

The Scum of the World

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 4. 1 Corinthians chapter 4, we'll be reading verses 6 through 21.

I have applied all these things 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.

For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich. Without us you have become kings. And would that you did reign so that we might share the rule with you.

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.

[1 : 07] We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

To the present hour we hunger and thirst. We are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless. And we labor, working with our hands.

When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure. When slandered, we entreat. We have become and are still like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers.

For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ.

[2 : 10] As I teach them everywhere in every church. Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills.

And I will find out, not the talk of these arrogant people, but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power. What do you wish?

Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness? Two weeks ago, we returned to 1 Corinthians.

And we looked at just the first five verses here in chapter 4. Paul is winding down on a theme that he began in the first part of his letter.

The wisdom of God versus the wisdom, supposedly, of this world. And we've seen over and over again that the wisdom of God is nothing like the wisdom of the world.

[3 : 11] God's wisdom, God's power, God's ways are surprising and the opposite of what you'd expect. What appears to be weak is really God's strength on display.

What appears to be foolish is really God's wisdom on display. Here is a crucified Christ that is preached. And yet he is the Lord of glory that they crucified.

So the world thinks little of God's wisdom. The world thinks little of God's ways. God's ways are opposite to the world's ways. The world wants to be exalted with pride.

But the wisdom and the power of God brings us low in humility. That is the lesson that Paul has been teaching over and over again here in 1 Corinthians.

We are prone to pride. And so we need to learn the lesson of humility. And what better way to teach that lesson than for Paul to use himself as an example.

[4 : 15] That's what Paul is doing here in chapter 4. He's putting himself and the other leaders in the early church forward as examples to the Corinthians. And also to us.

That's exactly what Paul says in verse 6. He puffed up in favor of one against another. So Paul has already done this. He has already applied the lesson to himself in Apollos.

We saw that in verses 1 to 5. What did Paul call himself and Apollos? Stewards. Not that we've excelled in our own abilities.

Not that we've done this in our own effort. But God worked through us. Weak men that we are. God worked through us to accomplish his purposes.

And so Paul is saying we have nothing to boast in about ourselves. No reason for us to think ourselves highly. Our only boast is in God and what he has done.

[5 : 11] So stop doing what you're doing, Corinthians. Stop evaluating us using these ridiculous worldly standards. That's what Paul means when he says in verse 6. That they're not to go beyond what is written.

He's saying that you need to stick to the written word. What God says in his scriptures. There's your standard, Corinthians.

Here is truth. It's been preserved for us in writing. Written down. Here's the record of what God says. So this is what the Corinthians are to stick to.

This is what we are to stick to. Stick with these pages that are written. And then Paul is implying you will evaluate rightly. You will see things correctly.

You'll see things as God does, not as the world does. You'll see the wisdom of God for what it really is. You'll see the foolishness of the world for what it really is.

[6 : 08] And guess what that will result in? Humility. The Corinthians are like people who go to the bowling alley. And it's their first time bowling. And they keep getting gutter ball after gutter ball after gutter ball.

And you think, get those bumpers up for those people so they can at least get it down the lane. Well, God's word is like the bumpers for the Corinthians. The bumpers for us.

God's word keeps us from the gutter balls of worldly evaluations that are rooted in pride. So they needed the gutter balls, or they needed the bumpers of God's word to stay humble.

And then Paul, he puts into practice the very thing he's preaching here. He's told them, don't go beyond what is written. And if we look back at these first four chapters, five times Paul has said, as it is written.

1 Corinthians 1.19. Paul quotes Isaiah 29.14 using the phrase, as it is written, saying, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.

[7 : 15] In 1 Corinthians 1.31, Paul quotes from Jeremiah 9.23. And again, he uses that phrase, as it is written, what no eye has seen, or let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

Same thing in 1 Corinthians 2.9. As it is written, and then Isaiah 64.4, what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him.

And then finally, chapter 3, verses 19 to 20. As it is written, and Paul then quotes Job 5.13, and Psalm 94.11. Back to back. He catches the wise in their craftiness, and the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.

As it is written. As it is written. And every single time, what's the basic point that Paul is making using what has been written from the Old Testament? No one and nothing can trump the wisdom and the power of God.

So then, Corinthians, stay humble. Don't boast in yourself. Boast in the Lord. And Paul says, I've applied that to myself. Even as a well-known, highly esteemed leader in the early church, Paul is not saying, look how great I am.

[8 : 35] He's not boasting in himself. Apollos isn't either. We're servants. We're stewards, he says. So now Paul turns the tables on the Corinthians in verse 7.

He addresses them, and he says, who sees anything different in you? If this is true of me, and of Apollos, and the other leaders in the church, then Corinthians, who sees anything different in you? If Paul and Apollos are but servants and stewards, why should the Corinthians, or anyone else, think themselves worthy of any status above them?

So no room for boasting. And then Paul hammers that home with two more questions. What do you then have that you did not receive?

And the obvious answer is nothing. If then you received it, why do you boast as though you did not? All is freely given of God.

[9 : 36] It's all of grace. It's all a gift from Him. Listen back to the beginning of 1 Corinthians. As Paul is addressing them and thanking the Lord for them, listen to how he talks about the Corinthians.

Verse 4 of chapter 1. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus. That in every way you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you.

So that you are not lacking in any gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is faithful by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Nothing there that Paul is saying, wow, look what you've done.

Everything there is saying, wow, look at what God has done for you. Look at how God has called you. Look at how God has equipped you. Look at how God has been at work in your midst.

[10 : 45] It's all of grace. Kids, I think we've talked about this before in 1 Corinthians, but when you get a gift, maybe it's your birthday, and you get a gift from someone, is that gift earned by you?

Is that gift given to you? It's not earned by you. That would be really weird if you went to get a gift and you said, this is what I've been waiting for.

I deserve this gift. You have to give this gift to me. That would be offensive. That would be wrong.

That would be totally inappropriate to say that when you received a gift.

No, instead, kids, you can say this. What do we say when we receive a gift? There it is. Thank you.

That's right. We say thank you.

And that's recognizing this gift wasn't given to me because I earned it. This gift was given to me as a gift. It was a generous act from somebody. And so we go to write what, kids, after we get that gift?

[11 : 49] A thank you card. We write a thank you. We don't write a, I deserve this card, do we? No, we write a thank you card. And as you're writing that card, you don't say things like, I deserve this gift.

I'm really awesome as a friend. I expected this for a while. You were a little late in getting the gift to me. No, you say, thank you for giving me that gift.

That's obvious. But sometimes, kids, we can act like that even with God. We can act like we deserve something. We can act like we earned something.

And we're treating God as though we're writing a thank you note, but we're calling it the I deserving note. And so Paul is reminding the Corinthians, Paul is reminding us, we didn't earn what God has given to us.

He freely gave it to us. What do we have that was not given? So the Corinthians were boasting.

They were puffed up about themselves.

[12 : 47] They thought themselves more highly than they ought. They were using those wrong standards to evaluate themselves, thinking like the world. And so Paul is now going to point that out with a very sharp rebuke.

So last time we were in 1 Corinthians, we considered just the first of three relationships. We remember Paul said, as it relates to Christ, I am a servant and a steward.

Well, now we're going to see the last two relationships defined this evening. Here in verses 8 to 13, we see as it relates to the world, Paul says, I am the scum of the earth.

So the Corinthians are boasting in themselves. And Paul is going to speak now in a striking fashion. His words here are dripping with sarcasm.

We have to see this. Paul is not commending them in these verses. He is admonishing them for their pride. He is writing tongue-in-cheek when he says this, beginning in verse 8.

[13 : 51] Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich without us. You have become kings. And would that you did reign so that we might share the rule with you.

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. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour, we hunger and thirst.

We are poorly dressed, and buffeted, and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands.

When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure.

When slandered, we entreat. We have become, and still are, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things. So the Corinthians thought so highly of themselves.

[14:52] They were swelling with pride in themselves. They were thinking, we have arrived. But they were simply aligning themselves with the standards of the world. They were completely caught up in the rat race of life.

They wanted wealth, and honor, and influence. They wanted to be esteemed, and praised by men. And Paul is saying, you don't need me, or any other leader in the church, for any of that.

If that's what you want, if you want all that the world has to offer, why are you using my name anyways? I'm no leader for that. Neither is Apollos, or Peter, or any other leader in the church. Paul is saying, without me, already you have all that you want. Already you have become rich. Without us, you have become kings. Now obviously, the Corinthians shouldn't be arguing over church leaders in the first place.

But even more to the point, what purpose is that actually serving them? They don't need to associate themselves with godly men in order to gain worldly status. That doesn't make sense even.

[16:01] So Paul is saying, you don't need me to gain all that this world has to offer. I can't help you with that. It seems that you're actually doing fine without me at that. If you want to be exalted by the world, Paul's no leader for them.

Then Paul reminds the Corinthians of the ministry that God has given to him. If you want to follow my lead, well, let me tell you what I'm up to. His life is filled with hardship and pain and difficulty. Paul is saying, just look at my life. It's filled with humiliation, with trials and suffering and affliction. I'm mocked by the world. I'm hated by the world.

I'm the scum of the earth, Paul says. Kids, do you know what scum is? You ever been to a pond? Most ponds aren't crystal clear like a flowing river.

Lots of ponds have this layer on top of them. We call it pond scum. It's algae and other stuff. My understanding of ponds ends here.

[17:04] And it's gross. You don't want to touch it. It's slimy and gooey looking. Or if, like our kids, we have pots and pans that they play with outside and you leave some water in that pot or that pan for a number of days and then you come out to that pot or pan, it's got some gross looking dirt and stuff in it.

That's scum. And Paul says, the world treats me like that. I am the scum of the earth in the world's eyes. I'm like a thin layer of dirt.

And then he says, I'm the refuse of all things. I'm like garbage to the world. So Corinthians, how does that sound? No worldly honor or power or prestige to be gained from that kind of life.

Just the opposite. Paul is held in disrepute. Paul is looked upon as weak. He's hungry. He's thirsty. His clothes are raggedy. He's a homeless man.

He's lost everything that could have boosted his status in the world. And yet, Paul wouldn't trade it for the world. He's gained all that truly matters.

[18:13] His words here in 1 Corinthians 4 might remind us of something that he said in Philippians 3. In his letter to the Philippians, beginning in chapter 3, verse 7, Paul writes this, But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him.

Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

So Paul had lost everything from a worldly perspective, but he was unfazed by that. He wasn't grieved by it. He didn't lose any sleep over it.

He didn't regret it and wish that he could do things differently so he could still have all that the world offered. He counted himself, he counted himself, he himself counted everything he once had as rubbish, refuse.

[19:39] The world and all that it has to offer, that's as good as garbage to me, Paul says. So when the world turns around and considers Paul like garbage, well, that's fine. He's not concerned with that.

He doesn't care what the world thinks of him. His only concern is what God thinks, that I may be found in Christ with a righteousness not my own. That was Paul's aim.

That was Paul's goal. Cursed by the world, persecuted, slandered. Sounds good, Paul says. I'm simply sharing in the sufferings of my Savior.

Savior. He was counted as rubbish by the world. He was looked upon as weak. He had nowhere to lay his head. He was reviled and persecuted.

He was made to be a spectacle as he was lifted up and hung upon that cross where he bled and died, weak in the world's eyes, mocked, spit upon, challenged to save himself.

[20 : 41] Yet what the world cannot see is that the cross is the very power of God on display. It's the way to salvation. Christ died on that cross in order that our sins would be forgiven.

That he would then rise again in power. What appeared foolish to the world was the very wisdom of God. And so Paul is just simply taking up his cross here and he's following his Savior.

The servant sharing in the sufferings of his Master. Just as Jesus promised, in John 15, 20, a servant is not greater than his Master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. So Paul is sharing in the sufferings of Christ. He's becoming like him in his death that by any means possible he may attain the resurrection of the dead.

So we see here that Paul has this future-oriented perspective. He's not removing himself entirely from this world. It's not that he's becoming a hermit and trying to escape.

[21 : 47] He's absolutely in the world. He's sharing the gospel with the world. He's being rejected by the world. But he's not concerned with what the world thinks of him. How the world evaluates him.

He's looking to a future day. Just as he said back in verse 5, when the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart, then each one will receive his commendation from God.

So he's not looking for the commendation from the world. He's looking what comes from God.

That's what matters to Paul. So what about us? What are we after?

What are we pursuing? The world will appeal to us to define success in this life in all the wrong ways. We can be just as tempted as the Corinthians to invest time and energy and money into building up our own little kingdoms, boosting our status in this world.

We could do it even in the church, puffed up with pride, focused on ourselves, and our minds all that while are set on earthly things. Or do we have the same perspective as Paul here in 1 Corinthians with minds that are set on heavenly things?

[23 : 07] We're content in Christ whatever the world might say about us. We're content in Christ whatever the world might do to us. We could be made fun of. We could be scoffed at, ridiculed, made to be a spectacle, the refuse of the world.

But we know Christ. We're found in Him. We're secure in Him. Come what may, we belong to Him.

So is your hope ultimately in what you can gain in this life or is your hope in what is promised to you even in the next?

Henry Light in the 1800s penned a hymn titled My Rest is in Heaven. And he says this in that hymn, Let trial and danger my progress oppose.

They only make heaven more sweet at the close. Come joy or come sorrow, whatever may befall, a home with my God then will make up for all. With Christ in my heart and His word in my hand, I travel in haste through an enemy's land.

The road may be rough, but it cannot be long. So I journey on with the conqueror's song. So we have a hope set before us. Whatever may come in this life, however we may even be treated in this life, we have a heavenly city that awaits us.

[24 : 34] We are but pilgrims in this land. We are journeying towards that celestial city just as Pilgrim did, just as Christian did in Pilgrim's Progress. So we have that future hope.

And yet, God in His great kindness to us on this journey in this life gives us living, breathing examples to follow. So we have a hope for the future and God has given us present help along the way.

God has told us about the city that's to come. And then He's given us people who help us in our journey to that city. People that we can look to and follow and learn from.

And that's what we see now as we finish out our verses. Paul says, as it relates to you, I am your spiritual father. Read with me beginning in verse 14.

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers.

[25 : 42] For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church.

Some are arrogant as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon if the Lord wills. And I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.

What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love in a spirit of gentleness? So as the Corinthians are receiving these words, they have just had the sharp rebuke from Paul.

It is entirely possible the Corinthians were ashamed as they heard this letter being read. We have missed the mark. We've let the world and its thinking cloud our minds.

We've got our priorities all wrong and Paul has let us know it with these sharp words. He hasn't held back. But Paul's goal is not ultimately shame.

[26 : 49] Paul's goal is repentance. That is fueled, though, by a sense of shame. It needs to be said. There's a place for feeling shame for our sin.

We should feel bad when we've gone our own way and disregarded God. That's a good sign that our conscience is working when we feel bad for our sin.

We know that we've sinned and we grieve it. It would be a deeply concerning sign if we had no concern when we sinned, if we just went on our merry way, if we were simply numb to it, if we had no hint of shame whatsoever.

In fact, two times in 1 Corinthians, still to come, Paul says, I write this to your shame. He says this, I do want you to feel some shame, but the shame is meant to serve a purpose.

It's not meant to just beat them up and bury them down. That shame is meant to turn them and to lead them to change, to look to Christ. So they need to see the ugliness of their sin and yet, they need to see Christ.

[28 : 03] So yeah, only pointing out their sin, maybe kind of making fun of them the way that he did, that would have been mean-spirited of Paul, but pointing out their sin that they might turn from it, now that's loving of Paul.

So Paul says, I do this not simply to shame you, but what? To admonish you. Because he wants them to take their sin seriously, to change.

They were completely backwards in their thinking. The Corinthians were telling Paul, Paul, you need to become like us. And Paul is correcting them.

And he's saying, no, I don't need to become like you. You need to become like me. You need to learn from me. You need to be imitators of me.

So Paul is appealing to them. Leave this world, all that it offers, leave it behind. It should be rubbish to you, and you may well be rubbish to it.

[29 : 03] set your minds on things above. And so he gives himself as an example to follow. And this is really why we're kind of wrapping up this section here, because it's kind of ironic.

Here Paul is addressing the problem of people saying, I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. I follow Cephas. He's correcting them, and then he's saying, okay, now that we have the right mindset here, follow me, imitate me, live as I do, but not because you see in me a great leader, but because in me you see who?

Christ. Follow me as I follow Christ. Here's what it looks like to count everything as loss for the sake of Christ. Let me tell you by telling you of my own life.

So he calls them to imitate him. And that's fitting. They should imitate Paul. He's got this special relationship to them. They could have 10,000 preachers and teachers that they look to, but there's no one quite like Paul.

Because Paul can say, I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. It was Paul who first preached the gospel in Corinth to many of these people who are now Christians.

[30 : 16] It was Paul who planted this church. So he's reminding them, you hold a special place in my heart, and he too then should hold a special place in theirs. They should listen to him.

They should imitate him. He's not just telling them to abandon worldly ways of thinking. He's truly putting himself forward to them as an example.

Look at me and my life. Don't follow me for worldly reasons. Don't follow me for selfish ambition.

Follow me because you've seen how I've taken up my cross and I'm following my Savior.

So you do the same now. So we too need Paul's exhortation and we need Paul's example here.

The world can write us off and that's okay.

We're not living according to this world's ways. We're not living for what this world has to offer.

We're clinging to what Jesus said. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

[31 : 18] But whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? So Paul has modeled that for us with his words here in 1 Corinthians.

He's told us what it looks like to die to self, to take up our cross, and to follow Jesus. So Paul has been a helpful example to the Corinthians. He's been a helpful example to us in everything that he's written.

But we also need Timothy's. Paul understood that the Corinthians might struggle to imitate him by merely reading his letters.

They needed to also see his way of life in Christ. They needed to see his way of life lived out before them. And so, unable to go to them himself, Paul sent Timothy.

And so now, as Paul says in these verses here at the end of chapter 4, he is going to come to them soon. He's going to come visit because things have gotten very bad in this church.

[32 : 24] sin is being celebrated, discipline is needed to restore the honor of Christ in the church, to restore order and purity in the church. So Paul is coming.

We're going to see that our next time in 1 Corinthians. But up until this point, Paul has not actually visited since planting the church. He has sent Timothy, who could remind the Corinthians of Paul's ways in Christ.

Timothy was someone that the Corinthians could look at with their own eyeballs. They could talk to him. They could ask questions. They could see how Timothy lived the Christian life. We need that too.

We need to have sound doctrine. We need to have God's written word before us. And how important is it that we also see it lived out?

We need that. We need sound doctrine taught to us and we need to see how that sound doctrine is lived out before our eyes. Paul is just giving us the basic framework of discipleship here.

[33 : 29] It's right there in verse 17. Here's this picture of discipleship. It's a certain way of living that is worthy of imitation. As Paul says in verse 17, my ways in Christ, or your translation might say my way of life in Christ Jesus.

Paul is talking about his Christian life. He's talking about his walk with the Lord. That's a crucial component to discipleship. We need someone to live out their faith before our eyes.

But that's not the only component. That life in Christ then is coupled with sound doctrine. We see it in the very same verse. I think the NIV actually captures this really well.

It says, he will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. So his life agrees with what he teaches.

There's integrity. He is a man who lives according to what he says. He's not a hypocrite who says one thing, teaches one thing, and then his life is a mess and he's an ungodly example to them.

[34 : 36] No, what he teaches is in agreement with how he lives. And we need that in the Christian life. We need to see faithful brothers and sisters who are grounded in God's word, to learn from them, to live like them.

And we need to be those kinds of brothers and sisters as well. So we look to those who are farther along in the Christian life than us, and we seek to imitate them. And we look to those who are not as far along as we are, and we seek to be worthy of imitation that they might learn from us.

Not because we look like the world, but because by the grace of God, we look more and more like Christ. snubbed by the world, perhaps, looked down upon by the world, disregarded, counted as fools, but we're enduring all of that joyfully for the sake of Christ.

We're delighted to walk humbly with Him. So that's the kind of example we should follow in others, and that's the kind of example that we should set for others.

And we need God's help to do both. We're tempted to pride still, aren't we? Tempted to think, well, I don't need help. I don't need to look to somebody who's farther along.

[35 : 52] I can live the Christian life just fine without looking to them. Or we're tempted to think, no, you need to look at me and how I live the Christian life, so imitate me. So we need humility that God can give us to humbly look to others and learn from them, and to humbly live in such a way that encourages others to learn from us.

We need God's help. So let's ask Him. Let's go to prayer now and ask for His help. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we are thankful that You've given us Your written Word, that we might learn from it, that You might teach us of You and Your ways, that You might grow us in humility.

help us to those who are not as far along in the Christian life as we are, just as Paul was to the Corinthians. And help us also that we might look to others who are farther along, that we might learn from them and model our lives after them because they look more and more like Christ.

In all of these ways, we want to look like, and we want others to look like Christ, to be formed more and more into His likeness. we worship Him, we look to Him, He is the head of the body, we follow Christ.

We thank You that You sent Him, that He might be the Savior that we need, who came in humility, who came and died upon the cross in all apparent weakness and yet rose victorious according to Your very plan.

[37 : 26] That is Your wisdom on display, that is Your power on display, and we give You thanks in Christ's name. Amen.