

1 Cor. 4:1-5
God Will Judge His Stewards

NKJ 1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.

4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

It is a common thing for us to judge things by our preferences. You walk into a room and immediately consciously or not, you begin to size it up according to what you prefer. Do you like the color of the wall? Do you like the furnishings? Do you like the way they are laid out? So one person could walk into a room and see the gold lame wallpaper, the velvet elvis painting, the bean bag chair, and the bamboo blinds and say "I love what you've done in here" while another person could walk in and say "Oh my, didn't you get the memo about the 70s being over, that's just wrong baby." Different preferences, different reactions.

I used the example of a room, but I could have used restaurants, plays, poems, music, colors, whatever, different tastes, different preferences, different reactions and in a consumer culture like ours, we are used to getting what we prefer.

There is a huge problem though, to applying the standard of preference to the church and its ministers. But unfortunately it is very common. People select churches and judge ministers based on their preferences. ***We prefer short sermons, says one family. We prefer that the church have a praise band, says another. We prefer not to have children in the worship service,*** says yet another. When we do that kind of thing, we are applying the consumer mentality to the church of Jesus Christ, and judging no by a fixed and unchanging standard, but by the fickleness of our preferences, which are usually *highly* influenced by the trends of our surrounding culture.

Now the Corinthians weren't concerned with the same issues, they weren't writing to Paul angrily to say when are we going to get a praise band, with an electric pan flute, like the church over in Ephesus. But they had been judging him and indeed other ministers by the standards of their own preferences.

We prefer men who weave Greek philosophy into their sermons and are impressive speakers, we want less of the preaching of the Christ Crucified, and more preaching of the saints glorified, we want a heavy emphasis on signs and wonders, and so on. And so Paul had shown them how what they wanted, what they preferred, was wrong. But now he is going on to show them that their entire standard for judging Gospel ministers and ministry was wrong.

Now many people, then and now, expect the minister to give them what they want because to their mind he's their hired hand. I mean you go to a restaurant, and you don't expect the chef to serve you the meal *he thinks you should have*. If I'm paying for it, I want to be served the food, I want to eat.

Paul however reminds them who he, and indeed all ministers are. They are not servants of men, they are the servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

There are two important ideas there first *that ministers are servants of Christ:*

The word for servant there is *Huperte* meaning literally “an under-rower” or common sailor. Not the captain, certainly not the admiral. A man with no authority of his own. What is his calling? To obey the commands he is given. And who is his Captain, indeed the admiral of the whole fleet? It is Jesus Christ. Christ is the one who issues the orders and his faithfulness is judged by how well he carries them out. Christ commands and it is his job to say “Aye-Aye” sir and carry out the command to the letter.

Secondly, ministers are *Stewards of the mysteries of God:*

Stewards were the slaves who were in charge of the household, like Joseph to Potiphar for instance. Their master trusted them to manage the affairs of the household according to his instructions. They were the ones for instance, who dispensed the provisions to other slaves.

What are the mysteries of God? Well Paul has used that phrase before in 1 Cor. 2:7 – it refers to the truth of the gospel. Which truth is a mystery in the sense that it cannot be discovered by human wisdom. It was a truth that wise men and philosophers could never have figured out. ***I mean how could we have known that we might be saved from our sins, and reconciled to God, by believing in His Son Jesus Christ?*** We come to know it because God has revealed it particularly, as the author of Hebrews puts it, as he has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.

So ministers are men who have no discretionary authority, that is they mustn't invent new ways of worshiping God and command God's people to do them. Their powers are purely ministerial. Their job is to faithfully dispense what God has given them in the way that he commanded. Their job is to declare to his people what he has said. In that sense we describe the ministers power as purely “Ministerial and Declarative.”

Just as an aside, if that is what an Apostle said that should immediately show you how wrong it is to have Popes or Arch-Bishops issuing their own decrees and then commanding that the faithful obey them.

Paul then goes on to say that their faithfulness will be judged by how well they execute these commandments, how well they perform their duties as stewards. Hodge put it this way:

“The great thing required of them is fidelity. Fidelity to Christ as servants; not arrogating to themselves any other man ministerial power, or venturing to go beyond his commands. Fidelity also to the people, not failing to dispense to them the truths which God has revealed, nor mixing those truths with their own speculations, much less substituting for those doctrines human knowledge or wisdom.”

Paul had been judged by the Corinthians and found wanting because he didn't meet their standards, but he's not afraid. He says in verse 3 essentially, I could care less if my ministry has been judged by a human court – the word for court there is *hemera* it means “day.” It's important because Paul says that

he's not worried about the judgment that comes on the *judgment day* of man, but rather he indicates in verse 5 that his great concern is for what will happen on the *judgment day* of God.

The day when the Lord comes and all men go before the great white throne to receive their judgment and rewards. Now ministers we are told in the word, will receive a much stricter judgment than ordinary believers:

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

They will be judge according to what they taught, how faithful they were in their teaching, whether they gave God's people the whole counsel of God holding back nothing that God wanted men to know, whether they were lazy or diligent, and here is where it gets difficult – *what their motives were for preaching* that is what Paul means in verse 5 by his ***bringing to light the hidden things of darkness and revealing the counsels of the hearts.***

Sometimes a Pastor's motives, even for preaching the truth aren't good. In his letter to the Phillipians Paul said: “

15 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will:

16 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; 17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.

Why should I be preaching? Not for money, not to promote another agenda, not for the praise of men, not for the sake of contention so that I can argue with false believers or have an opportunity to tell the world off.

No, I am supposed to be preaching out of Love. Love for Christ, Love for the Gospel, and Love for his people. And Christ when he comes will not merely examine **what I actually did, but why** I did it. *For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*

Properly understood you'll see why this should be the scariest job on earth, and not something that anyone should enter into for any other reason but love. Now Paul said he knew nothing against him by God's standard, later he will say to the Ephesian elders – ***“26 "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.”*** That may not be Man's Standard, but it is Gods.

Two Applications:

1) **Therefore you when you judge a ministry, do not bring it to the bar of man or preferences.**

Bring it before the bar of God's unchanging word. Don't ask is he dynamic, or trendy, or popular, or compare him to other men – ask the critical question – *is he as far as you can tell - faithful?*

And keep in mind that that servant will answer in the end to God.

2) **Seek to be under ministries that do reveal to you the mysteries of God, and flee those that don't. You know I get tons of calls by people asking “Tell me about your music.” – I always**

groan at that one. It's the wrong question. The right question – which I hear far more infrequently is *“Tell me about what you believe. Tell me what you preach.”*

Ask that question, and seek out the men who aren't popular or handsome or worldly wise, but the men who LOVE to preach Christ Crucified. That is the kind of man who will receive the praise of Christ and hear “Well done O good and faithful servant” on the last day.