

The Authority of Servants

1 Corinthians, Volume 5

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1 Corinthians 4:1-5

These instructions are based on four key thoughts:

- i. Regard (1)
- ii. Requirement (2)
- iii. Responsibility (3-4)
- iv. Respect (5)

I. Regard:

This point has special reference to full-time ministers. The thoughts developed in the last three points are broader and refer to all.

In this manner: a few verses earlier, in 3:21, Paul has specifically said how not to regard leaders and one another in the body of Christ, saying, "Let no one boast in men." In 3:22, 23 Paul has said that since all things are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's, therefore, regard us as servants of Christ.

Us: Specifically, this applies to Paul, Apollos and other apostolic teachers. Verses 2-5, however, give generalities that go beyond just teachers and relate to _____ in the body of Christ.

Regard: The word implies a reasoning activity of the mind. Paul is asking them to think through how important this issue is. He asks them to come to a conclusion regarding his position and his role with regard to the Corinthian church.

Servants: This is not the same word that was used in 3:5 (diakonos). The word is huperetes. It means an under-rower. It was used to describe one who rowed in the lower bank of oars on a large ship. From that the word was generalized to mean a servant, though generally a servant of a _____ kind.

Of Christ: Servants have no authority of their own. What authority a servant might have is entirely derived from the master.

If the church is Christ's, and it is (3:22-23), it should openly receive those who are sent as His emissaries. The church should also refrain from extolling these people as anything other than servants of the Lord.

Stewards: The word oikonomos from oikos and meno (manage) means to manage a house. The word was generally used for a slave appointed as a manager or overseer of

the affairs of the house and other slaves. This person directed the affairs of the household and dispensed the provisions.

This was a relatively responsible position. The steward was set over several others and responsible for them which was often a large task. Still, the steward was totally _____ to his master. In relation to the master he was a slave. In relation to the slaves he was an overseer. This is how we stand in relation to Christ. He is our Master; we are His servants or slaves. At the same time, however, He has entrusted to us a serious responsibility. The spread of His kingdom on earth during this age is contingent upon our faithfulness.

Mysteries of God: This is what _____ manage and are responsible to dispense within the realm of the church. This phrase was first introduced in 2:7 and it means the same here. It is a reference to God's revelation. The truths God has revealed, which are undiscoverable by human _____, is that for which we are responsible.

What authority does God grant to His stewards?

What authority is not granted by God to His stewards?

How are Christians to regard their spiritual leaders?

II. Requirement:

There is just one requirement for those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 2: *"In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy."*

In this case, moreover: In light of our position as servants the demands that apply to stewards of households apply to _____ in the household of God.

Required of: Literally "sought in". Trustworthiness is what is demanded of stewards. This is what God is seeking in you, me and every other Christian.

That one be found: This wording states that this is the design of God and this is what God desires to see developed in the life of _____ believer.

Trustworthy (As in Faithful): The service of a steward is to be without interruption, he is to perform that which the master asks of him.

Fidelity is required. Loyalty is required. A steward was not closely supervised. We understand the meaning of "faithful" from two different passages that reveal two

different aspects of the meaning of this word: Matthew 25:21, 23, 26 (opposite of _____), and 2 Timothy 2:2 (passing on spiritual _____)

What is God's requirement for you? Diligence and passing on spiritual truth. Pass it on to your family, your friends, through Sunday School, through a Bible Study, through friendships, and wherever else you can. The Christian who is not growing and serving in the body of Christ is a contradiction in terms. True spiritual growth and service under the power of the Holy Spirit seems to be what Paul was labeling gold, silver and precious stones back in chapter 3.

III. Responsibility

Who do we have to answer to? This is the issue of verses 3 and 4.

V.3. I (Paul) feel myself in no way dependent on your personal opinions of my ministry.

V.4. It doesn't really even matter what I myself think of what I am doing.

It is very difficult to accurately assess your own achievement and Paul points out that in every case it really does not matter. We humans tend to discount our shortcomings and inflate our achievements. But it is not our task to pass such judgments. We should get on with the job of serving the Lord." Paul was not aware of any matter in which he had failed in his stewardship, but he did not put his confidence in that at all.

Acquitted (means Justified): This is a legal word meaning acquitted of a charge or declared not guilty. It is often used by Paul of our position before God. In this case he uses it regarding our faithfulness in serving as Christians.

Q: How far does this go? It extends to everything we do in our lives. See Col.3:22-23, Eph.6:5-8. You can satisfy and please men without pleasing God. You can also satisfy and please God without pleasing men. 1 Cor.10:31, says, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

IV. Respect

This is the corollary to understanding our responsibility to please God. If each person is responsible to God then it is totally out of place for us to pass judgments on one another. We must encourage and exhort one another as we meet together and provoke one another to love and good deeds (Heb.10:24-25). But when someone sins (and only then) we should reprove and rebuke in order to restore a brother to fellowship (Matt.18:15). Beyond that, whenever we pass judgment upon another Christian we are encroaching on God's responsibilities. Our duty is to respect one another and allow God to do and to lead as He pleases in the lives of other Christians. We must respect what God is doing in other people's lives even if it is not what He is doing in our life. See Rom.14:10-12.

So do not go on passing judgment: The negated present imperative means “_____ judging”. The grammar implies that the command is to cease an act that is in progress.

The time: This refers to when the Lord comes.

*Remembering that this passage has to do only with Christians and not non-Christians I want to point out three ideas contained here:

1. Bring to light. . . darkness: The Lord will reveal all those deeds which in this present age of darkness are hidden. Therefore, what you might base a judgment of another Christian on is probably _____. Also, you had better get busy on serving in order to please God in your own life rather than worrying about what other Christians are doing with their own stewardship. See Matt. 6:1, 4, 6
2. Disclose the motives of hearts: Not only will unseen deeds be dealt with and rewarded, but the unseeable desires and motives, both good and evil, will be revealed and judged at the coming of Christ. (See Matt. 19:30; 20:16) This is true because God sees and knows things that we do not see or know.
3. Then each man’s praise. . .: Recall 3:14, 15. Remember, only Christians are involved in this discussion. This is the praise that really counts. See Matt. 6:2, 5. Reward in full is what one receives when good deeds are done in order to be seen by men. Nothing else will ever be gained.

Conclusion:

How should we regard spiritual leaders and other Christians in general? As _____ of Christ. Do not exalt them beyond measure. Do not negate the value of their potential ministry to you.

What is required of a servant of Christ? Faithfulness to discharge the responsibilities given to him as a stewardship from God. This applies to spiritual truth. This applies to finances. This applies to children God may give you. This applies to opportunities that God may give you. This applies to everything.

What is our responsibility? To please God. That is all that ultimately really matters.

Because of all this, we must respect and appreciate what others are doing in the Body of Christ. May God deliver us from sinful judgmental attitudes and allow us to get on with the work of serving Him and allowing Him to bring about maturity in our lives.