

1 Corinthians Chapter 4

1 Corinthians 4:1 "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Minister used here means servant.

In the verse above Paul expresses his humility by using a word literally meaning under-oarsman or assistant.

In the case here, they are ambassadors, or assistants of Christ.

Paul wanted everyone to view him and his fellow ministers only as the humble messengers God ordained them to be.

“Stewards”:

This means a house distributor or an overseer.

In the most extended form, it means a fiscal agent, or preacher of the gospel.

Paul defines his responsibilities as an apostle by using a word originally referring to a person entrusted with and responsible for his master’s entire household.

Such as buildings, fields, finances, food, and other servants and sometimes even the children of the owner.

The mystery of God is used in the New Testament to refer to divine revelation that previously had been hidden.

It was all that truth which Paul had to oversee and dispense as God’s servant and steward.

Jesus came and revealed to His followers the mystery of God. We are no longer closed off from the Father, but can go boldly to the throne by the name of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the door that leads to close fellowship with God.

Look with me at the following Scripture on the mystery of God.

Luke 8:10 "And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."

The mystery of God is the Truth in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit reveals to all who are truly believers, this mystery.

See Luke's verse 10.

What do you think that is about?

Why are some not allowed to understand the mysteries of God?

Unless the Holy Spirit draws a person who is truly repentant and seeking a relationship with Jesus, they are unable to understand that which is the truth written in the Bible.

To them it is nonsense.

Secondly, it is the Holy Spirit who reveals the truth to them.

1 Corinthians 4:2 "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

Remember, we said that in the most extended form, steward meant minister of the gospel.

Notice, that the main ingredient of a minister is faithfulness to God and His Truth.

Man, in the verse above, does not mean someone of the male gender.

The word man was translated from means any person, young or old.

The requirement then is not even that you be of a special gender.

It is just required that you be totally sold out to God.

The most essential quality of a servant or steward is obedient loyalty to his master.

1 Corinthians 4:3 "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."

There seems to be a group here, that is questioning Paul.

Paul is reminding them that he will not be judged of these people.

He says he cannot even examine himself, but he reminds them that all are judged of God.

I do not know why they were questioning Paul, perhaps, because some of them had known him before he became a Christian.

We must remember though all the laws in the temple at this time were not even similar to the laws God had given Moses.

Jesus even called them man's laws.

The priesthood had greatly deteriorated, and they were making up laws as they went along, so that they could have greater control of the people.

The priesthood was being bought and sold instead of coming through the Levitical tribe.

Here Paul is not being arrogant or saying that he is above fellow ministers, other Christians, or even certain unbelievers.

He is saying that a human verdict on his life is not the one that matters, even if it was his own.

1 Corinthians 4:4 "For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord."

Justified, as we have explained before, means just as if I had never sinned.

Paul in this, however, is saying he ministers what the Holy Spirit of God gives him.

He is not ministering what he believes, but what God knows, and there could be nothing wrong with that.

The Lord will judge Paul the same as He does all His ministers, as to whether they were faithful in their messages.

Paul was not aware of any un-confessed or habitual sin in his own life, but his limited understanding assumed that his was not the final verdict.

Paul's own sincere evaluation of his life did not acquit him of all failures to be faithful.

The Lord is the ultimate and only qualified Judge of any man's obedience and faithfulness.

1 Corinthians 4:5 "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."

"Hidden things of darkness":

This refers to the inner motives, thoughts, and attitudes which only God can know.

Our judgment on this earth is warped, because we only judge what we see with our eyes and hear with our ears.

God judges the heart of man.

You may hide a sin that you have committed from the world, but you will not be able to hide it from God.

Since we are not able to judge justly, being human, we should not judge at all.

Leave judgment up to Jesus who looks into the heart and judges.

His judgment is perfect.

Jesus is the Light.

There is no darkness where He dwells.

No sin can hide from His Light.

“Counsels of the hearts”:

Since final rewards will be based, not just on outward service, but on inward devotion, only God can give the praise each deserves.

1 Corinthians 4:6 "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."

“These things”:

Is referring to the analogies that Paul used to depict those who minister for the Lord, including himself and Apollos: farmers (3:6-9), builders (3:10-15), and servant stewards (verses 1-5).

“Your sakes”:

Paul’s humility, expressed in light of God’s judgment on the greatest apostles and preachers, was useful to teach believers not to exalt any of them.

“Which is written”:

God’s faithful servants are to be treated with respect only within the bounds of what is scriptural.

“Puffed up”:

The greatest problem in the Corinthian church was pride and arrogance.

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]?"

Paul is correct in the statement that we are what we are, because God made us that.

I happen to be a Caucasian, because God chose that I be born to Caucasian parents.

We have nothing to do with our nationality or our I.Q.

We are not even male or female because we wanted to be, but because that is what God made us.

Our Creator made us what He wanted us to be for the furtherance of the kingdom of God.

Even where we minister is chosen by Him.

We are equipped by the Holy Spirit in the area we are to function most effectively in.

We have very little to do with this either.

It seems in the verse above, that some of the people in the church have received gifts of ministry from God, and now they are trying to control Paul and his ministry.

This is the wrong thing to do with the gift we receive.

God did not give them their gift so that they might glory over someone else.

Pride is deception, since everything a person possesses is from God's providential hand.

1 Corinthians 4:8 "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."

We must remember that the life style of these Corinthians, had been the very same as of a very affluent society.

Many of them had ruled over servants, and they still had the desire to rule.

Paul is saying this in somewhat of a reprimand to them.

We see this same situation in the following Scripture.

Revelation 3:17 "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:"

This was the church who had brought the world into the church.

Paul sarcastically, in a severe rebuke, heaps on false praise, sarcastically suggesting that those Corinthians who were self-satisfied had already achieved spiritual greatness.

They were similar to the Laodiceans.

“Reign”:

Yet, Paul genuinely wished it were the coronation time of the Millennium, so that they all might share in the glory of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:9 "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."

There is a great deal of sacrifice in this world required of those who minister God's Word.

It is required that we sacrifice our flesh that our spirit might reign in our body.

The fate of most of the apostles was very much like their leader, Jesus.

John was an exception of that.

He suffered much on this earth, even being banished to the Isle of Patmos for speaking the Word of God so boldly.

Paul died in Rome after knowing much persecution on this earth.

The imagery of this verse is of condemned prisoners brought into a Roman arena to fight and die; the last ones brought out for slaughter were the grand finale.

In His sovereign wisdom and for His ultimate glory, God chose to display the apostles figuratively before men and angels during the present age as just such worthless and also condemned spectacles.

Like doomed gladiators, they were ridiculed, spit on, imprisoned and beaten.

Yet God glorified His name through them as He used them to build His kingdom.

1 Corinthians 4:10 "We [are] fools for Christ's sake, but ye [are] wise in Christ; we [are] weak, but ye [are] strong; ye [are] honorable, but we [are] despised."

"Fools...Wise":

Again, Paul is using sarcasm.

This time on himself as if mimicking the attitude of the proud Corinthians toward him, Paul rebukes them.

Paul is saying that he is more than willing to be thought of as a fool for the furtherance of the ministry of Christ.

He jumps right in and tells them that it would be wise for them to accept Christ as their Savior.

These people Paul was speaking to had undoubtedly been highly thought of in their community.

It is almost as if he is saying, why are we thought of so poorly, if you believe it is wise to come to Christ.

We are the messenger that Christ sent to make you wise unto Christ.

1 Corinthians Chapter 4 Questions

1. What 2 things did Paul call himself in verse 1?
2. What does the word "minister" mean in the verse?
3. What is the most extended meaning of the word "steward"?
4. Where had the mystery of God been veiled?
5. Who revealed the mystery of God to the believers?
6. What is the requirement of being a steward?
7. Man, in verse two, means what?
8. Verse 3 tells us that others were trying to _____ Paul.
9. Who are we all judged of?
10. What was wrong with the laws in the temple at this time?
11. What had Jesus called these laws?
12. Why had the high priest changed the law?
13. What does justified mean?
14. Paul is not ministering what he believed, but what?
15. Judge nothing before the _____.
16. What will the Lord make manifest when He comes?
17. Why is there no darkness where Jesus dwells?
18. What was the division in the church at this time?
19. Why should ministers not be jealous of each other?

20. Who maketh thee to differ from another?
21. Who chooses where you will minister?
22. Why does God give one person a different ministering gift than He gives another?
23. What type of life style had they been experiencing in Corinth before Paul came?
24. Verse 9 says God hath set forth the apostles _____.
25. Who are the apostles made a spectacle to?
26. Which apostle does the author believe was carried into heaven without benefit of the grave?
27. Paul said, he was a fool for _____ sake.
28. In verse 10 Paul says, they are three things, what are they?