

Application

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[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians 4, starting the reading this week at verse 6 to verse 13. 1 Corinthians 4, verse 6 to 13.

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1 Corinthians 5, verse 6 to 13.

1 Corinthians 5, verse 7 to 13. 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. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong.

[1 : 44] You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst. We are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless.

And we labor working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure. When slandered, we try to conciliate.

We have become and are now as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things.

Amen. May the Lord bless us that reading. May it be to his praise and to his glory. Oh, see the dawn of the darkest day. The apostle had made the appeal at the very beginning that all of you agree, and there be no dissensions among you, but you may be united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

And the way that this dissension was now developing was now this criticism of him as their pastor.

[3 : 07] And the apostle goes on to say that this cannot be allowed. And it can't be allowed because what you are doing by doing this, you are taking the right of God in judgment to yourself.

And he went on to remind them that at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Not because of salvation, but to see with what we've done with the gifts and callings that God has given us.

Of course, Christ didn't come in Paul's lifetime. And thus far, he hasn't come in our lifetime either. But the apostle Peter in his letter says, the time has come for judgment to begin at the household of God. And the reason for that is that so that the church, of which you and I are part, may have a particular, a better testimony, a holier walk with God, a filling of God in our presence, in our midst. So, the word this week isn't judgment. The single word that applies to what I'm about to say is the word application.

[4 : 36] Look at verse 6. I have applied all this 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.

There's a saying abroad about theologians. The saying is that they take the mysteries of God and they make them more mysterious.

I'm not trying to do that. I'm trying to do the reverse of that. Now, there are three things in this particular verse that make it difficult to understand. First of all, we find in verse 6, this statement, I have applied all this, literally, these things.

What does that refer to? There's the verb that he uses, which means to apply, and it's so translated here, but also means to transform. And there is the phrase, not to go beyond what is written.

These three things make this verse difficult to understand because in reality, we don't really have a clue as to what Paul's talking about. And perhaps when you read him, you wonder what he is talking about.

[6 : 12] Now, these things, what are they? This is the teaching that Paul has given to the Corinthians, which begins at chapter 3, verse 5.

And in the discussion of this theme, he's taken the metaphors of gardening, building, and stewarding, and replied them to himself.

He says this, I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. That's the metaphor of gardening.

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation. The building metaphor. And this is how one should regard us as stewards of Christ and servants of the mysteries of God.

So that's what these things actually refer to. It's this teaching that he's already written to the Corinthians on how they are to regard him.

[7 : 19] The second thing is the verb, translated as apply. But it actually means to transform. So in Philippians 3, verse 21, who will transform the body of our humility into one sharing the likeness of his glorious body.

Transform. And that's what he's doing here. He's taking these figures, gardening, building, and stewarding, and he's transforming the context from the Corinthians to himself and Apollos so that they will understand what he's talking about.

That leaves the phrase not to go beyond that which is written. This is probably a quotation that something he has said or the Corinthians have said.

and it refers not to the Old Testament in general but to the Old Testament passages which are alluded to earlier in this letter.

So thus understood what it means is that the Corinthians are to make the Old Testament the basis of their way of living in the sense that all they had at that time was the Old Testament.

[8 : 45] Now the application is this that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written that none of you may be puffed up in favor or once against another.

In other words if you will take this context and apply it to yourself rather than having criticism of us you will have appreciation of us and that in itself will deal with all the divisions the arguments the sects the whole thing.

It will bring it to an end. So what they are required to do secondly is receive this teaching. Verse 7 Who sees anything different in you?

What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it why do you boast as if it were not a gift? So the need comes in at the very end of verse 6 that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

And the verb here means to be conceited or arrogant. So what is being conveyed here is that this verse refers to the way that the Corinthians have decided to stir up opposition to Paul and Apollos.

[10 : 22] And they shouldn't be doing that. Why? Because Paul and Apollos don't do that against themselves rather they think they are complementary in the work of God.

1 Corinthians 3 verse 5 makes this clear. What is Apollos? What is Paul? Servant through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each.

Who makes you different from your neighbor? Now why is it that you're making this distinction between persons that you may consider or make them superior?

Now the answer that the apostle is looking for is this no one for in fact you're not different from your neighbor in any way.

You are and can be nothing more or less than a sinner pardoned by the grace of God. God. This is the truth of what the Corinthians have to realize.

[11 : 37] But there's another answer. Not only are they pardoned sinners, so far as you differ from your neighbor by possessing special gifts, it is God who made you differ since the gifts were given by him and the consequence of that is that you have nothing whatsoever to be boast about.

Right at the beginning of the letter he writes and says this, that in every way you were enriched in him with all speech and knowledge and you are not lacking in any spiritual gifts.

So this is what it's now about. Not just the fact that they had this criticism of Paul and Apollos for their own reasons, which gives division by itself, but they are also developing these factions because this group had this particular spiritual gift and that group had a different spiritual gift and one is better than the other.

So they say, you have already become rich. Apart from us you have come into your kingdom and I wish you had come into your kingdom that we might reign with you.

But before we get to that, he's dealing with this problem of what gifts they had. And in verses 5 to 7 of chapter 1, he tells you what they are.

[13 : 20] In every way you were enriched in him with all speech and knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed among you, so you are not lacking in any spiritual gift.

So what gifts is he talking about? In the listing of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he talks about the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge.

And what these are, are preaching gifts that deal with the two problems that the early church had with a sect called Gnosticism.

Gnosticism taught that in God there are many extensions of light and Christ is merely one of those. He didn't die on the cross but only appeared to do so. They also taught a great stress on they and they alone having true knowledge and wisdom.

[14 : 33] So these two gifts have been given to the church to deal with that very problem. So what they are now guilty of is not just criticism of the pastor, they're guilty of spiritual pride which was causing them to have a false view of themselves.

And this is what he means when he says this. Apart from us you have come into your kingdom. Yes and I wish you had come into your kingdom that we might reign with you.

This is a distortion. They think they've arrived. They think that they've got all the spiritual gifts.

They're not behind in anything.

They have a distorted view of who they are. And the way the apostle now seeks to deal with this is in the third point by dealing with what he, Apollos, Barnabas, Peter, all are.

I think that God has exhibited us as apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death because we have become a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men.

[16 : 05] Now in verse 13 he says we are the offscouring of all things. Now that offscouring is in fact an illustration from cooking.

because if you cook mutton in a pot with a lid, when the cooking is over, you can correct me afterwards if I'm wrong, when the cooking is over and you take the lid off, there's this dirt around the pan, is there not?

That's what he's talking about. We have become this dirt as far as the world is concerned. And so now he goes to expand on something earlier.

How do you consider us? What do you think about us? Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

So what he's now saying is that the ministers of the word are simply that. They're not laws.

[17 : 25] In fact, he says to the Philippians on one occasion, we could have made demands as Christ's apostles, but instead we became as children in your midst, like a nursing mother caring for her children.

we are as men under the sentence of death. In other words, he's thinking about the Roman arena, where many Christians, women, men, children, ended their lives either in combat with one another or with gladiators or with wild beasts.

And he says this, we have become a spectacle to the whole world, angels and men. The word he uses in Greek gives us the English word theater.

We are on show, is what he's saying. We have become this kind of spectacle, this theater. We've been placed in the public arena.

Everyone can see what we are. It's not a position of privilege, of high standing. It's the position of Christ himself, who took the very nature of a servant, humbled himself and became obedient unto death.

[19 : 03] This, says Paul, is what we are. Christ crucified before the spectacle and the wisdom of the world.

So in verse 10, we are fools for Christ's sake. You are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong.

You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. He has become foolish in worldly standards, so that he might become wise in the Christian sense, and this reversal of fortunes that he's talking about has been achieved by the grace of God working in him to their benefit.

And the point is, the point of this lowly lifestyle to which you and I are called is to present the sufferings of Christ to the world.

This is not a walk that entails pomp or arrogance. It's a walk that entails humility. Verse 11, to this present hour we hunger and thirst.

[20 : 33] We are ill-clad, buffeted, and homeless. In the second Corinthian letter, he talks about having been on the wrong side of robbery.

He has a distinct lack of supplies. We go hungry, thirsty, and naked. This is the sufferings of Christ. So he goes on in verse 12, and we labor, working with our own hands. If you read the correspondence that he writes, in particular to the Philippians, he says that we acted in a particular way that we might not become indebted to anyone.

We did not eat any man's bread, he says, without payment. He's depending on his own ability to raise funds.

So we read in the Acts of the Apostles, and because Paul was of the same trade, he stayed with them. This is for Apollos. And they worked for by trade, they were tent makers.

[21 : 59] And the idea that's conveyed here isn't just of casual labor. It's not for a temporary contract.

This is hard work. And he's also got the labor of preaching. the care of founding and caring for the churches.

But we do our Christian service in such a way that we are not indebted to anyone. Now, rabbis at this time, which Paul had been one, often took on secular employment because the synagogue didn't have enough money to keep them going.

But it's another mark of loneliness because in classical Greek times, any teacher who did secular employment would have been despised.

And this is something else that Paul is saying to the Corinthians. This is our position. We're in this permanent state of loneliness, humility.

[23 : 17] And we are doing that in your presence to exhibit very clearly to you, to the world, to men, to angels, to demons, the fact that Christ suffered for us.

He took the way of humility. And he writes to the people in Corinth, dear brothers and sisters, if you want to follow Christ, this is the only way.

It's a way away from leading out of dissension and argument. It's a way for blessing. It's a way of moving forward.

God. It's a way that's approved by God. I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and there be no dissensions among you, that you may be united in the same mind and in the same judgment.

And he's now put before them a way that all of this can be achieved. So the word is not judgment.

[24 : 39] The word is application. Jesus himself said, if any man will follow me, let him take up his cross, deny himself and follow me.

This is what the apostle is saying in writing in verses 6 to 13 of 1 Corinthians chapter 4. Next week we'll bring the chapter to an end by looking at 14 to 21.

We stand and sing when I survey the wondrous cross. eman into 2 through 1 year to 2 services to 9 to 5 to 1 2