

## Christian Response to the Rage & Wrath of Man: Paul Reasons with the Corinthians

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 4:1-21

If Paul needed practice with troubles in the ministry, he got that from his experience with the church in Corinth. The examples from the book of Acts focused much on the problems with Jewish persecution and the entanglements of Roman government. Here, we will see Paul discuss godly values as he deals with turmoil, mainly within the church. Almost immediately, you can see in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that there is division and trouble. Thank God for the Corinthian church! Without Paul's letters to them we would not have so many practical discussions about the problems of ministry today. Some of the things abounding in the Corinthian church were division over which minister is the best, selfish indulgence, tolerance / laziness regarding sin in the church, and personal pride – competition about who has the best spiritual gifts and who knows the most. These things also threaten the churches today. Be warned: the rage and wrath of man can manifest itself within the church, not just from the outside world (Acts 20:16-30; Ephesians 4:26,29-32; Romans 14:1; 16:17-18; I Corinthians 14:40; 16:14; II Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:15; Philippians 2:14-16; I Timothy 2:8; James 1:19-20; 3:8-18; 4:1-10).

So, as we conclude our thoughts about Christian response to the rage and wrath of man, we need to look at Paul's concern for ministry and how the church needs to be faithful, focused, and following Christ, not man.

### **I Corinthians 4:1-2 – Be servants of Christ – faithful stewards of the mysteries of God.**

We are here to represent and serve the purposes of Christ on earth. He has given us a stewardship, in which we are to preserve and promote the truth of the Gospel, managing the work and the care of His people (Ephesians 3:1-9; I Peter 4:10; Jude 1:3; Philippians 2:1-16; I Timothy 3:14-15; II Timothy 2:1-10).

### **I Corinthians 4:3-5 – Stay focused on pleasing the Lord.**

Though God tells us, in general, to be submissive to human government and to cooperate with one another in the church, we are ultimately accountable to God only. Man has a way of trying to control others, managing them like a herd. Opinion polls and “popular” thinking often dominate people's thoughts, decisions, and actions. Two temptations plague us in life: 1) to live in fear of man – and 2) to live to please man (Proverbs 29:25-26; Isaiah 2:22; 51:7-8,12-13; I Corinthians 3:18-23; 7:23; Galatians 1:10).

Paul wasn't going to be pushed around by everyone's opinions and judgements. Even though Paul had a clear conscience, he still deferred to God to decide and approve his service in Christ's kingdom. We should live in the anticipation of standing before Christ, who will reward us according to our heart motives and our works. See Psalm 31:19-20; Romans 14:4,10-12; I Corinthians 3:10-15; 7:23; II Corinthians 5:8-10; Hebrews 4:11-13; James 2:12; Revelation 2:2,9,13,19; 3:1,8,15; 22:12.

**I Corinthians 4:6-7 – Stay dependent on God's grace. Do not glory in man.**

When men put confidence in their abilities or in the abilities of others, they easily lose sight of the fact that none of us could do anything without the grace of God. See I Corinthians 1:26-31; 3:1-9; John 3:27; Romans 15:15-19.

**I Corinthians 4:8-13 – Be willing to forfeit personal reputation and comfort for the sake of others.**

A candle spends itself to light others. So, we should be willing to cheerfully sacrifice of ourselves for the Glory of God and the good of others. See I Corinthians 10:32-33; II Corinthians 4:5-12; 6:3-11; 12:14-15; Galatians 4:19; Philippians 2:17; II Timothy 2:3-4,8-10.

**I Corinthians 4:14-16 – Follow Christ-like examples.**

Many people can talk and teach well. Many can assert themselves as leaders. But Paul wanted the Corinthians to remember that not everyone is invested in their well-being. Paul loved them and served them as a father would do for his children. Consider how Christ loved us and gave himself for us! Don't follow good performers. Follow those who follow Christ's example of sacrificial love. See Mark 10:32-45; II Corinthians 8:9; I Corinthians 11:1; I Thessalonians 2:1-12; Ephesians 5:1-2; Philippians 2:1-8; 3:13-17; Hebrews 13:7 cp Matthew 7:15-20; Romans 16:17-18.

**I Corinthians 4:17-20 – Follow through with God's work and God's people.**

Many take "potshots" at ministry in the church. They try things. They dabble. Paul demonstrated and orchestrated deliberate ministry to people that had long-term goals and effects. He did not start something in the lives of people and then abandon it for something else later. Should we not commit ourselves to a thorough and lasting ministry through our churches? Serving Christ in His kingdom is not just a bunch of talk. It is a life of steady service by the grace and power of God. See I Corinthians 16:13-16; Hebrews 6:10-12; Philippians 1:3-8; 3:12-15; I Corinthians 9:24-27; 13:1-8a; Luke 9:57-62; 14:27-35; Galatians 2:20; I Corinthians 15:10; II Timothy 2:1-2 cp. 4:7-8.