

Paul wrote to a church that was being pulled in various directions - the Apollos group and the Paul group, and the Peter group. (see chapter 3:22)

So, one of Paul's main goals in the whole letter of 1 Corinthians was to unify, unify, unify. What could Paul write that would keep the church in Corinth together?

Paul began by writing chapters 1, 2, and 3 about worldly wisdom as compared with godly wisdom. Next, starting here in chapter 4, Paul wrote about church leadership. What view of church leadership promotes church unity?

Two things must be held together to have a Biblical view of church leaders.

- 1) Church leaders are servants of Christ, and answer to Christ first.
- 2) Church leaders serve us.

The balance of both is important for a view of church leaders that unifies.

**Church leaders are servants of Christ, which means Christian leaders serve Christ by serving others.**

### **1. Leaders-servants-stewards must be faithful. (v.1-2)**

Verses 1-2, *"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful."*

Who is the us? Verse 1, *"This is how one should regard us."* To whom is the word "us" referring here? It is the apostles. Just eight verses later, in verse 9, Paul wrote, *"us apostles..."*

However, the same principle applies to all church leaders building up God's building. This is how one should regard us. How is that?

As servants. You might be surprised to learn that the Greek word for "servant" here is not the Greek word deacon, but instead is the Greek word "under orders." The illustration is when the word is used for an "under-rower" as if you

have a captain calling the signal to row a rowing boat, and all the under-rowers follow his signal to row. The under-rower has no authority of his own – his only business is to mind his own business and do what is commanded. Row when he is told to row.

Apostles and elders and missionaries and authors and are seen as leaders.

Apostles are now to be regarded as servants of Christ? How do these fit together? Leaders or servants? First or last? The answer is servants.

This is one of the great truths of Christianity, that is so familiar to us, that it does not even surprise us. Even our country's secular businesses and hospitals have borrowed this truth, and even the American military has long recognized and taught this truth – that leaders must be servants, that the last shall be first, that in order to be a good leader, a person must serve those that he is leading.

Christ crucified and risen again is the only pattern for the foundation of the church, and also the only pattern for the rest of the structure of building the church. Christ is our leader, our head, and Christ is our servant. So, all of us are servants.

Why was Paul writing this here? Paul detected that the Corinthians did not have a correct grasp of Paul's role as an apostle. They did not have a right view of Paul! How could they receive Paul's letter, if they did not view Paul the right way? That needed to be corrected, before Paul could write the remaining chapters.

How did they think of Paul? As the boss. But Paul says, no Christ is the head, Christ is the boss. Paul works for Christ.

So, what was Paul's position in working for Christ? Paul's position was the person to bring out the mysteries of God. Paul and the apostles were not only servants of Christ, but verse 1 also showed that they were "*stewards of the mysteries of God.*" The Christians in Corinth needed to think of Paul as bringing the news that was previously hidden, and now was being brought out and helpfully explained. Paul brought them the gospel. Formerly, they did not know, and now,

thanks to Paul and the other apostles coming to Corinth and preaching it, the gospel had become known to them. Paul did not himself invent what Paul taught them. Rather, Paul was given this content from Christ. Paul was not the originator of the teachings. Instead, Paul was a dispenser, the one who gave things away, like an executor of a large estate. Paul's job was to give out the riches of God verbally while Paul was in Corinth with them, and then do the same in written form in this letter of 1 Corinthians.

Paul was giving them good news from God. They must think of Paul that way.

Building on that, Paul wrote verse 2, which says that the central thing required of stewards of riches, was that they be found faithful. Faithful to give out the riches. There was a review to be done by the master. God Himself would review Paul's work and see whether Paul was consistently generous with the Word of God, whether Paul gave the pure and true teachings. The steward of the mysteries of Christ was answerable to Christ. God is the one who required Paul to be faithful. That brings us to point 2.

## **2. Leaders are evaluated by the Lord, not by the world or even self. (v.3-4)**

Verses 3-4, *“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup> For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.”*

Four options who will hold Paul accountable. 1) the believers over in the church of Corinth 2) a human court 3) Paul himself or 4) God.

Door #1 – what if the believers in Corinth judged Paul, and determined that Paul was OR WAS NOT faithful in bringing the truth of the Word of God to them? Paul would count that as a very small thing. How about door #2, if a human court, a tribunal of men should take up the matter of Paul's faithfulness or lack of

faithfulness in bringing the mysteries of God? Again, Paul would count that as a very small thing. Door #3 was Paul's own evaluation of his own ministry. In verse 3, Paul wrote, "*I do not even judge myself*" However, Paul then went on to write in verse 4, that even if Paul WERE TO JUDGE HIMSELF, what would Paul find as a verdict? Paul's honest assessment of himself, he wrote was, "*I am not aware of anything against myself...*" But even in that case, so what? Paul followed that by writing, "*...but I am not thereby acquitted.*" I am not thereby found innocent or justified, just because I cannot see that I taught anything wrong. In other words, what the apostle Paul says about the apostle Paul does not even settle the matter. Wow! Well, if the evaluation of an apostle does not even settle the matter, then what would it take to get the official verdict regarding Paul's ministry? It takes God. Here is an extremely important sentence listed at the very end of verse 4, and we must not miss it, "*It is the Lord who judges me.*" What does that mean? It means that 'it is the Lord who takes stock of how I have performed as a preacher and teacher of the gospel of grace, and whether or not I have consistently given out the beauty of message of the grace of God for the forgiveness of sinners found only in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.' It is the Lord who determines that. Has the gospel been preached? The Lord is the one who says yes or no.

The minister does not merely answer to you as a church, merely answer to the elders of the Session, or merely answer to the presbytery or General Assembly. Every pastor answers to the Lord our God, for every pastor is a servant of Christ.

Many people have passed harsh judgments on the ministry of pastors, which have proven to be wrong. Alternatively, many people have counted as acceptable the ministry of pastors, which have proven to be ministries that did not bring forward the truth of the grace of God in Christ Jesus alone.

What unifies a church is to agree about the ultimate court for all such evaluations – we must all agree that the final judging of ministries belongs God.

Why? Because missionaries and elders are Christ's servants, and they work for Christ first. You are the recipient of ministry of a pastor, but you are not his master. Christ is. Romans 14:4, *"Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls."*

Along with that is another important truth - a Pastor's own conscience is not a good guide. He might be telling himself to feel guilty, when Christ says those are not sins, or else those are sins, but they are forgiven. Or, an elder might be telling himself that he is fine, just fine, when God says I do not allow that. The status of a church leader before God is not to be decided based on how he feels, nor even his own settled opinion about himself. My case is not judged by me, or my conscience, or my figuring, or my opinion. I might be too lenient on myself, or I might be too hard on myself. I might even be deceiving myself in one direction or the other! Rather, my case is judged by Christ! Which brings us to the third point.

### **3. The final evaluation of leaders must await the Lord's coming. (v.5)**

Verses 5, *"Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God."*

Paul draws this conclusion for his readers in verse 5 – do not pronounce judgment on your preachers and teachers before the Lord's coming. Before the final resurrection. Before the Lord's judgment of us all. That day is the day of revealing all things. Everything will be made known. How the missionaries behaved on the mission field. How the preachers preached grace. How the church members responded and lived. Everything that was done in every meeting, in every church, in every home, on every mission trip – all of it will be found out, and reviewed and evaluated by none other than the Lord God Himself, even the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

What was done in private, will have the light of the World shining upon it. Not just the things said and not said, the things done and not done, but also the very purposes and motives of every heart for what was said and what was not said, and the reasons in the mind and thoughts for everything that was done, and all things that were not done.

We need to wait for medical tests.

We need to wait for the awards ceremony for artwork submitted to the judges.

We need to wait for the academic tests to show our resulting score.

We wait for sports competitions to show how the judges rated them.

Above all else church leaders await this – the revelations of God about us, about our work for the Lord, about our statements our actions, and our internal motivations.

There will be wonderful things done for the wrong reasons.

There will be terrible things done, but with the best of intentions.

There will be bad things done with bad motives.

There will be faithful and godly work done with faithful and godly motives.

All will be weighed and considered, and the truth of all will be accurately named and displayed. Our God does all things well.

What will be the result for you?

Let's go back to the idea of the building of God.

We are all builders, contractors. We work for God, on God's building, the church.

Paul was writing to those who were building on the foundation that Paul built. Paul was saying – Christ will show that I built well, and Christ will show that you were building on top of what I built, in a bad way. Chapter 3:10, "According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation,

and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” And in verse 13, Paul wrote that each one’s work will be revealed by fire, and that “...the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.”

There is more in chapter 4, that we will cover later.

**Conclusion:** This is an application to all leaders and all believers.

1. You are answerable to Christ. Whether you are sincere or insincere, we cannot know. You yourself may even be mistaken on that! If you are genuine, or have questionable motives, we cannot see. But Christ knows.
2. Ultimately, it is not your place to pass judgment on others, including your leaders. Leaders are here to serve you, but that does not mean that they take orders from you. They take orders from Christ the master.
3. Look forward to your reward, that comes through Christ.

The gospel is about the grace and mercy of God.

Our reward and commendation does not come to us through our own good deeds. Our reward and commendation comes to us through the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, “*Jesus said..., “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*”