

IT IS REQUIRED IN STEWARDS THAT A MAN BE FOUND FAITHFUL

TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 4:1-5

1. The first three chapters of this epistle deal with divisions in the church.
2. Cliques and factions were formed around certain preachers – Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and others (1:10-12; 3:3-6, 21, 22).
3. Chapter 4 is a continuation of this theme. Verse 1 says, “Let a man so account of us (regard us), as of the ministers (servants) of Christ...” (cf. 3:5). It is foolish to form cliques around servants.
4. In other words, Paul is saying, they should not say, “I am of Paul” or “I am of Apollos” because Paul and Apollos and the other preachers were “ministers,” i.e., servants (4:1; cf. 3:5).
5. The words “ministers of Christ” are important. We are all saved to serve.
6. The key words in our text tonight are ministry, stewardship (4:1, 2), and judgment (4:3, 4, 5).

I. MINISTRY

1. In the New Testament, there are three different Greek words used that are translated as “minister.” The word “minister” in I Corinthians 4:1 literally means, “servant, or an under-rower on a boat.”
2. This is how the apostle Paul described himself. The picture is one of a slave one of those ancient Roman ships, rowing and working hard.
3. John Phillips said, “He was just ‘an under-rower.’ Paul endeavored to pull his oar to the Master’s command in harmony, cooperation, and fellowship with all those who served” (*Exploring I Corinthians*).
4. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* says the word “came to denote any subordinate acting under another’s direction.” Since preachers are “ministers of Christ” (4:1), it is Christ who gives us our directions.
5. All Christians are “ministers” (servants), and all Christians should be involved in some type of ministry (teaching, soul winning, music, ushering, cleaning, working with children, etc.).
6. Some Christians are sick and bedridden, so God has given them a fruitful prayer ministry.

II. STEWARDSHIP (4:1, 2).

1. We are not only ministers but “stewards” (4:1, 2).
2. The most important quality for a steward is faithfulness (4:2).
3. All Christians are stewards (cf. I Peter 4:10). In Bible times, a steward was the person who managed the household for the owner of the house.
4. For example, Eliezer was Abraham’s steward (Genesis 15:2). Stewardship implies responsibility, and responsibility demands faithfulness.
5. First Corinthians 4:1 says we are “stewards of the mysteries of God.”
6. “The mysteries of God” are the deep things of God. In Colossians 1:25, 26, Paul said, “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.”
7. These “mysteries of God” were unknown in Old Testament days, but now have been “made manifest” to the saints.

III. JUDGMENT (4:4, 5).

In I Corinthians 3, the apostle Paul referred to the judgment seat of Christ (3:12-15), and he refers to it again here in chapter 4 (cf. 4:4, 5).

1. Paul says in verse 3, “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you...” Paul was more concerned with what God thought of his ministry (4:4).
2. When Paul said, “For I know nothing by (against) myself...” (4:4), he meant he was not aware of anything against himself.
3. In Acts 23:1, Paul appeared before the chief priests and their council, and said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” That is the idea here in I Corinthians 4:4.
4. “Yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord” (4:4b). Paul knew he was not competent to judge in this matter. Only God is the perfect Judge.
5. *Barnes Notes* say this about, “Yet am I not hereby justified.” – “I am not justified because I am not conscious of a failure in my duty, I know that God the Judge may see imperfections where I see none. I know that I may be deceived; and, therefore, I do not pronounce a judgment on myself as if it were infallible and final. It is not by the consciousness of integrity and faithfulness that I expect to be saved; and it does not follow that I claim to be free from all personal blame. I know that partiality to ourselves will often

teach us to overlook many faults that others may discern in us...He searcheth the hearts. He may see evil where I see none. I would not, therefore, be self-confident; but would, with humility, refer the whole case to Him.”

6. Paul is referring here to the judgment seat of Christ, which will take place after the rapture (4:5).
7. “And then shall every man have praise (reward, commendation) of God” (4:5b).

CONCLUSION: From H.A. Ironside (I Corinthians)

At the close of a meeting a brother said to me, “Didn’t you go a little strong there?” I said, “No, I do not think I did.” “Well,” he said, “think of the dying thief, that man was saved just as he hung by the side of Christ; what opportunity did he have to do anything for which to get a reward?” “Why, my dear brother,” I said, “think of the dying thief again. There he hung nailed to a cross, he could not move a hand nor a foot, but he recognized in the Man on the central cross the coming King of the ages and said, ‘Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,’ and he turned to his fellow and rebuked him and bore witness to the perfection of Christ and said, ‘We suffer justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this Man hath done nothing amiss’ (Luke 23:41). At the judgment seat of Christ, I think I see that redeemed man coming before his Lord, and he says to himself as he comes, ‘I was saved only a few minutes before my Savior died, and I have had no opportunity to serve Him, to witness for Him, I cannot expect any reward.’ And then I think I hear my Lord say, ‘Every one present who was converted through some sermon you heard about the dying thief, come here,’ and I imagine I see them coming until there are thousands and thousands of them, and I see my blessed Lord turn to that man and say, ‘I want to give you this crown of rejoicing for all these souls that you have helped to win to a knowledge of My salvation.’” Do you not see it? “Then shall every man have praise of God.”