

Studies in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians

INDUCTIVE LESSON FOUR

1 Corinthians 4

Father Knows Best

In the culture of the Middle East the father is respected and almost revered by his children. His word is law. Paul tells the Corinthians that although they may have many teachers in Christ, they have only have one spiritual father in Christ. Paul was the spiritual father of the Corinthians. Yet despite their unique relationship with Paul and the example he provided his spiritual offspring, they had divided into factions following different teachers and sat in judgment over their spiritual leaders. What does Paul, their spiritual father, offer to direct his prodigal sons back onto the right path in their walk with Jesus? In the strongest of terms, he directs them to follow him (as he follows Christ). This sound advice will be repeated later in this same letter.

Someone I know had built a large impressive fish pond in his backyard. After its completion, he placed a few large, but expensive, koi (ornamental goldfish) into his pond. Seeking to fill the pond with fish but stay within his budget, he purchased three dozen tiny koi. One morning while he and his wife were enjoying breakfast on their patio they were astonished to see a four foot tall white heron fly into their backyard and gracefully wade into their fishpond. The heron remained motionless for only a moment until with pinpoint accuracy it thrust its spear-like beak into the water and emerged with a tiny koi. Despite their best efforts, the heron now known as the Great White Wings of Death could not be kept from harvesting the tiny koi. After a week only one of the tiny koi remained. Despite numerous visits from the heron, the tiny koi survived and actually began to grow larger. Investigation showed that the tiny koi had survived by swimming as close as possible next to the largest koi in the pond. It was only by imitating the movements and shadowing the large fish that it survived. Likewise, for their own wellbeing, Paul told the Corinthians to stay close to him and follow him as he followed Christ.

Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom in understanding it, and then read through the entire section two or three times. With this chapter, it might be particularly helpful to also read the passage at least once in a less literal and more dynamic translation such as the Amplified Bible or the New Living Translation. If you don't have a copy of either of these translations you can find them online at the Blue Letter Bible website, www.blueletterbible.org.

Study Text / Worksheet

Write down your observations, comments, or questions directly on the text as you go over it.

1 Corinthians 4

1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. 6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? 8 You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us--and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! 9 For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. 14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. 15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ

Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. 18 Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. 20 For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. 21 What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness? (NKJV)

Observation

- 1) My Observations: In the left column write down observations you make directly from the text. Inductive tips (things to look for): a) What are the promises? b) What are the commands? c) What are the sources of conflict? d) What are the cause/effect relationships? e) What are the repeated words and ideas? g) What do we know about who is speaking and who is receiving the message? h) What comparisons and contrasts can you identify and what do they illustrate? i) Do you have unanswered questions on part of the passage? (Share them with your group.)
- 2) Digging Deeper: In the right column write down any additional observations you can add from other sources such as: a) other scriptures that apply (cross references) b) dictionaries for specific words (English or Greek dictionary) c) Bible dictionaries for historical information d) commentaries. See the Tool Box at the end of the study for suggested sources.

1 Corinthians 4:1–7 (God’s Steward under Scrutiny)

My Observations

Digging Deeper

1 Corinthians 4:8–13 (Fools for the Sake of Christ)

1 Corinthians 4:14–21 (Father Knows Best)

Interpretation

Webster’s Dictionary tells us that interpret means “to explain the meaning or make understandable.” What is the spiritual truth or lesson that God is trying to teach in this passage? Don’t isolate the passage but read into it and read out of it. Look for commands, imperatives, promises, or warnings. What is God saying to those people at that time? (You will share what God is saying to you in the next section.) State the spiritual truth or lesson in a single sentence.

Application

This is where you purpose to do what God has taught you in your time with Him. It is through applying the Word that God changes lives. Application does not happen by osmosis but by intent. God enlightens us with His Word, we apply what we’ve learned with our wills, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to carry out these choices. The goal of all application is to glorify God by becoming more like Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:18 says, “All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for....”

Teaching: What did I learn?

Reproof: Where do I fall short? Why do I fall short?

Correction: What will I do about it?

Training in righteousness: How can I make this principle a consistent part of my life?

1 Corinthians 4:1–7:

Interpretation:

Application:

1 Corinthians 4:8–13:
Interpretation:

Application:

1 Corinthians 4:14–21:
Interpretation:

Application:

Take Away / Summary

If one of your friends at work or a neighbor were to ask you what you did last night, you would tell them you went to a Bible Study. The next question would likely be, "What did you learn?" We often summarize an entire athletic contest or a movie in a few brief sentences and easily convey the essence of the event. Now apply these same skills to give a summary of the passage in a sentence or two. Then, in an additional sentence or two describe what impact this passage will have on how you live.

Memory Verse

"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." James 4:10

Key Words / Phrases

Write out the definition of these key words. You can use a regular dictionary or go to one of the Greek sources listed in the Tool Box at the end of the study. The first two terms have survived from the Greek to form words used in English today. You may also use a concordance to see where else and how the word is used in the Bible.

Steward (v.2):

Puffed up (v. 6):

Imitate (v. 16):

Tool Box

Step 1: The Bible. Read passage in a couple of different versions. If you are having trouble understanding a passage, choosing a version for the list below might be helpful.

Word for Word Translations

NASB – New American Standard Version <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-American-Standard-Bible-NASB/>

AMP – Amplified Bible <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/Amplified-Bible-AMP/>

ESV – English Standard Version <http://www.esvstudybible.org/>

KJV – King James Version <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/King-James-Version-KJV-Bible/>

NKJV – New King James Version <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/New-King-James-Version-NKJV-Bible/>

Thought for thought

NLT – New Living Translation <http://newlivingtranslation.com/>

The Message <http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/Message-MSG-Bible/>

Step 2: Study Tools. Use these to help you dig deeper.

