

1 Corinthians Series #11

"The Requirement of Stewards" - 1 Cor. 4:1-5

I. INTRODUCTION

A.

- 1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
- 2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.
- 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.
- 4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.
- 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

B. The Game

1. There is a game many pastors play when they get together
 - a. the goal is to appear humble while bragging about how wonderful you are and what a dynamic church of the Nineties you have.
 - b. in the course of conversation, each pastor tries to slip in little remarks about how many people are coming each week, new programs they have begun, or such
 - c. if things aren't going well, a pastor will still try to put the best spin on things
 - 1) one guy, after listening to others bragging
 - 2) was asked, "how are things at your church?"
 - 3) He replied, "Well, we haven't had any recent additions, but we have had some blessed subtractions
 - 4) trouble-makers that had left
2. Some magazines for Church Leaders actually rate different pastors
 - a. they use such criteria as membership, attendance, size of staff
 - b. Sunday School, academic degrees
 - c. book and articles written
 - d. how many conferences they have been invited to speak at
3. This is all wrong!
4. Can we judge success in ministry by numbers, flow charts, buildings, programs, or degrees?
 - a. the world does

- b. but God uses a different standard
- c. we will see what that standard is today

II. TEXT
A. V. 1

I Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

1. You'll remember - Paul is dealing with their disunity
 - a. the church was divided into factions
 - b. they were lining up under who they thought were the best teachers
 - c. they were arguing over who was the best pastor
 - d. each claiming their leaders was best while putting others down
 - e. they had fallen to the error of cults of personality;
 - f. they had made the all too common mistake of allowing themselves to follow after celebrities instead of Christ.
2. Paul shows them how he and the other leaders should be considered by the Church
 - a. "You guys are esteeming us as celebrities?"
 - b. "Rather, you should consider us as servants, as stewards."
3. "Servant" - a galley rower
 - a. in a Roman galley
 - b. 2 to 3 tiers, levels of rowers
 - c. 2 to 3 to a bench
 - d. would row in time to the beat of a drum
 - e. took directions from a pilot.
 - f. not a job with much of a future or perks
 - g. actually, it was reserved for men with a lot of brawn but not much brain
4. Paul says, "This is how you ought to think of us - as lowly slaves who merely move in time to the pilots orders."
5. "Stewards"
 - a. a slave who was put in charge of the affairs of a Master's house
 - b. *owned nothing* but had *possession* of all.
 - c. supposed to see to the affairs of the house
 - 1) make sure everyone was properly fed.
 - 2) property was to be kept in good order and safe
 - 3) the house was to stay well equipped
 - 4) any resources were to be wisely invested so as to make a good return
 - d. the steward was given authority, but was also under

- authority
 - e. Paul saw himself as a servant in God's house who had been given a task to perform
 - f. to reveal the "mysteries of God."
 - 1) meaning the plans and purposes of God as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.
- 6. Paul's primary application of these titles of servant and steward was to himself and the other leaders of the church,
- 7. But what he says really applies to all believers
 - a. because we are all called to be servants of Christ
 - b. In 1 Peter - every believer is called a steward of the grace of God.
- 8. In the eyes of the world: it is quite a comedown from being a celebrity to being a slave
- 9. But in the eyes of God, the greatest of all is the one who is the servant of all. (Mark 10:44)

B. V. 2

2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

- 1. When you get hired for a new job, you usually are given a job description
 - a. the job is defined
 - b. the duties are detailed
- 2. This is the job description for stewards in the kingdom of God
- 3. If you boiled down the requirement for stewardship to one word, it would be this: Faithfulness!
- 4. And you know what? Faithfulness cannot always be demonstrated by numbers or by prosperity
- 5. I know a few men who were faithful in ministering as pastors of small churches
 - a. but they were fired because they failed to generate the right numbers
 - b. many denominations require monthly or quarterly reports
 - c. have to list the total number of converts, baptisms, recommitments, average attendance, and of course, offerings
 - d. they had come short of the projected business plan for the church so they were turned out
 - e. never mind that they had saved several marriages from ruin or had kept half a dozen people holding on to Christ during dark days of personal loss.
- 6. Generally, if a person is called and equipped by God, if they

- are faithful, their ministry will grow.
7. But not always
 8. Consider the church in Smyrna in Rev. 2:8-11
 - a. only 2 of the 7 churches were not rebuked by the Lord; Smyrna and another
 - b. Revelation 2:9-10 "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. 10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
 - c. this church was poor and hurting
 - d. but they were faithful and Christ commends them for it
 - e. it would not have been written up in "Church Growth Monthly" - but it was noted in the Records of Heaven

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9. It is our experience here that as we have been faithful to stay focused on being stewards of the mysteries of God, that we have grown
 10. People are hungry for God's word - we delight to share it
 11. Now, we realize the need for new facilities
 - a. we don't seek them to somehow validate our ministry
 - b. we don't seek them as a mark of success
 - c. in fact, we don't seek them at all
 - d. we seek God, and remain faithful to Him
 - e. as He directs us to step out and find new facilities, we will follow faithfully
 - f. that's the point - He is directing us
 - g. will we be faithful?

C. Vs. 3-4

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.

4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.

1. Not only were the Corinthians arguing over who was the best pastor, they were putting others down
2. Word had reached Paul that there were those in Corinth who were critical of him
3. So he responds by pointing to the fact that there are 3

judgments

- a. a judgment by man
 - b. a judgment by self
 - c. a judgment by God
4. Of these 3, 2 are bogus and only 1 matters
5. First judgment is by man

with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court.

- a. "a very small thing" - the least
 - b. of all 3 of these judgments, this one ranks last
 - c. you cannot live to please the crowd
 - 1) they are fickle
 - 2) today's hero is tomorrow's fool
 - 3) today's joke is tomorrow's superstar
 - d. Galatians 1:10 "Do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."
 - e. Christian, do you live to please others? Are your decisions determined by the judgment of others
 - f. Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man brings a snare, But whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.
6. Second judgment is by the self

In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this;

- a. judgment by others he said was least, last
 - b. judgment by self not even ranked
 - c. why?
 - d. Paul knows how easily we put the best spin on all we do
 - e. the self is too easily deluded by pride
 - f. He distrusted himself, so he wouldn't even entertain self-judgment
7. This brings us to an apparent problem:
- a. aren't we supposed to judge ourselves
 - 1) 1 Cor. 11, 28, 31 = we are told to examine ourselves and to judge ourselves before taking communion
 - b. Aren't we called to confront one another when we see a brother or sister taken in a fault?
 - 1) 2 Tim. 4:2 - rebuke one another
 - 2) Doesn't this mean there is some judgment involved

- 3) of course!
- c. How do we reconcile this?
- d. remember the context of this whole section!
 - 1) from the beginning, Paul has been contrasting the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man
 - 2) when he speaks of judgment by man or self, he is speaking about judging from a merely human or worldly perspective
 - 3) We are to judge, but from God's perspective, not man's
 - 4) In John 7:24 Jesus said, "**Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.**"
 - 5) Our judgment is not really ours - it is God's
 - 6) We are merely the messengers of what God has already judged and made clear in His word
 - 7) Here is how we judge (Hold up the bible and point to it)
 - whether ourselves
 - or others
- e. that is what Paul speaks of at the end of v. 4
 - 1) and this is the third judgment
 - 2) it is by God

D. V. 5

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

- 1. Let your judgment wait until all the facts are made known
- 2. And that won't happen till the end when God reveals all things
 - a. what has been done in secret
 - b. even our hearts; intentions, motives
- 3. Example of good umpire in softball
 - a. waits a bit to look and see the final outcome
 - b. my experience at T-ball umpiring
 - 1) play at first base
 - 2) the kids are slow
 - 3) "Out!" - kid dropped ball
 - 4) had to reverse my call

III. CONCLUSION

A. A Lot Here

- 1. Today, we have seen some important lessons
- 2. First - as stewards, we must be faithful

3. Second - all our judging must be by God's Word, not merely our own perspective

B. To The Lost

1. A day of reckoning is coming
2. God has written a job description for YOU!
 - a. because you are a member of the human race
 - b. you have a responsibility to God
 - c. that is to love and serve Him
 - d. and quite frankly, you've fallen down on the job
 - e. you've got a problem with sin and unless you turn away from it, and ask God to forgive you, the day of your performance review will not be pretty
3. Notice the last words of v. 5 = "Then each one's praise will come from God."
 - a. two words await all men and women: each person is appointed to hear one or the other from God
 - b. those words are "Yes" and "No"
 - c. to those who have come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, they will hear the words, "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter now, into the joy of your Lord."
 - d. to the rest he will say, "Depart from Me into everlasting torment; For I never knew you."
4. So you say, "What must I do to be saved?"
 - a. repent of your sin and believe in Jesus Christ.
 - b. you must make a step of confessing him publicly