

1 CORINTHIANS

4:10-21 | STUDY GUIDE

Scum

1 CORINTHIANS 4:10, "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." (ESV)

- Sarcasm
 - Stark contrasts being made between the apostles and the Corinthians
 - Paul is not saying that they are actually wise
- The Corinthians valued success and power
 - They saw the poverty and struggle the apostles were facing as evidence they were failures

1 CORINTHIANS 4:11-13, "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 are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things." (ESV)

- "We don't look fashionable"
 - Paul is telling them that their vanity has made the apostles an object of scorn
 - The apostles rejected the idea of popularity or power
- We do manual labor
 - The Greeks saw working with your hands as work only fit for slaves
 - They despised any manual labor—it was "beneath" them

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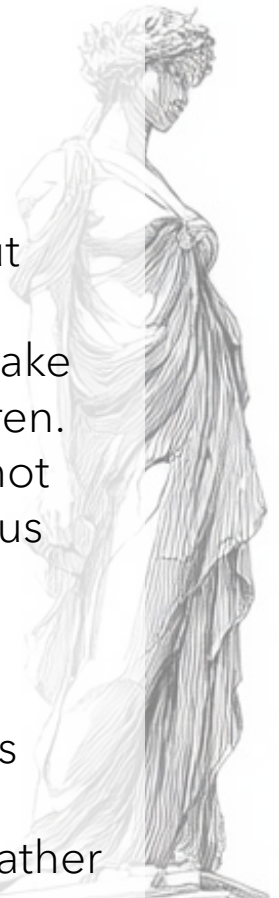
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- We turn the other cheek
 - The Greeks viewed this as “weak”
 - Matthew 5:39, “But I tell you, do not fight with the man who wants to fight. Whoever hits you on the right side of the face, turn so he can hit the other side also.” (NLV)
 - Jesus clearly did not see this as weakness and the apostles are showing that in action
- We have become what you discard
 - Actual practice of appeasing the gods by sending out “unwanted” to sea as sacrifice

1 CORINTHIANS 4:14-15, “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.” (ESV)

- Paul has a sense of duty to the church in Corinth
 - “Countless guides” = παιδαγωγός
 - Trustworthy slaves who supervised upper-class boys until they were of age to leave the home
- Guides have influence, but nothing compared to a father
 - A father loves his children and disciplines in a way that a tutor of someone obligated to watch a child does not

1 CORINTHIANS 4:16-17, “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.” (ESV)



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- In a sense, Timothy is their older, wiser brother
 - Timothy is often trusted by Paul to go and assess issues in various church plants

1 CORINTHIANS 4:18, "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." (ESV)

- Some Corinthians were apparently so arrogant in their own wisdom that they thought Paul was scared to come visit
 - Paul sets the record straight
- He then prepares for the rebuke he is about to give
 - "What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (1 Corinthians 4:21, ESV)
 - Paul has much more to correct in the Corinthians, but he's asking them how they want him to deliver it—a rod, as if striking wayward sheep, or with gentleness?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: Sarcasm in Paul's Letters, Timothy Brookins, Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy, Craig Keener, 1-2 Corinthians, Bruce W. Winter, After Paul Left Corinth, N.T. Wright, The New Testament in Its World