

CORINTHIANS – THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

STUDY 5

Testing teachers

... it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.

1 CORINTHIANS 4:2

5a: 1st Test -- Faithful to Scripture (4:1-6)

4:1-2 The Christian teacher is not to be viewed as the *master* of our faith, but as the *servant* or *steward* of Christ (Matt.24:45-51; Luke 17:7-10)

Ministers is not *diakonos* as in iii.5, but *huperetes*, a word which Paul uses here only. It applied originally to an 'under-rower', i.e. one who rowed in the lower bank of oars on a large ship. From this it came to signify service in general, though generally of a lowly kind, often service with the hands. [Morris 74]

The business of a steward is not to electrify people by his eloquent sermons, not to dazzle them by his wonderful ability, not to please them by flowers of rhetoric, not to so speak that he will simply be to them as a "lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument" (Ezek. 33:32), as was said of Ezekiel, but the business of a servant of Christ is to open up the truth of God, to unfold, to expound, to make known these mysteries in order that the people of God may appreciate the heritage that He has given them in the word. [Ironsides 144]

4:3-6 Does the postponing of judgment till the Lord's coming remove our responsibility to test teachers? (Isaiah 8:20; Jer. 8:9; John 12:47,48)

Stands written [gegraptai] is a regular formula introducing Old Testament quotations ... [Barrett 106]

... the absence of a verb gives it the appearance of a familiar saying, 'Not beyond what is written!' or 'Keep to the book!' -- not, probably, a current proverb, but a saying well known to the Corinthian church, where some were disposed to go beyond the gospel of Christ crucified and risen, which they had received 'in accordance with the scriptures' (15.3f.), and to add to it elements more in accordance with secular wisdom ... [Bruce 48,49]

God has not given teachers to the Church in order that they may supplant the Bible and save His people the trouble of studying the Word for themselves, but that they may spur the people of God on to more intensive searching of the Scriptures. [Ironsides 152]

5b: 2nd Test -- Cross-centred Gospel (4:7-13)

4:7-10 Some of Paul's critics seem to have been over-impressed by 'exciting' preachers. But which perversion of the gospel do Paul's critics seem to have adopted? (Matt.16:21-28)

Some of Paul's Corinthian friends, in terms of an 'over-realized' eschatology (cf. 15.12; 2 Th.2.2; 2 Tim.2:18), were speaking and acting as if they had already attained the kingdom and the glory simultaneously with the gift of the Spirit. In this, it has been suggested, they anticipated the second-century followers of Prodicus, self-styled Gnostics, who claimed to be 'by nature sons of the first God' and therefore 'royal sons far above the rest of mankind'. [Bruce 49]

**Proto-Gnostic
over-realized
eschatology**

In verse 7 we learn for Christians to attach themselves to certain gifts, to the neglect of others who may also have a special ministry from God, is to become very one-sided and to be only partially developed. Take for instance a Christian who says, "I am not interested in teaching, I like the preaching of the gospel ...". You will find that person is very easily carried away by all kinds of winds of doctrine. As long as there is plenty of emotional appeal, a great deal to enthuse and excite, they are there; but when there is something that necessitates thought and meditation, they are not interested ... Another says, "Well, there is So-and-So, I like to hear him; He is an exhorter, and he always stirs me up, but I am not interested in dry teaching." Dry teaching! ... mere exhortation, if not backed up by the Book, will not accomplish very much. Yet exhortation is a gift given by the risen Christ to the Church. [Ironsides 152-54]

4:11-13 Judged by this 'gospel', how do Paul and his companions measure up?

Paul several times refers to the fact that he earned his living with his own hands (e.g. 1 Thes. ii.9; 2 Thes. iii.8). This is all the more significant in that the Greeks despised all manual labour, thinking of it as fit only for slaves ... The apostles are slandered, but they simply beseech. Such conduct did not commend itself to the Greeks. To them it was evidence of pusillanimity. Throughout this whole passage Paul is concerned to emphasize the contradiction between the values of the Christian, and those of the worldly-wise Greek. [Morris 81,82]

5c: 3rd Test -- Will Submit to Testing! (4:14-21)

4:14-16 Note that although they have bought into a perverted gospel, Paul still regards them as his 'children' in the Lord (i.e. genuine Christians)

4:17-21 But if they ARE the 'King's kids', what will they be prepared to accept? (Heb.12:5-11)

... his plans were subject to the Lord's will; compare xvi.7; Jas. iv.15. They were

subject to many variations. Phrases such as *if the Lord will* were widely used, not only by Jews and Christians. [Barrett 118]

How can you tell when people are still in spiritual babyhood? One thing is they cannot enjoy the deep things of God. ... I have known young Christians who, after being converted a number of years, say, "I am not interested in Bible lectures, they are too dry for me, I do not understand them. I like something simple", and you get the impression that they would like to lie down on a couch and have a nursing-bottle and a nipple on it, in order to suck down a little weak truth. Many of you ought to be teachers yourselves by this time and you are still just babies. [Ironsides 160]

When I arrive, shall I come with a rod, or in love with a spirit of meekness? As though he said, That depends entirely upon you. If you profit by what I have written, if you turn from all the folly and stupidity of these discussions and this puffing up of the flesh and pride ... and take the place of true humility through my teaching, I can come in tenderness. But if not, then I am prepared to come with a rod. Which shall it be? said Paul. [Morgan 78]

A Balanced View of Christian Teachers

[v.6] Being *puffed up* in this way in favour of one of them meant that they were *against another*. This is the evil of partisanship. There is a sense in which Christians may rejoice in the leadership given by their eminent men. But when they find themselves so much in favour of one leader that they are against another they have overstepped the bounds. *Puffed up* is a verb which Paul uses frequently in this Epistle (iv.18,19, v.2, viii.1, xiii.4), but elsewhere once only. Evidently he regarded it as particularly appropriate to the case of the Corinthians. They, more than others, were addicted to the sin of pride. What is party spirit other than oneself writ large? [Morris 78]



Harry Ironside

These servants of Christ are God's gift to the Church for the blessing of the whole ... We are inclined to go to one extreme or the other, either to laud and praise and over-estimate the ability and character of God's servants, or else on the other hand to set them at naught and disdain the instruction and help God intended them to give. He would have us take the middle course, not to foolishly flatter His servants but to recognize that we have a great responsibility toward them as they seek to fulfil their responsibility toward us. [Ironsides 139]

Editor's query: *But isn't it easier to go down the road and find a preacher who'll tell us what we want to hear?*

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