

# [Not] Judging Ministers

*1 Corinthians*

By Rev. Rodney Kleyn

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 4:1-5  
**Preached on:** Sunday, October 23, 2016

## **Covenant Of Grace Protestant Reformed**

4005 E. Marietta  
Spokane, WA 99207

**Website:** [www.reformedspokane.org](http://www.reformedspokane.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/cgprf](http://www.sermonaudio.com/cgprf)

In Scripture this morning, we open to the book of 1 Corinthians 4. 1 Corinthians 4. We've been working through the book of 1 Corinthians and have gone through the first three chapters in detail verse by verse and this morning we come to chapter 4. The text will be the first five verses of the chapter but we will read the entire chapter together. 1 Corinthians 4,

1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. 4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. 6 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. 7 For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? 8 Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. 9 For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. 11 Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; 12 And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: 13 Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. 14 I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. 15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ

Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. 17 For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. 18 Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. 19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. 20 For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. 21 What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

The text is the first five verses. Let's read those again. Paul says,

1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. 4 For I know nothing by myself [or against myself]; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

All of us are very familiar with the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7, "Judge not that ye be not judged," and perhaps that is one of the most misunderstood and misquoted verses in our modern day, a favorite of those who want tolerance in society for every kind of evil and lifestyle. So it's important for us to understand what Jesus means by those words. He's not saying that all judgment is wrong, in fact, it would be impossible for us to live our lives as Christians if we may not judge.

When we judge something, we evaluate it. We form an opinion about it. We draw a conclusion about it and we act accordingly. Think of raising your children, you're going to direct them and correct them and to do that you have to form judgments on what they are doing. We live in a culture that is infiltrated with evil and pumps evil into our lives and we have to form judgments, and we have to make separations, and even with regard to ourselves, we have to make judgments, evaluate our heart and our motives and our lifestyle and so on. It would be impossible, I say, to live without judging. In the New Testament we are called to exhort and to admonish one another. What is it to do that except to form a judgment and to speak to the brother in love and with understanding?

So what does Jesus mean? That's important for us as we begin to look at these verses this morning because Paul really says the same thing as Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount. In verse 5 he says, "Judge nothing before the time." Judge nothing before the time, in other words, don't judge. Judge not. What does Jesus mean? Well, we must remember that he is speaking in the context of the Jewish leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees, and their influence in the Jewish society and he is contrasting how they judge with the way that we should judge and they assume to themselves in their judgments the

place of God and that's the first thing that Jesus means. He condemns those who judge as though they are God, as though they can make a final decision and a final judgment on something. Somebody might say something like this, "He's reprobate and he's going to hell." That's God's position to make such a judgment. We say, "In our judgment, he's living in unbelief. He's walking the road that leads to destruction," and that makes it an urgent situation.

In the second place, Jesus condemns judging as though you are above fault yourself. He calls us to humility in our judgment. He says, "Before you judge, take the beam out of your own eye," and certainly he has the Pharisees in mind. They lifted themselves up as though they were better. They brought this woman to Jesus caught in adultery and they wanted to catch him, "What is he going to do with her?" And Jesus said, "Well, any of you who are without sin, you cast the first stone." So there is this self-righteous judgment that Jesus condemns.

Then third, Jesus condemns the position of those who judge the motives and the thoughts of the hearts of others. That, again, is something that only God can do. We don't know a person's heart. We deal with the behavior. We draw our conclusions from this but we don't judge the heart. That is God's territory, and that's really what Paul is talking about here and applies in this chapter, that broader principle to the specific judgment that we are to make of ministers of the Gospel. We should not judge ministers as though we are God. We should not judge ministers as though we are above fault. And we should not judge ministers by motive that we cannot see, and that was the problem in Corinth.

Paul says in verse 1, "Let a man so account of us," us, he means me, Apollos, Cephas, other preachers. This topic has been recurring in the first chapters. It's come up in each of the chapters. Paul, Apollos, Cephas. There was division in the church. Some said, "I'm Paul. I'm of Apollos. I'm of Cephas." Then some said, "Well, we're better than that, we're of Christ." And there was this division in the church over personalities.

As we've noted, Paul doesn't just correct the behavior but he sets before them principles that help them to think in different ways. He addresses the behavior by setting before them principles and, again, that's what we have here in this chapter, the principle about judging that Jesus has given, he applies specifically to judging ministers.

Now it's important as we begin to understand that what Paul is talking about here is very specific, he's talking about the judgment of ministers in the local congregation. There wasn't a problem with the teaching or a difference between the teaching of Paul or Apollos or of Cephas. These were faithful men. Yes, there is a judging that we have to make and an evaluation that we have to make concerning false teachers in broader Christian circles and that must be done still with care. We are not God. We must look at ourselves as we evaluate others because we have our own weaknesses and though motives may appear to be expressed, we must be careful not to judge these either. Yes, we do make judgments and certainly just the fact that we belong to a particular church and a particular denomination is a judgment that we've made on much of the teaching in many other churches.

So we make judgments but Paul here is speaking more specifically to the local church in Corinth. He says to them, "Judge nothing before the time." He means don't have a continual critical spirit towards the pulpit in your church, or attraction to the personality of the individual who preaches the Gospel in your congregation. Yes, if a man preaches false doctrine in your pulpit, then there is a judgment and a way of dealing with that, Matthew 18, go and speak to the brother, clarify it. 1 Timothy 5:19, bring an accusation not just to him but in the presence of others, to the consistory, to the classes. Yes. But Paul isn't really talking about that, false teaching in the pulpit in the congregation at Corinth, but rather there were these faithful men, Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, and what was the general attitude that the people should have towards them who preached in their pulpit.

So this morning, we want to consider that under the theme "Judging Ministers," and maybe the theme would better be "Not Judging Ministers," and so I parenthetically put it that way in the bulletin and in the outline as well because that's the application of what Jesus says here to a specific situation. Not judging ministers. Let's notice first how we should view the ministry, and that's verse 1. Paul lays down specific things to help us with that. Then second, the criteria for judging ministers, what is the standard. Then finally, the one true Judge of ministers.

As I said, Paul doesn't just correct sinful behavior in these early chapters in Corinth, but he sets before them principles and he teaches them more broadly, and that's what we have especially in verses 1 and 2. How should you think of the office of the ministry of the word so that you don't think too highly of the one who preaches the word or you don't think too critically of the one who preaches the word, so that you don't focus on the person. That's really the issue, isn't it? I'm of Paul. I'm of Apollos. I'm of Cephas. They focused on the person and all too often that's what happens is that a personality that one is attracted to and so they love that certain preacher, or there is something that just doesn't click in your relationship with the pastor and so everything is jaded by that. Whatever the minister says is evaluated by whether you like him or you don't like him. You focus on the person. If you're attracted to the man, you listen to everything he says just because he says it, and that's very dangerous. We need to be like the Bereans who searched the Scripture and not have a man-following cultic mentality in the church. Or on the other hand, some will go home and have fried preacher after every spiritual meal or they don't even wait to get home, they walk out of the church and they share tasty morsels with others; everything the minister says is jaded by a perception or an experience with him personally so that you cannot hear the word with profit. That's what Paul is speaking to here. That's the behavior he's correcting in these first verses when he speaks of how we should view the ministry.

Now before we get to what Paul says in verse 1 about that, this needs to be said: that this is a very important issue and subject, especially for heads of households, fathers and parents in the home. I say that because I have seen entire families, children, an entire following generation, turned away from the faith and turned against spiritual things because the father and the parents had the wrong attitude toward the church and the

ministry of the word in the church. Parents and fathers especially, you set the tone in your home for how your children will approach and the attitude they will have towards the preaching of the Gospel. Ephesians 6, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath." That's not only don't make them angry at you so that they respond in anger, but it means more broadly, don't create in them an embittered spirit towards the Christian faith and the word of God. Don't breed in them a cynical attitude towards the church so that they are discouraged from the faith. So this is an important word for parents, for heads of households, and if you are guilty of this, you need to repent. This is something you need to talk about with your children, the attitude that you have towards the church and the preaching of the word.

Paul addresses that attitude that we should have and the view that we should have of the ministers of the word in the first verse, "Let a man," he means let anyone, all of you, every one of you, "so account of us," account means to think or to reckon concerning us, the ministers. He's saying, "This, then, is how you ought to think of those who are ministers of the Gospel," and he uses two illustrations. These are not the only ideas and the only things that we should think about when we think of the pastor or the minister. He is a pastor. He is a shepherd. He is a bearer of good news. He has an office from Jesus Christ. He is a mere man. The Scripture teaches us all those things and many more about the ministry of the word and the minister of the Gospel, but here in order to help us get our focus off the man, Paul gives us two illustrations. This is how you should think of ministers, they are "ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." If you have a problem with focusing on the man, Paul says, this is the way you should think so that you don't think too adoringly or you don't think too critically. Think of him as a minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God.

Now, the word minister here means servant but it's a unique word. It means literally an under-rower. It refers to a galley slave in the ship who worked on the lowest level in the ship shackled to his fellow slaves, pulling hard at the oars to the beat of a drum in order to propel the ship forward. He answered to the captain of the ship and the passengers on the ship, the people on the deck even though they benefited from his hard labor, didn't even know or notice him. Paul is saying that's the way to think of the minister of the Gospel. He's a galley slave. Now he doesn't mean by that that he's your slave and that is there to be trampled and pushed around by you, but he means this: he answers to Jesus Christ, the Captain, and he himself as a person is not all that important. A specific application would be this: so long as the ship is moving in the right direction and the minister is not on the foreground but is happily and humbly working in the shadows, that's a good thing. That's what Paul means. In other words, don't give too much attention to the man, and the minister should not draw too much attention to himself. This is Christ's ship. He's the Captain. The minister is the galley slave.

The other illustration also in verse 1 is of a steward. Paul says, "This is how you should think of the minister, as a steward of the mysteries of God." A steward is one who usually in the absence of the landlord or the owner, his master, is given responsibility to care for all the property and all the possessions of his master and lord, to do this not in a hoarding way, a Scrooge kind of way but to do it with wisdom for the profit and benefit of the

master's estate and the master's household. So his work includes decision-making and distribution of food and money. You can think of Joseph in Potiphar's house. When Potiphar went off to war, Joseph was given the position of steward and everything in Potiphar's house was placed under the care of Joseph. Or you can think of the parables of Jesus where he speaks of a man going into a far country and leaving his estate in the care of his servants, stewards. And that's the idea here. That's the way to think of the minister. He's a steward. He's been given charge of something that is valuable and precious to God, that belongs to God, and he is to handle it wisely and dispense from it and protect it with care.

He's a steward of the mysteries of God. Mysteries in the New Testament, that word mystery is used to refer to a revelation from God that was previously hidden. "So God," Hebrews 1, "who at sundry times and in diverse manners has spoken unto us by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the mystery here, formerly hidden and all its fullness now revealed, and Paul says that the minister is a steward of the mysteries of God. That refers broadly to all biblical truth and there are two things that the minister as a steward must remember: one is that he declares the whole counsel of God, Acts 20:27, Paul says, "I declared unto you the whole counsel of God"; but at the same time the minister has to remember that as a steward he is limited by that, by the word and the mystery of God. So Paul says in chapter 2, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." The minister is a steward of the mysteries of God.

Now there are all kinds of pressures to use the pulpit for other things. A man has his opinions, we live in a political and a social environment, but those mustn't be the issues and those are not the focus of the ministry and the pulpit. The pulpit is not a soapbox but the minister declares the counsel of God and the cross of Jesus Christ.

Paul says this is the way to think of the minister: an under-rower and a steward. There is a Master. There is a word from the Master. The minister is a servant and it's very important that every minister ultimately see that, that he answers to God. A famous preacher once said to his congregation, "I'm willing to be your servant but you are not my master. Jesus Christ is my Lord." So that's the way to think of the minister so that the focus is not on the man or the personality but on the task and the word, the Gospel.

Now what's the criteria for evaluating the minister, and that's what Paul comes to in verse 2. It's not his ability and giftedness, it's not his creativity and his mastery of the English language, it's not his personality or how fun the man is to spend time with and to hang with socially, but faithfulness. "Moreover," Paul says, "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." These are the kinds of men that Paul looked for to appoint as pastors in the church as he went about as a missionary. You see that later in the chapter in verse 17, "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord." The portrait of Timothy in the Bible is interesting. He seems to be physically frail. He's a very young man. He's somewhat timid but what made him a man and a minister is this: that he was faithful. Paul calls him a good minister of God in 1 Timothy 4:6.

A faithful minister. This is how a man must be judged and so Paul says of Epaphras, he's a faithful minister, Colossians 4:7. Again of Tychicus, another early New Testament pastor, Ephesians 6:21, he's a faithful servant. That's what's required of stewards. This is how you are to judge the minister, is he faithful? Is he faithful to his calling? Is he faithful to the word of God? Is he faithful to the people of God? Can you trust him with the word and with the sheep? That he be faithful as a steward, not to his advantage but for the benefit of the flock and the care of the Master's possession.

Now is that the way ministers are judged today? And the answer is no, it's not. Magazines are published that evaluate the best churches and the best ministers in our land, and the standard is the size and growth of the congregation; the giftedness of the man in the pulpit; the following that he has; the conferences that he gets to speak at; the books that he's written; the education that he has; his personality and his bedside manner and so on. Now if we think about those things, it's foolish to judge a minister that way. What has Paul said earlier in this book? He said, "I have planted. Apollos watered." Who caused the church to grow? "God gave the increase." You don't put that on the minister but on God. Or you find a man who is gifted, where are gifts from? They are from God. Paul's going to talk about that in the following verses. "What do you have that you didn't first receive?" Or personality, who makes a man? Who shapes him to be who he is? God does.

These are not the criterion by which a minister should be judged but this: is he faithful? Is he faithful? When he stands in the pulpit, can we trust that he will be faithful to bring God's word? To declare the whole counsel of God? To bring the cross and to make us know the cross of Jesus Christ? Yes, it's nice to have a gifted minister in the pulpit who is easy to listen to but that's not the important thing. That doesn't matter in the end. It's nice to have a pastor who is easy to relate to but in the end that doesn't matter. That doesn't have eternal value. He'll pass away too. What about your soul? Is he faithful? A man may be very gifted but unfaithful, able to get in the pulpit and do a very good job of preaching, at least from the spectator's point of view, but what's going on in his personal life? What's he doing outside of that? He may be leading an immoral and prayerless life, be unfaithful. So we judge a man by not his gifts or his personality but faithfulness.

Now this applies in a broader way to all of us and that's what we've noticed here. Paul takes these broader principles, these broader ideas from the word of God and he applies them specifically, that it's important for us to see that this is what God expects of any of us and all of us. Think again of the parables that Jesus told of the talents and of the servants, and he has left us here, what does he expect of us? Faithfulness in the church and in every relationship, every responsibility.

So what's your task this morning? Are you the breadwinner in the home? Are you the spiritual leader? Are you the mother in the home that finds yourself serving your family day after day? Or a student with opportunities to learn and gifts that God has given to you? Are you an employee entrusted with responsibility from your boss and paid for the time that you're on the job? Are you a Christian in the world who has a calling to bear a

light to others? Here's the requirement: not success, not that you become well-known, get recognition, but faithfulness. Will we be found faithful in the day of Jesus Christ?

Now if you look at verses 3 through 5, Paul comes to the subject of judging. He says in verse 3, "with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment." Paul knows that he is being critically evaluated, judged by the congregation or a segment of the congregation, in Corinth. This judgment of Paul was very severe and he makes that point when he says, "or of any man's judgment." Literally on any day of man, and there is a parallel idea there. There is the day of the Lord, but some take upon themselves the position of the Lord as judge and it's the day of a man. "I'm the judge today. I take the Lord's position. I judge the motives. I'm going to pass the final judgment," that judging that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 7, and this is what was happening to Paul.

He's being evaluated this way and he'll come back to that later in the chapter as well, but Paul says, "with me," or to me, "it's a very small thing that you judge me. I don't pay much attention to it. I take a very stand-back position and relaxed approach to what you say about my ministry." Now we shouldn't get the idea that Paul thinks that he is above criticism here or that there is no attention paid to what others say concerning his preaching or that he doesn't evaluate himself. No, that's not the approach of Paul either. Look at verse 4, he says, "I know nothing by myself," or against myself, "yet am I not hereby justified," and he means, "I do evaluate my own ministry and I know that there is nothing offensive, unfaithful about my work as a minister. But that doesn't justify me because I can't even judge myself." That's what he says at the end of verse three, "I judge not mine own self. So your judgments of me," he says, "and my judgments of myself, they are not the important thing in the end."

Yes, a minister must be open to critical evaluation and input regarding his work. The office of believer in the church qualifies everyone who hears the word with a believing heart as a prophet of God to go home and do what the Bereans did and search the Scriptures and the minister in his work is under the oversight and the care of the elders who evaluate his ministry and evaluate his preaching too. Is it faithful? Is the congregation being edified and the members of the congregation have opportunity to express that personally and in family visitation and to the office bearers in the church and so on?

Paul's not above that. A minister's not above that. But Paul says, "Ultimately what you say is of very little importance. Not nothing but of very little importance because I don't answer in the end to you. I don't do my work based on polls and popularity and for approval ratings, but I answer to the Lord. God is my Judge." So Paul says, "he that judgeth me," verse 4, "is the Lord." The word Lord there refers to the ascended Christ and the day of the Lord when he will come again as Judge.

Now how does he evaluate a man's ministry? Verse 2, is he faithful? Is he faithful? And the idea is this, that all our judgments are finite. What do we know about others? What do we know about others' motives and attitudes or what's going on in their life, or in this



case, what's going on in a man's ministry? Which one of us even has the ability to judge our own heart and our own motives to give a fair judgment of ourselves? No, we'll exonerate ourselves when we shouldn't. But there's one who's omniscient. There is one who is all-knowing and it's his judgment that matters.

That's what Paul says in verse 5. He will try. When he comes, he'll "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." He means this: that every aspect of our lives will be evaluated in that day, as Jesus says, "Every idle word, every thought, every desire, every motive," and here now specifically with application to the minister of the Gospel, he'll evaluate not just his public life, not the effectiveness or the success of his work but every aspect of his ministry. Every motivation. Every thought. Everything done in secret, in darkness.

Then a man's praise, a man's reward, a man's evaluation will come from God, not from man, and in that day it won't be as we expect it to be, will it? With regard to ourselves, I think we know what to expect, but with regard to others, it won't be as we expect it to be. One will be heaped on with rewards that we thought was not very significant, and another who stood out, was prominent, had a great reputation, was effective, will be found to be quite unfaithful in different aspects of his labor.

So this is Paul's conclusion in verse 5, "Therefore," that's a conclusion, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come." He means hold off in premature hasty evaluations and judgments. Don't put yourself in the place of God. Don't take on yourself what is God's work. When the Lord comes, he'll give the rewards. He'll make the judgments and it won't be according to giftedness or success but faithfulness and a heart, and whatever accolades a man might receive in this life will mean nothing in that day.

So judge not. Paul's purpose here is to get the focus off the man. That was the problem in Corinth. I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am of Cephas. Paul says, "No, they're galley slaves who work in the shadows. They're stewards who must be faithful. Here's the criteria. God knows the heart, God is the Judge. Don't judge before the time."

So in closing, I want to make three points of application. The first is to myself as a minister of the word and to all who are in this office of calling, a reminder of the calling to be faithful. Not to labor to be men-pleasers. In the last days, Paul warns, people will heap up to themselves teachers who have itching ears, who will just say what the people want to hear. The minister must be influenced not by what people think but by the word of God. Not by human expectations but by the requirements of God's word and of the Gospel, a steward of the mysteries of God.

Then beyond that, there is this application: that this passage forces the minister, me, to evaluate every aspect of my ministry. My away time. My personal walk. All of the resources that I have and am I using them for the calling that God has given me in the ministry. And whatever anyone says about that, I must answer that before God and as I see, I see my weaknesses, and I ask, pray, pray for me. That's what Paul says, pray for us. Pray for us.

And now that kind of application comes in the second place to all of us because all of us are called as stewards and servants to be faithful in whatever it is that God has called us to. Faithfulness. This is what God expects from us. Not success or renown. Faithfulness. So regardless of what the world may say and regardless of what the world may lift up and exonerate and the status that it might give to a person for achievements or whatever, faithfulness is what God expects and maybe that's in a place similar to that of a galley slave, in the shadows serving. Faithfulness, this is what God requires. We mustn't be enamored with giftedness and we mustn't seek the praise that men would give.

And then a final application and it has to do with sitting under the preaching of the word of God. Not just my ministry here but the ministry of anyone who stands in this pulpit, anyone whom God might send to labor here on a given Sunday. There is one criteria: faithfulness. One criteria: faithfulness. We must be careful not to be enamored with a man's gifts or wit or personality or success and we must be careful also not to allow our own reception of the word to be jaded by a critical spirit when we see a man's weaknesses.

Is he faithful? Judge not before the time. May God grant that there's always in this pulpit a faithfulness ministry of the word. Amen.

*Father, we thank thee for the word here. In its broader context, the purpose of it is unity and peace in the church. Corinth was torn by division because of personalities to which people were attracted. Lord, may our focus be the word, the Gospel, the whole counsel of God, the cross so that there is in our midst a proper peace and unity in the church. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.*