

1 CORINTHIANS – FACT SHEET 5



Chapter 4:

Having challenged the Corinthians to move on into maturity, the Apostle now contrasts what maturity looks like 'in Christ' compared to the flawed worldly standards. When God's people move into maturity, they naturally then become 'A Serving People'. This can be considered in four ways:

First – The **OBJECT** of Godly Service: 1-5:

The Apostle starts with the words, 'so then' (vs1) – 'in the light of what I've just said about revering and exalting people' – 'men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God'. Paul can describe himself and his fellow labourers as both servants and stewards (NKJV). The reference to servant here is more in the line of an 'under-rower', a servant of a servant, supporting, labouring. A steward is more akin here to a loving, caring house-wife – desiring the best for those under their care. The object and focus of their care, in addition to God's people, being 'the secret things of God' (vs1); with the key quality of such not being 'busyness' but rather 'faithfulness' (vs2). Our service is not done to please men (vs3) or even oneself (vs4); but ultimately the Lord (vs4). Our service is to be done in the light of eternity and not for short term gain. The Lord as judge will ultimately, 'expose the motives of men's hearts' (vs5). The ultimate object and motivation for our service is to please Him.

Second – we see The **DISTRACTION** to Godly Service: 6-8:

In these 3 verses, the Apostle points out some distractions and barriers to Godly service. Yet before critiquing, he again reminds them that they are 'family', 'now brethren' (vs6). He also is keen to tell them that whatever he is about to tell them for their benefit, he has applied to himself first (vs6). The first distraction to Godly living is living by **RULES** beyond God's Word; effectively going, 'beyond what is written' (vs6). This can then lead to a second barrier, **PRIDE**, thinking one is better than others around you. Paul reminds the Corinthians that all they have was 'received' (vs7), so they should not **BOAST** as if it was all down to them. The folk at Corinth thought they had 'landed' spiritually and so fell into the other distraction of **SELF SATISFACTION** (vs8). With such distractions, it is often difficult to see beyond one's own performance, ego and needs.

Third – We see the REALITY of Godly Service: 9-13:

In these few verses, Paul outlines the reality of what true service and sacrifice for Christ looks like and its consequences. He can describe him and his fellow Apostles as being, 'at the end of the procession' (vs9). Those at the end of a Roman victory procession would be those captured and enslaved, ridiculed by their captors. Paul gives this picture of God's true servants, often being those who are misunderstood, ridiculed and marginalised. This 'procession' is displayed both before 'men and angels' (vs9) – there is a much bigger audience than we might anticipate as heaven itself watches God work out His plan through His servants (see Ephesians 3:10). In the following verses, Paul then commences a character CV of the servant of Christ, one who reacts and behaves so differently to the 'serve me and I'll serve you' standards of this world. These qualities include 'blessing those who curse us' (vs12), enduring persecution (vs12), and answering slanderous accusations kindly (vs13). The servant of Christ knows the bigger picture (see 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Matthew 5:11-12).

Fourth – Paul gives us an EXAMPLE of Godly Service: 14-21:

Although Paul has had some harsh words to say, his motive and his heart are revealed in verse 14, as a loving father, addressing them as, 'dear children'. They are reminded of their conversion days (vs15), it is easy to 'lose our first love' over time and in the busyness of church. Not in a boastful way, the Apostle encourages the Corinthians to 'imitate' him (vs16) – to consider his sacrifice, his motives and his focus. In looking to encourage the church, Paul is, 'sending... Timothy' (vs17), one who does not display over confidence, boastfulness or self-satisfaction, but rather 'faithfulness' (vs17), a key characteristic of a servant of God. With Paul out of the way, it was easy for the stronger personalities to start taking over, stamping their imprint on the fellowship. Paul reminds them of their accountability (vs18) and encourages them to be people who operate in the power of God, as opposed to being those who merely talk about service (vs19-20). God will achieve His purposes in spite of us not because of us – we can resist His Spirit and guidance; and battle against Him or accept the loving and gentle nurturing He gives us (vs21).

For further study:

Look up these 'servant' passages and note the characteristics of God's people: Matthew 5:1-12, Matthew 18:20-22, Matthew 20:25-27, 2 Cor 6:3-5, 2 Timothy 2:24

Further Reading/Bibliography: *The Holy Bible, 1 Corinthians (Morris, Tyndale), The Message of 1 Corinthians (Prior, IVP) 1 Corinthians, A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary (Thiselton, Eerdmans).*

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Word" Psalm 119:18