

A Faithful Steward Is to Be Judged by Jesus, Not Critical People

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

This portion comes at the following point in the outline.

- II. Paul's response to reports of division (1:10-6:20).
 - A. A church divided, internally and against Paul (1:10-4:20).
 - 1. The problem - Division over leaders in the name of Jesus (1:10-17).
 - 2. The gospel - a contradiction to wisdom (1:18-2:5).
 - 3. God's wisdom, revealed by the Spirit (2:6-16).
 - 4. On being spiritual and divided (3:1-4).
 - 5. Correcting a false view of church and ministry (3:5-17).
 - 6. We have all in Christ, eliminating boasting (3:18-23).
 - 7. The Corinthians and their apostle (4:1-21).
 - a. **On being a servant and being judged (4:1-5).**
 - b. The marks of true apostleship (4:6-13).
 - c. Appeal and exhortation (4:14-21).

Introduction

The Corinthians' misunderstanding of leaders and ministry, and the wisdom of God and man, have been addressed. But at the heart of this is the attitude of many of them toward Paul himself. They're not just "for" Apollos or Peter, they're decidedly "against" Paul, rejecting his teaching and authority. So in 4:1-21, Paul must reassert his authority, for these things are not optional. Yet he must do so while maintaining what he has stressed as to the servant role of an apostle.

Verses 1-5 make an application of the truth of being a servant, and show how that relates to their treatment of him. He insists that he is God's servant, not theirs, and they are not allowed to judge another's servant. In doing so, he also reminds them of the future judgment they all will face.

Verses

¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³ 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. ⁴ For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 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.

Questions

- 1. General.
 - a. What are your initial observations, thoughts, or questions about the whole passage, or any specific words, phrases, or thoughts?
 - b. How would you briefly describe the passage?
 - Paul insists that the Corinthians regard him and Apollos (Vs. 6) as **servants** entrusted with the mysteries of God. But though he is God's servant for them, he doesn't **belong** to them; he's not accountable to them. Servants are to be faithful, but only the Master can make that judgment. They must end their critical spirit of him, because Jesus will return, and judge both Paul and them.

2. Specific Verses.

- a. There is an important idea to note in the Greek words Paul uses. In 3:5-9, the word Paul used to describe leaders was *diakonos*, emphasizing their servant nature. In verse 1 here, he uses a different word that is translated “servant” (*hypēretas*), and it emphasizes “one who has the duties of administering the affairs of another.” Then, he uses the word *oikonomos*, translated “steward,” which means “a slave who has been entrusted with managing a household.” How does this help us understand how he is telling the Corinthians to regard him and other leaders ?
 - He and any other leaders are servants given to the Corinthians (3:21-22). Yet most importantly, they are **God’s** servants, with a delegated authority by God over the household of the Corinthians. Emphasizing this role, with this profound entrustment (the mysteries of God), should lead the Corinthians to **regard** Paul properly.
- b. We are mostly familiar with verse 2’s emphasis that stewards be found faithful, but what weight is put on it as we understand Paul’s emphasis that he (or any other leader) carries particularly this role of a unique servant of the Master?
 - The faithfulness that God requires of all of his servants is even more uniquely important as it relates to stewards, those **leaders** God assigns in ministry. They carry a great privilege, and therefore, a responsibility, to be faithful.
- c. What is Paul saying in verses 3-4 about what is and isn’t decisive in the judgment of someone?
 - He isn’t concerned with the Corinthians’ judgment of him, or even ultimately his own judgment of himself. It is the Lord. He is the one who is the Master of each servant, particularly in the specificity of ministry, and his **evaluation** is what ultimately matters.
 - Also, though the passage doesn’t refer to it, the idea of Matthew 7:1-5 applies here. They are clearly so plagued by logs in their eyes that they aren’t in a position to judge Paul’s manner and motivation of ministry.
- d. Why is this important?
 - Due to all of their issues, as the rest of the passage will indicate, the Corinthians were very critical of Paul (There have also been hints already. For instance, in 2:1-5 he has defended his approach to ministry, contrasting with what they seemingly valued.). His assertion here is that their distorted view of him isn’t the final verdict. In that only God can judge, and it is implied that God confirms Paul’s ministry as an Apostle, he has the authority as God’s steward of God’s house to call them to **repentance**.
- e. How does Paul continue his admonition to not be critical of him in verse 5? What are the elements of this and why is it important?
 - He grounds them not judging him in looking to Jesus’s return and his judgment of people’s **intentions** and **faithfulness**.

3. Final thoughts and application

- a. Do you have any final observations, comments, or questions?
- b. How do you think you can apply the truths of this passage to your life?
 - Be faithful in the service that God has given us, whatever it is. Do not judge by man’s standards. Consider properly the ones God gives us as stewards. Base how we might face these things in the coming judgment of motivations and faithfulness by Jesus.