

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

December 15, 2021

Series - *The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul*

The Corinthian Letters

The Long Letter (First Corinthians)

Text – 1 Corinthians 4 – *Servant Leadership*

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

Introduction – This chapter will conclude the introductory chapters of this epistle primarily dealing with the overall issue of carnality within the Church at Corinth; and more specifically the tendency of this church to divide due to their elevation of certain individuals. The cure for this problem has been dealt with by Paul simply enough; “Don’t elevate man!”

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (1:31)

I. Paul’s Conclusion Regarding God’s Servants (vs. 1 & 2)

“Let a man so account of us,…”

- A. They are Ministers - the word literally means “under-oarsman”, meaning the one underneath the deck of the ship that was to work the oars. He was not the captain; he was not the man in charge of the under-oarsmen; he was not the man that beat the drum. He was simply a servant; a subordinate. We would do well to remember that the ministry is not about us. (Mark 9:33 – 37; Mark 10:35 – 45)
- B. They are Stewards of the Mysteries of God – the word *mystery* (used 22 times in the N.T.) meaning something that was previously veiled or not understood. The O.T. Jews did not understand the mystery of the church age. Paul was a steward of these mysteries. A steward was one who was given charge of another’s possessions. He was a steward of the truth that was veiled to those who did not understand. The Ethiopian eunuch said when asked if he understood the Book of Isaiah, “how can I except some man should guide me?” The parables were also examples of mysterious truth. God’s ministers are stewards of these mysteries.
 - 1 In Romans, Paul expounds the mystery of the Christ’s Cross.
 - 2 In Ephesians, Paul expounds the mystery of Christ’s Church.
 - 3 In Thessalonians and in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul expounds the mystery of Christ’s Coming. (1 Corinthians 15:51) [Sub-points 1 – 3 - Phillips, John *Exploring 1 Corinthians* p. 92]
- C. They are Faithful – meaning trustworthy, believable, and dependable

“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” (Luke 16:10)

"That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many." (Nehemiah 7:2)

"Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?" (Proverbs 20:6)

"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;" (1 Timothy 1:12)

Your level of faithfulness will determine your level of ministry.

II. Paul's Concern About The Corinthians Judgment of Him (vs. 3 – 7)

"...it is a very small thing..."

J. Vernon McGee states that man comes before three courts: the court of man's opinion; the court of our own conscience; and the court of God's judgment. Obviously God's court is the highest, yet unfortunately, we will often place the highest importance on the court of public opinion. Paul didn't care too much about what people think, and he did not get stressed out in his own mind about his ministry; but he did want to please the Lord.

A. People Often Forget The Judge that is Important (v. 4)

B. People Often Judge in Ignorance (v. 5)

1 *hidden things of darkness*

2 *counsels of the heart*

C. People Often Exalt Men Incorrectly (v. 7)

Note Regarding Judgment: Jesus said, *judge not, that ye be not judged* (Matthew 7:2). In 1 Corinthian 6, Paul commands us to judge. Is there a contradiction? No! Paul has given the church the right to judge matters that affect the church. We can judge what we can clearly see. However, we cannot judge the heart, and we cannot judge motives; but we can judge the act, based upon the Word of God.

III. Paul's Comparison (v. 6; vs. 8 – 13)

"And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes;"

Paul now uses himself and Apollos as an illustration of what the life of a true servant of God was really like. He also contrasts between what he goes through to bring them the truth' and the benefit they receive.

A. They appeared foolish to the world to bring them God's wisdom. (v. 10)

B. They were despised of men in order to bring them honor. (v. 10)

C. They sacrificed and suffered physically, emotionally, & financially (vs.11 - 13)

IV. Paul's Challenge Regarding His Authority (vs. 14 – 17)

“I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons, I warn you.”

Paul was not trying to get them to follow him because of his eloquent writing or clever knowledge of the Bible. He did not want, as Diotrephes, the preeminence among men. He wanted them to follow them because he was the one with authority from God to instruct them. (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17)

- A. He was an Apostle. The first verse of every one of Paul’s letters save both letters to the Thessalonians, the letter to Philemon, and the letter to the Hebrews establishes Paul’s authority as an Apostle. (Also 1 Corinthians 15:9 & 10)
- B. He was A Prophet (a foreteller; an inspired speaker - Ephesians 4:11)
- C. He was the one who planted the Church at Corinth. *“... ye have not many fathers”*
- D. Timothy was an extension of Paul’s Authority. (v. 17)

V. Paul’s Contention (vs. 18 – 21)

“What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?” (v. 21)

See Jude 3 & 4. If the Corinthians wanted to oppose Paul, they were in for a fight. The word *power* here is the Greek word δύναμις (dunamis), which means great force. Paul not only had the authority of God, but he also had the power of God. The Corinthians were strongly warned here.

- A. He offered to come in love and meekness.
- B. He would come with a rod if he had to. It was their choice.