

# ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

Study to show "The Way of True life,"

## *Bible Study Outline*

**TOPIC:** Keeping a Clear Conscience

**TEXT:** *1 Corinthians 4:1-7*

**Instructions:** - *Let the above passages be read each time you come together to study this topic so that everyone could participate fully. The teacher should provide additional background information on the topic and come up with follow-up questions. Participants should be brief in their responses and use relevant Bible references to illustrate their points. They should be careful not to dominate the discussion to allow everyone to have an equal opportunity to participate.*

**Introduction:** There is much contemporary confusion about the nature of the ordained pastoral ministry. What are clergy? Are they primarily priests, presbyters, pastors, prophets, preachers, or psychotherapists? Are they administrators, facilitators, managers, social workers, evangelists, or liturgists? The uncertainty is not new. Throughout its long and checkered history, the church has oscillated between the opposite extremes of clericalism (which puts clergy on a pedestal) and anticlericalism (which knocks them off again). Now that many churches have recovered the Pauline vision of the "**every-member-ministry**" of the body of Christ, radical questions are being asked once again. Are clergy necessary any longer? Are they not superfluous? Wouldn't the church be healthier without them? Actually, this confusion goes right back to the beginning. The first-century Corinthian church divided into different factions that were each claiming the patronage of particular teachers: "I belong to Paul . . . Apollos . . . Peter." Paul was horrified by this personality cult. "What on earth do you think we are?" he asks. Paul's illumination here of the character and role those in leadership are to have encourages us to lead with integrity in the midst of the pressure leadership brings. Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-7.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What do you think is hard about being a leader in Christian settings? What triggers temptation to pride in leadership, and how do you think Christian leaders could cope with that temptation?
2. Paul says that Christian leaders have one responsibility; they "must prove faithful" to God (verse 2). What did that mean to Paul? What does it mean to you?
3. Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 5 to "judge nothing" and says that he does not even judge himself. Yet chapters 5-8 are full of his instructive judgment on the church at Corinth. (He also wrote to them the beautiful love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13.) How do you think Paul would explain the judging portion of his letter in view of his command to the Corinthians not to judge him?

4. All leaders receive criticism-sometimes cruelly. Assuming you are in the leadership team of your church, how can 1 Corinthians 4:1-7 help you respond to criticism?

5. Often leaders carry a public face that brushes away hurtful personal attacks or when they are being disrespected, but the hurt remains. What do you find here that might heal some of those hurts?

6. Consider more carefully Paul's words, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent " (v. 4). What are some practices that will help a Christian leader keep a clear conscience?

7. Notice the three questions in verse 7. How would the answers to these questions affect the way a Christian leader relates to people under his or her influence?

8. The sins of pride and boasting tempt all leaders. Some grow adepts at subtle ways to inform others of their successes without appearing to boast. Assuming you were in the leadership team of your church, and you were tempted to pride and boasting, what would you find in these seven verses that might help you resist those sins?

9. As you reflect on this passage, and you are not in the leadership team of your church, are you more or less willing to accept leadership roles? Why?

10. Prayerfully examine yourself for any hint of pride in your own leadership and or a follower. Let the teacher read Romans 12:1-21 aloud as God's instructions to the group.