

## **I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS**

### **II. Handling Divisions Among Believers, 1 Corinthians 1:10-4:21**

#### **F. Our Accountability To God In Church Functions**

**(1 Corinthians 3:16-4:5)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid*.
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. This epistle is timely for us who face our own decadent culture today, so we view 1 Corinthians 3:16-4:5 where Paul taught our need to have a sense of accountability to God in church functions (as follows):

#### **II. Our Accountability To God In Church Functions, 1 Corinthians 3:16-4:5.**

- A. Having discussed in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 the believer's accountability to God for his ministry at Christ's Judgment Seat, Paul gave a warning of accountability to those who lead in church functions, 1 Cor. 3:16-23:
  - 1. First, Paul asserted that the local church body of believers is "a temple of God inhabited by the Spirit," *Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to 1 Corinthians 3:16.
  - 2. Accordingly, if a church leader destroys that local church temple by way of his ministry, him will God destroy, for God's temple is holy, 1 Corinthians 3:17 ESV, NIV.
  - 3. This destruction can occur through unbiblical teaching and actions by a leader who presents himself as being wise in reference to this world's wisdom, for Paul warned that one should not deceive himself in thinking that he is wise in this world's wisdom, that he should rather become as it were a fool in the world's eyes that he might become spiritually wise, 1 Corinthians 3:18. Indeed, the world's wisdom is folly with God, what Paul noted in citing Job 5:13 (in 1 Cor. 3:19) and Psalm 94:11 (in 1 Cor. 3:20).
  - 4. Paul thus directed that no man should glory in men (1 Cor. 3:21a), for there was no need for such glorying in his readers, for by God's grace, Paul, Apollos, Peter, the world, life, death, the present, the future – all of these belonged to them in Christ, they belonged to Christ, and Christ belonged to God, 1 Cor. 3:21b-23.
- B. Paul then warned those who sat under the ministries of human servants of the Lord for their need to have a sense of cautious accountability to God in their views and treatments of those leaders in 1 Corinthians 4:1-5:
  - 1. The apostle directed that those who sat under the ministries of himself, Apollos and Peter regard such men as *huperetes*, "servants" with an emphasis on "subordination" because "(t)he word . . . originally" meant "an under-rower in a trireme, a ship with 3 banks of oars," U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 585; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 850; *Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to 1 Corinthians 4:1.
  - 2. These "under-rowers" of God were stewards of God's formerly unrevealed truths, or "mysteries," and they were required of the Lord to be faithful in dispensing those truths to others, 1 Corinthians 4:2.
  - 3. For this reason, Paul added that he considered it a small thing that he would be judged by his hearers or by any human court for his ministry, for he was accountable only to God, 1 Corinthians 4:3; Romans 14:4.
  - 4. Paul stated that he was not aware of anything wrong that he was doing in his ministry, but that his lack of such awareness did not excuse him of any wrong, for God was his ultimate Judge, 1 Corinthians 4:4 ESV.
  - 5. The apostle concluded that his readers should not pronounce a judgment of human opinion about a leader prior to the Judgment Seat of Christ when the Lord returns, for Christ will bring to light the things that are hidden in darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts, 1 Corinthians 4:5a. At that time, God will graciously reward each leader for what good he had done in serving the Lord, 1 Corinthians 4:5b.

***Lesson:*** *Leaders of God's people in the local church need to sense their cautious accountability to the Lord for their need to be humble and uphold only the wisdom of God in their lives and teaching, and those who sit under such leaders also need to sense their cautious accountability to the Lord in relating to these leaders and view them as subordinates to God responsible to Him to be faithful in dispensing God's truths in their lives and ministries.*

***Application:*** *May we realize that each of us in the local church, leaders and subordinates alike, will give an account to the Lord for our actions in the local church, that we thus be careful to do and to say what is Biblically accurate and edifying to one another for the glory of God and not for the glory of man.*