

Good morning, my name is Gaius. I am a member of the church in Corinth. I thought I was an important member: after all, I am one of the few baptised by Paul himself. Yet I belonged to the Apollos party in the church.

What do you say? You did not know me? Well that's exactly the point. I am mentioned in Paul's letter, but I am not really important. I have now learned to listen. I learned that I'm not important. In the church it is about Jesus.

We Corinthians thought we had arrived. We felt like kings. We have so many gifts, so much wisdom in this church! Or so we thought... We understood all the conspiracies. We were pretty snobbish. Well, I am sorry to say that many of us still are. We thought the resurrection of the last days had already taken place. We thought that our wisdom enabled us to judge everything and everyone, including Paul. And so I liked Apollos. In a way I still do because he is so clever and he speaks so well. But I learned not to follow a leader. I am no longer a member of a party.

Then Paul wrote his letter. He showed me that it's about the cross, not about our achievements. Not about our wisdom. And (let me see, here it is): God says: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate'. That's a quote from Isaiah. Auch. That is so relevant for us. I also learned that 'You can never claim that you have arrived' (verse 8). I learned that Paul and Apollos are not rivals. After all, it's Jesus we follow. What makes our church OK is not our wisdom but our closeness to Jesus. And when it comes to leaders, from Paul's letter I learned the importance of loyalty and trust.

I now realise that we should not judge our leaders, at least not by our natural criteria. We are called to judge what is true – but not to judge people. I also realise Paul and Apollos learned their leadership style from Jesus. He washed the feet of his disciples. He was despised and he did not retaliate. His apostles imitate his lifestyle.

We had learned our style from our Roman officers and centurions. Our leaders are mainly interested in winning wars. I heard that they will soon try to conquer Britain.

We thought that a true apostle should be like our caesar, our rhetoricians, our orators. Our orators throw back insults at you when you confront them. They will threaten you with the worst things. By contrast, Paul doesn't retaliate. Remarkable. Well, we could have known this from how he was with us. If we had only paid more attention. He just quietly sat down with a scroll and taught us. We should have learned from Paul's example that following Jesus does not give status in society.

I appreciate Paul even more after reading this wise letter of his. Have you heard how he calls himself and Apollos? He refers to himself as a 'servant of Christ'. And yes, Paul serves – as does Apollos. On the other hand, we were puffed up. Paul alluded to Isaiah, Jeremiah and Job to show we shouldn't be. But we were chatting and babbling so much, we hardly heard him. I am so sorry about all that.

That wisdom of ours? Our many gifts? We might just as well boast about having brown eyes of being left-handed. All we have is a gift from God! Paul writes about Christian leaders (11-13): 'To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we

are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly.’ That put us in our place. Well, me. Others in the church here are still not convinced. I now want to be loyal to Paul again and trust him. I am no longer in the Apollos party.

You know, the lifestyle of Paul and Apollos is unique in our culture: they are self-giving, generous, not after reputation. Such is unknown in our culture. The word humility is not in the Greek dictionary! And man, did this Paul work hard when he was here! As you will know, he is a tentmaker; that is not an easy profession. Heavy physical work. He wanted to earn his own income, without relying on us. I understand that he merely got some support from the church in Filippi once or twice. Apollos also works hard to earn his own money. They are not afraid to get their hands dirty. They are very different from the many lazy bones here. And from the many people who have retired here with their money.

Have you got a minister like Paul and Apollos? Look here: Paul also calls himself ‘entrusted with mysteries’. No, he does not mean secrets, not conspiracies. What he means is that the Scriptures used to be hard, but that the coming of Jesus has clarified their meaning.

What, you have two ministers? You better listen to them then. They can teach you so much. These Jewish scriptures are still enormously difficult!

Paul also reminds us that he is our spiritual father. Yes, that will never change. He is the one who first told us about Jesus. I wonder if you have a spiritual father or mother or both. Are you still loyal to them? Do you still trust them? Do you remember what they taught you?

Now listen, I wrote a letter to Paul in response:

Gaius the Corinthian, and some others in the church at Corinth

To Paul the apostle of Jesus:

We are very grateful to you that you came to Corinth and stayed almost two years with us.

And we are glad that you sent us Apollos to guide us.

We are sorry that after your departure we got so divided and that some of us are still forming parties. We clearly did not fully grasp the implications of the gospel. That the cross is the end of all worldly wisdom. We should have realised that Apollos and you are in the same business and that you are basically simply preaching Jesus and showing us the lifestyle of Jesus.

Thank you that you have not given up on us despite all our mistakes. When you heard our mistakes and sins, you wrote a letter and you sent Timothy.

Please forgive us and come again to tell us more about Jesus and God. Help us to understand the Scriptures better and discover with us what a truly Christian lifestyle is. We will then try to be quiet and to listen to you, not to our own wisdom.

Thank you for teaching us loyalty and trust.

Do greet Timothy and Luke please, if they are with you.

The peace of the Lord Jesus be with you.