and keep on going.]

Hebrews 11:24-26 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

There is a good example there, where Moses was a highly esteemed and powerful general in Pharaoh's army. But he chose the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.

Paul says that all that I have written in chapter 4 is not to put you down, to reproach you, I am warning you. You are like my children, my beloved children.

I scold you like a child that I love. I am responsible for you. I am your father in the faith. I am the one that taught you the gospel message that Jesus is the Messiah, the one that is going to be ruling the Kingdom of God.

I Corinthians 4:16-17 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. [imitate my form of Christianity – not the kind that boasts and is arrogant] For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, [just] as I teach everywhere in every church.

There were some in the congregation, who were talking big, and they were spouting off, and they were arrogant.

Brethren, true Christianity causes men to be peaceable, not contentious, or prideful.

I Corinthians 4:18-19 Now some are puffed up [arrogant], as though [supposing] I would not come to you. [Paul says, 'You are going to have to answer to me'] But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but their power [might].

Paul was well aware that God would uphold him in a confrontational conflict with the divisive men. Paul was not afraid to confront them and set them straight, but he wanted to be loving, gentle and compassionate.

Psalms 37:17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholds the righteous.

I Corinthians 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not in [empty] words, but in power [mighty deeds].

This is a test for the Church of God right now, not only for the Corinthians two thousand years ago.

Let us ask ourselves how we can eliminate an attitude of contempt, and grow to love our brothers and sisters, no matter which fellowship they find themselves in at the moment?

Paul says, "It's up to you. Do you want to do this the hard way or the easy way?"

Paul asks the question:

I Corinthians 4:21 What will ye? [What is your desire?] Shall I come unto you with a rod [corrective], or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

Study through this chapter, brethren, it is a very good study about being the servants of God. And, we saw in the scripture, where Christ said to be servants of all.

Let's remember, it is not just the job of the ministry, it is the job of every one of us to help one another into the Kingdom of God. To help others even if they have a sin, even if they have a fault or a weakness, even if they are not any fun to be with.

If we are to be **servants of Christ**, it is our duty to help one another into the Kingdom of God.

WZ/pp/sl