

# ANSWER TEN: NOT COMPARING AND JUDGING MINISTERS

## 1 CORINTHIANS 04:06–13

### *Introduction: Judging Others; Pride*

Worldly men measure, judge, boast and pride themselves in their superior gifts and achievements. Some in the Corinthian church had begun to make the same mistake. They were judging the gifts of believers and preachers; therefore, they became guilty of the same offense as worldly men. They were usurping the authority of God alone to gift and judge men (cp. v. 6). They were, in reality, nothing more than puffed up air bags. And no matter the church, when a lot of “puffed up” talk begins to swirl around, disturbance and divisiveness set in; the fellowship and life of the church become threatened.

One of the answers to divisiveness is believing and accepting the fact that we must not compare ministers.

- I. The ministers, Paul and Apollos, illustrate a point (v. 6).
- II. First, God causes the differences between men (v. 7).
- III. Second, you are showing superiority (v. 8).
- IV. Third, true ministers are put last (vv. 9-10).
- V. Fourth, true ministers serve — no matter the cost (vv. 11-13).

### **I. *1 Corinthians 04: 06 Taking Pride in Ministers***

The ministers, Paul and Apollos, illustrate a point. Very simply, what Paul had been saying about himself and Apollos was only an illustration for the Corinthian deliverers to apply to themselves. Paul had just declared two pictures to show who he and Apollos were (cp. Cor. 4:1-2).

- => They were mere servants of Christ. They were only the under-rowers, the slaves in the belly of the ship who serve the Lord and Master of the ship.
- => They were mere stewards, the slaves given the enormous responsibility to oversee the property of the Lord and Master of the estate. And because they were stewards and had been given this enormous responsibility, they were expected to be faithful and were held accountable for their faithfulness.

The point is this: Paul was not writing to teach himself and Apollos who they were and what their calling was. He and Apollos knew who they were, and they knew their calling. He was writing to teach the Corinthians (and all other churches) who their ministers were and how they were to be treated. Two lessons in particular needed to be learned.

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1. Believers must stop comparing and judging their ministers and elevating them above what Scripture says. Some in the Corinthian church were judging some ministers to be better and more capable servants of God than others. They were judging and elevating men over other men. They felt themselves so spiritual that they could rank the servants of God and judge the most effective speakers and teachers.
  2. Believers must stop bragging at the expense of another. The very reason a believer judges one minister superior to another is because the believer receives more from the preaching and life of a particular minister — more than he receives from any others. This is understandable, for every minister means a great deal to those who are reached for Christ through him and who receive special attention from him during crises. However, a serious sin occurs when the believer begins to think that no other minister can preach and minister like the favoured minister. The person or persons who begin to elevate one minister above another “is prideful.”
- ⇒ He thinks he has received truths from the favoured minister that others have not received; that if others have not received as much as he has, they are lacking in their blessings and growth.
- ⇒ He thinks he is more capable in ranking God’s servants and judging their gifts as speakers, teachers and ministers.

Note the words “take pride” or “puffed up” (phusiousthe). The phrase means to be inflated. It is a picture of puffed up air bags. The point is, the judging of ministers and the feelings that one can judge ministers is nothing but hot air in puffed up balloons. It is meaningless. It means absolutely nothing to God. (Cp. pride, arrogance in 1 Cor. 4:18-19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4.)

*Mat 23:12* “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

*Psa 118:9* It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

*Psa 146:3* Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save.

*Isa 2:22* Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?

*Jer 9:23-24* This is what the Lord says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord.

*Jer 17:5* This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.”

## II. *1 Corinthians 04:07 Self-exaltation; Boasting*

First, God, not man, causes the differences between men. Note the three piercing questions of Scripture that drive the point home.

1. Who makes you different from anyone else? What makes you think you have superior judgment to others? What makes you think you have received enough spiritual growth and insight that you can judge God's ministers? What gives you the right to feel you have received more than others because you sat under some minister? What makes you think you are more spiritual than other believers? Who is it that has made you spiritual?
2. What do you have that you did not receive? What is your spiritual gift? Did you create it or was the gift given to you by God? If you are spiritually mature, did you earn the maturity, or did God by His grace grow you? If you have spiritual insight, does it come from God or from your working it up? Were you saved and brought into the family of God by your own efforts or by the grace of God? When you sit under ministers, do you have infinite knowledge to see the whole scope of their lives and ministries? Did you choose them or did God? Did you work them up and gift them or did God give you the privilege to sit under them and to learn from their particular gift? What do you have or possess that you did not receive? Life? A body? A mind? A spirit? The ability to think and work and play and live? Breath? Another day without being snatched and taken away? Salvation? The privilege of knowing God and His dear Son? Spiritual growth and maturity? The Word of God? Preaching? Teaching? The church? Ministers? Did you receive all this as a gift from God? Or did you work it all up and take it unto yourself?
3. Now, if you received it all — all the blessings of life and of Christ and of the church — why are you boasting of being super-spiritual! Why are you acting superior to other believers? Why are you playing lord — as though you have the right to take God's place and judge His ministers and people? There is no doubt: you did not work up the spiritual life with all its ministers, believers, churches, gifts and blessings. You received it all: the simple privilege of being one member of God's great family. Now, you are one of God's dear children, but you are only one. Why, then, do you act as though you are the lord over some of God's dear sons and daughters. Why do you boast in exalting yourself as the person with the spiritual maturity to judge who should and should not serve? Who has and does not have the better gifts? Who is and is not effective? Who fulfils and does not fulfil God's purposes? Who should and should not serve here and there? Why do you exalt yourself and make yourself superior? Is God not able to handle the gifts and affairs of His ministers and people and church? Why do you boast as though you are the judge who is to hand out approval and disapproval?

**Luke 18:9** “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:”

**1 Cor 10:12** So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

**Gal 6:03** If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

**James 1:26** If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

**James 4:16** As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

**Prov 25:14** Like clouds and wind without rain is a man who boasts of gifts he does not give.

**Prov 25:27** It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honourable to seek one's own honour.

**Prov 28:26** He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.

**Isa 14:13-14** You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”

**Hosea 10:13** But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors.

### III. **1 Corinthians 04:08 Pride**

Second, you are showing superiority. Some believers were acting as though their lives were full, that is, fully filled and satiated. The idea is perfected and complete. They were acting as though they were perfect and mature, and had the right to pass judgment upon God's people. They felt they lacked nothing — no gift, no insight, no knowledge, no spiritual understanding. They were acting as though they were reigning as kings in God's church. They were acting as though God had already given them their spiritual reward and exalted them to rule over the believers of the church.

Paul says this: he wishes they were reigning as kings, for then the ministers of God would be reigning with them. It would mean that God had already created the new heavens and earth and rewarded the believers, exalting them to their promised reward.

**Thought 1.** Super-spirituality, a person thinking that he is spiritually superior and full, needing little if anything, is an extremely dangerous state.

**Luke 6:25** “Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.”

*Rev 3:17* You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

*Psa 17:10* They close up their callous hearts, and their mouths speak with arrogance.

#### **IV. 1 Corinthians 04:09–10 Ministers are the Last**

Third, true ministers are put last. The phrase “has put” (*apedeixen*) means more than to be seen or exhibited. The picture is that of doomed gladiators being taken to the arena. God has put the minister as a doomed gladiator to serve the world no matter the cost. Note two points.

1. The minister is “like a man condemned to die” (*epithanatiou*). This is a continuation of the picture of the doomed gladiator. He is marched through the city streets and before the screaming mobs of the arena. He is made a spectacle before the world and he has to endure it, for he has no choice.

Paul sees ministers as being spectacles. They are being marched across the scene of world history to carry on their combat as ordained by the Emperor and King. They are mere spectacles to the world and to angels and men, with few ever understanding and fully accepting them. And from among the few who do accept them, some eventually withdraw and turn against them.

**Thought 1.** Note the contrast Paul is drawing between the attitude of the Corinthians and that of himself and the other ministers of God. The Corinthian believers were living in full satisfaction and comfort while the ministers of God were suffering as the spectacles of the world.

2. The minister is expected to serve and to be put last. This is enlarging what has just been said.
  - a. The minister is counted as a fool for Christ’s sake because of His strong devotion to Christ. The world and too often believers look at the minister as a radical fool. But not too many believers are considered to be fools. Most believers are accepted by the world and among other believers and considered wise.
  - b. The believers are thought to be strong, for they receive the fullness of Christ without suffering too much and without having to go on and on hour after hour and day after day. But not ministers. They are weak in that they sometimes suffer the withdrawal and hesitancy of people to associate with them, the looks and stares, the lack of understanding, the abuse, the rejection, the talk and rumours and gossip, the disapproval and the rejection, the ridicule and sometimes the physical persecution and martyrdom.
  - c. The believers are thought honourable and usually respected; but ministers are too often treated as some kind of different person, in a different kind of profession — the kind of

person and profession other people would not want nor choose for their life's work. Ministers are too often without honour among the world and, tragically, among believers.

**Thought 1.** Again, note the sharp contrast between the attitude of too many believers and the true minister. This was the problem with the Corinthians, and it is the problem with too many believers and churches.

**Luke 9:23** *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

**Rom 8:36** *As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

**2 Cor 4:5** *For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*

**2 Cor 4:11** *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

**Gal 2:20** *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

## V. **1 Corinthians 04:11–13** *Ministers Serve at any Cost*

Third, true ministers serve — no matter the cost. True ministers are the servants of Christ, and the stewards of God's gospel (mysteries); therefore, they pay any price to share the gospel and to minister to people. Paul says that he and the apostles were bearing these very sufferings "even unto this present hour."

⇒ They sometimes lacked food, water, and clothing (cp. 2 Cor. 11:27; Mt. 25:36; Jas. 2:15).

⇒ They were tormented and beaten with fists, that is, pushed about, slapped (cp. 2 Cor. 12:7; Acts 23:2).

⇒ They had no home (cp. Mt. 8:20; 10:23).

⇒ They were not a burden to the church even if it meant that they had to labour at secular jobs in order to reach the Word and minister (cp. Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Th. 2:9; 2 Th. 3:8; 1 Cor. 9:6; 2 Cor. 11:7).

⇒ They were reviled or railed at, but they blessed (cp. 1 Pet. 2:23; 3:9; 4:14-16).

⇒ They were persecuted, but they suffered it (cp. Lk. 6:28).

⇒ They were defamed or slandered, but they beseeched or exhorted and met slanderous behaviour with kindness.

⇒ They were made as the filth (the refuse, rubbish, garbage) and the scum of the earth.



**Thought 1.** What are we doing for Christ today? How much are we suffering to preach the gospel and to minister to people? How many preachers and how many believers have honestly given all they are and have to share the gospel with the world? How many have sacrificed and given so much that they can eat only one or two meals a day? How many have only a few clothes hanging in the closet? How many cars are in the garage? How much money is in the bank? How many of us have really sacrificed all we are and have like the apostles did?

**Mat 5:11** *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”*

**Mat 10:39** *“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

**Mat 19:29** *“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”*

**Acts 9:16** *“I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.”*

**2 Cor 4:11** *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

**2 Cor 12:10** *That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong*

**Phil 1:29** *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*

**James 5:10** *Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ■*