

**14<sup>th</sup> August 2019.**

**BEING FOUND FAITHFUL AS SERVANTS AND STEWARDS  
OF GOD.**

**I Corinthians 4.**

In what to me was the Apostle Paul's final admonition with regards to the issue of factions amongst the Corinthian brethren, we see here Paul outlaying an argument that was supposed to give them and us a proper perspective of what really counts in the Kingdom of God. A faithfulness expressed in true humility.

Which when we consider part of what Pastor Silver talked about last Wednesday with regards to faithfulness, wherein that God would, as often quoted appraise us as "Good and faithful servants" not "well done perfect and successful servants" also taking note of this weekend's men's conference theme "Found faithful". It probably has it that the Holy Spirit is saying something to us that we must attend to. The keyword - FAITHFUL.

**4:1** In order that they might properly appraise Paul and the other apostles, he says that the saints should look upon them as servants or assistants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

The Greek word for 'servant' translated here *'hyperetas'* was one I learnt meant "under-rower" in the sense that someone is a rower on a big galley ship. So, though it is not the most lowly word for a servant, (*doulos*) it's certainly not a prestigious position. Under-rowers serve "Christ the master-pilot, helping forward the ship of the Church toward the haven of heaven." (Trapp)

Morgan describes this "under-rower" as "one who acts under direction, and asks no questions, one who does the thing he is appointed to do without hesitation, and one who reports only to the One Who is over him.

A steward is a servant who cares for the person or property of another. The mysteries of God were the previously hidden secrets which God revealed to the apostles and prophets of the NT period. In relation to the master of the house, the steward was a slave, but in relation to the other slaves, the steward was a master.

Thus making a correction of the ideology that Paul and/or Apollos were leaders just to be followed after, rather than helpful guides to serve alongside.

**4:2** A major requirement in stewards is to be found faithful. Man values cleverness, wisdom, wealth, and success; but God is looking for those who will be faithful to Jesus in all things. For stewards, the important thing was faithfulness. They had to be efficient managers of the master's resources. A steward never owned the property or resource he dealt with; he simply managed them for his master and had to manage them faithfully. Joseph and Daniel made remarkable stewards, whom God blessed and made their master's households prosperous....

**4:3** The faithfulness that is required in stewards is a difficult thing for people to evaluate. That is why Paul says here that with him it is a very small thing that he should be judged by the Corinthians or by a human court. Paul realizes how utterly unable man is to form a competent judgment of true faithfulness to God. He adds: "In fact, I do not even judge myself." He realized that he was born into the human family with a judgment that was constantly biased in his own favor.

**4:4** When the apostle says "I know of nothing against myself," he means that in the matter of Christian service, he is not conscious of any charge of unfaithfulness that might be brought against him. He does not mean for a moment that he does not know of any sin in his life or any way in which he falls short of perfection! The passage should be read in the light of the context, and the subject here is Christian service and faithfulness in it. But even if he did not know anything against himself, yet he was not justified by this. He simply was not competent to judge in the matter. After all, the Lord is the Judge.

**4:5** In view of this, we should be extremely careful in our appraisal of Christian service. We tend to exalt the spectacular and sensational, and depreciate that which is menial or inconspicuous. The safe policy is to judge nothing before the time, but to wait until the Lord comes. He will be able to judge, not only what is seen by the eye, but also the motives of the hearts—not only what was done, but why it was done. He will reveal the counsels of the hearts, and, needless to say, anything that was done for self-display or self-glory will fail to receive a reward. [3:13-15; Ps.62:12; Jer. 17:10; Rev.2:23].

That each one's praise will come from God is not to be taken as a flat promise that every believer's service will show up in a favorable way in that day. The meaning I learnt, is that everyone who deserves praise will receive praise from God and not from men.

In the next eight verses, the apostle states quite clearly that pride is the cause of the divisions that have come into the church at Corinth.

**4:6** He first explains that in speaking about the Christian ministry and the tendency to follow human leaders (3:5-4:5), he used himself and Apollos as the examples. The Corinthians were not forming parties around Paul and Apollos alone, but also around other men who were then in their church. However, out of a sense of Christian courtesy and delicacy, Paul transferred the entire matter to himself and Apollos so that by their example the saints would learn not to have exaggerated opinions of their leaders or to gratify their pride by the formation of parties. He wanted the saints to evaluate everything and everyone by the Scriptures.

In a broader sense, it is an important lesson: not to think beyond what is written; we must take our every cue from Scripture. It used to be that something was considered Biblical if it came from the Bible; today, people say things are "Biblical" if can't find a verse which specifically condemns it. This is to think beyond what is written.....

Three questions to humble the proud; For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

**4:7** If one Christian teacher is more gifted than another, it is because God made him so. Everything he has, he received from the Lord. In fact it is true of all of us that everything we have has been given to us by God. That being the case, why should we be proud or puffed up? Our talents and gifts are not the result of our own cleverness or qualifications.

**4:8** The Corinthians had become self-sufficient; they were already full. They prided themselves on the abundance of spiritual gifts in their midst; they were already rich. They were living in luxury, comfort, and ease. There was no sense of need. They acted as if they were already reigning, but they were doing so without the apostles. Paul states that he could wish that the time to reign had already come so that he might reign with them! But in the meantime, "lifetime is training time for reigning time," as someone has said. Christians will reign with the Lord Jesus Christ when He comes back and sets up His kingdom on earth. In the meantime, their privilege is to share the reproach of a rejected Savior.

**4:9** In contrast to the self-satisfaction of the Corinthians, Paul describes the lot of the apostles. He pictures them as thrown into the arena with wild beasts while men and angels look on.

**4:10** While the apostles were treated as fools for Christ's sake, the saints enjoyed prestige in the community as wise Christians. The apostles were weak, but the Corinthians suffered no infirmity. In contrast to the dishonor of the apostles was the eminence of the saints.

**4:11** It did not seem to the apostles that the hour of triumph or of reigning had come. They were suffering from hunger and thirst and nakedness and persecution. They were hunted, pursued, and homeless.

**4:12** They supported themselves by working with their own hands. For reviling, they returned blessing. When they were persecuted, they did not fight back, but patiently endured.

**4:13** When defamed, they entreated men to accept the Lord Jesus. In short, they were made as the filth of the world, the scum of all things. This description of suffering for the sake of Christ should speak to all our hearts. If the Apostle Paul were living today, could he say to us, as he said to the Corinthians, "You have reigned as kings without us"?

**4:14** In verses 14-21, Paul gives a final admonition to the believers on the subject of divisions. Conscious of the fact that he has been using irony, he explains that he has not done so to shame the Christians, but rather to warn them as his beloved children. He was not inspired by bitterness to speak as he had done, but rather by a sincere interest in their spiritual welfare.

**4:15** The apostle reminds them that though they might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet they have only one father in the faith. Paul himself had led them to the Lord; he was their spiritual father. Many others might come along to teach them, but no others could have the same tender regard for them as the one who pointed them to the Lamb. Paul does not at all intend to depreciate the ministry of teaching, but is simply stating what we all know to be true, namely, that many can be engaged in Christian service without the personal interest in the saints that is characteristic of one who has pointed them to Christ.

**4:16** Paul therefore urges them to be imitators of himself, that is, in his unselfish devotion to Christ and in his tireless love and service for his fellow believers, such as he has described in verses 9-13.

**4:17** In order to help them reach this goal, Paul sent Timothy to them, his beloved and faithful son in the Lord. Timothy was instructed to remind them of Paul's ways in Christ, ways which he taught in all the churches. Paul is saying that he practiced what he preached, and this should be true of everyone who engages in Christian service. Coz when it comes to truth, only he that practices what they preach is indeed faithful.

**4:18** When Paul explained that he was sending Timothy to them, perhaps some of his detractors in Corinth would rise quickly to suggest that Paul was afraid to come himself. These men were puffed up in suggesting that Paul was not coming personally.

**4:19** But he promises that he will come in the near future, if the Lord wills. When he does, he will expose the pride of those who can talk so freely, but have no spiritual power.

**4:20** After all, it is power that counts, for the kingdom of God is not concerned principally with words but with action. It does not consist of profession, but of reality.

**4:21** The manner in which Paul comes to them will depend on themselves. If they show a rebellious spirit, he will come to them with a rod. If, on the other hand, they are humble and submissive, he will come in love and a spirit of gentleness.

So like a father, he truly is, he warns his children of impending stern correction if they do not change.....or loads of goodies if they have been good children.

Or better told is the story Jesus gave in Luke 12:41- 48.....

Paul is facing some of the real challenges of ministry; how to confront sin without being too harsh, or implying that you are above sin; how to get people to conform their lives to the gospel when they think too highly of themselves. This is tough work in a heart to do, and only a great work by the Holy Spirit can accomplish it!