

Subject: *Living as Servants of Christ*

Scripture: *1 Corinthians 4:1-5*

In this series of messages we are taking a close look at our identity in Christ. We are new creatures in Christ, disciples of Christ, saints in Christ, and servants of Christ. Each of these relates to our salvation and our relationship to Christ. We have a special identity, a special privilege, and a special assignment. Paul was a highly motivated Christian because he knew who he was in Christ. In his letter to the Philippians Paul tells us what drives him:

Philippians 3:14 *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

1. The role of Christ's servants

To be a servant is a high calling and, at the same time, it is a humble calling. Some of the greatest people in the Bible are called the servants of God (Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Job, and others in the OT and Peter, Paul, John and many others in the NT). Jesus came as a servant and set the example for us.

Mark 10:45 *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

Jesus taught us to be His servants and He told us the honor of serving Him.

John 12:26 *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor.*

Paul had a unique role to fill in the body of Christ. His role was different than ours, yet in some ways we have the same role to fill. He was an apostle, but he said to consider him and the other apostles as “ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

When Paul said that he was a “minister” of Christ, he used the word *huperetes*, which means someone who works under another person's direction. It is a compound word that means an “under-rower.” Paul has in mind the lowest kind of slave onboard a Roman galley ship. An under-rower was inside the ship and on the lowest level of the ship. It was his job to pick up his oar and row. It was hard work and it was demeaning work. An under-rower knows that his daily job consists of doing the one thing assigned to him. He must take up the oar and row. Paul didn't see himself as the captain of the ship, but the under-rower of the ship. How about you? Are you willing to take the lowest place on the ship or do you like to call the shots and be the captain?

Serving the Lord involves a kind of routine, consistent, day in and day out grind. Vance Havner said there are three kinds of tests in the Christian life: 1) the test of the marvelous, great days when we are on the mountaintop and everything's going our way. It takes grace for that because we tend to get proud and puffed up; 2) the test of the mysterious, when things happen that don't make sense, when God seems to have forgotten us, and nothing works out like we planned; and 3) the test of the monotonous, the daily grind, when life is routine and nothing special seems to be happening. Are we willing to stick with it?

Galatians 6:9 *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

2. The resources of Christ's servants

Paul said he was a “steward of the mysteries of God.” A “steward” is a person entrusted with his master’s entire estate: his house, farm, finances, food, other servants, and sometimes even the master’s children. A steward is not an owner. He is a manager who works for the owner and is accountable to the owner. The servants of Christ are entrusted with valuable resources:

- We are stewards of God’s truth

Paul said that he was entrusted with the precious truths of the Gospel. The word “mysteries” refers to something that was not known previously, but now God has revealed. Some stewards are entrusted with houses and land, some with precious jewelry and money, but Paul had something worth far more than that—the precious gospel and the Word of God. We have also been entrusted with gospel and the Word. **2 Corinthians 4:7** *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

- We are stewards of God’s grace

1 Peter 4:10-11 ¹⁰ *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* ¹¹ *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

All of God’s servants have different gifts and abilities, resources, and opportunities. We all have a unique SHAPE:

S – Spiritual gifts – These are given at salvation.

H – Heart – This is our driving passion.

A – Abilities – These are natural talents.

P – Personality – Some are introverts and some are outgoing.

E – Experiences – We have different kinds of family, education, job experience, and ministry experience.

Everything we have is given by God. **1 Corinthians 4:7** *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?*

3. The requirement of Christ's servants

Christ requires one thing of His servants —He requires us to be faithful (vs. 2). A servant doesn’t need to be creative, attractive, relevant, or popular. He has to be faithful, dependable, and reliable. Suppose you are a business owner and you entrust your business to the manager for three months. At the end of three months, you come back to find that your business has not been cared for, the place is filthy, the books are in a mess, the bills haven’t been paid, and orders haven’t been filled, emails and phone calls haven’t been answered. You call that manager and say, “What’s going on?” Now the manager might have many excuses, but that doesn’t change the fact that he was not faithful.

If you are not now serving the Lord, what's your excuse? If you look in the Bible you will find an odd collection of people who served the Lord and many of them could have used excuses: Abraham was too old, Jacob was insecure. Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused by his family, Moses had a speech problem, Gideon was poor, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and all kinds of family problems, Jonah was reluctant, Peter was impulsive, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had many failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was bashful. I suppose you could call them, "misfits in the ministry," but they weren't misfits at all. They fit perfectly into God's plan and purpose.

Matthew 24:45-51 *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

John Maxwell uses the term "countability" because he can be counted on to do his job. We need to be countable. He suggests that a countable person has three qualities:

CHARACTER + COMPETENCE + CONSISTENCY = COUNTABILITY

The Lord is counting on us. Other people are counting on us. We need to be faithful.

4. The reward of Christ's servants

In verses 3-5 Paul refers to his evaluation as a servant of Christ. He said that he wasn't concerned about the evaluation of other people or even his own self-evaluation. All that mattered is the Lord's evaluation. When the Lord comes, He is going to evaluate our service and reward us accordingly.

- The Lord will evaluate our service

Romans 14:10-12 ¹⁰ *But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.* ¹¹ *For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.* ¹² So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

- The Lord will reward faithful service

Verse 5 says "then shall every man have praise (commendation, approval) of God." That's what we long for, what we strive for. Jesus told the parable of the talents. On the day of reckoning, to some servants Jesus will say: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The world offers some impressive titles (CEO, MBA, PhD, JD, CPA). By God's grace we can have two titles: BA (Born Again) and WD (Well Done). The Lord saves us for a purpose. We are saved to serve Him. When God saves us, why doesn't He take us to heaven at that moment? He has a job for us to do. At first, God deals with us as sinners. Then He deals with us as sons and servants.