

Ten Thousand Instructors in Christ

1 Corinthians Chapter Four



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

~ Our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God has seen how Paul dealt with divisions and strife in the church at Corinth. In this report, Paul is going to speak about the condition of Christ's willing servants. A submissive condition and joyful service is what should constrain our Christian conduct. As believers, we are ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, we preach by our lives, and the way we live; and we all send a message to the world through our existential being.

It's easy for someone in a church to say to someone else, "*... so and so is my pastor.*" Well, I am neither one's minister, pastor — or Bible teacher. I am a minister of Christ, and I am responsible only to Him for the things I say about Him. None of us have the right to judge others in any capacity; especially when the other person believes they are doing the will of God — and tries to do God's will in their lives. Actually, ministers preside over a higher court than you or I are qualified for; and Paul speaks of three different courts in this chapter; which all believers are required to appear before.

A "*steward*" is in charge of distributing goods and services for another person. A minister is a steward who is charged with dispensing the mysteries of the Word of God. The "*mystery*" is that which has not been revealed previously. The mysteries of the Bible cannot be comprehended nor discerned by the natural man, as we have seen in prior reports. Only the Spirit of God can make the things of Christ Jesus real and meaningful to

us; only the Holy Spirit can even show them to us. That's the "mystery" Paul is talking about; and it is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Mystery Parable discourse in Matthew chapter thirteen, Jesus concludes by asking, "*do you understand these things?*" The disciples said they did. I don't know whether they did or not but, honestly, I don't think they did at that time; because I'm not sure how well we understand them now. Well, Jesus said, "*a faithful steward brings forth from the household things both new and old!*" That part I *DO* understand. That's what a faithful steward today should be doing, too; bringing forth from the Word of God things both new and old.

I'm sure many people have heard many of the things I say and teach from the Bible many times before. Well, I am to bring forth both new and old, but I suppose I bring forth more old than anything else? Quite frankly, I think all the words have been said; just as all the musical notes have been played. I'm sure most people don't like what I do, but studying to be quiet and show myself approved is just about all I know how to do for the Lord. Either way, it is wonderful to be a steward of the mysteries of God. Can you think of any calling higher than that?

Well, it's very important that a man in this position be found faithful; in fact, it is the most important thing of all things in the church. Many great rewards in Heaven will have nothing to do with some significant accomplishment; some of the best rewards will be for simple faithfulness in our service to the Lord. Those faithful few that can be depended on just happen to mean everything in this world! And Faithfulness is one of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit....

² Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

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.

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

Three courts all believers must appear before:

(1) Others. Paul says he doesn't worry about what others think about him; and that sure sounds anti-social, doesn't it? Well, this doesn't mean Paul didn't value the opinion of others, and it doesn't mean he was immune to the estimations of those around him, either. Paul always defended his apostleship with great emotion when it was challenged. As we can see in this chapter, Paul was deeply hurt by false rumors and profoundly affected by hurtful accusations. He was very sensitive to what other people thought; but he never altered his mission to fit the acceptance of others.

Whether we like it or not, we're all judged by others. Abraham Lincoln said, *"... public opinion in this country is everything!"* Unfortunately, that is a true statement. Even so, there is a huge danger in deferring to the opinion of others and yielding to the criticism of our enemies. Some people have actually surrendered their principles, honor and reputation to the court of public opinion. Milton said, *"... the last infirmity of a noble mind is the love of fame!"* That's a rather direct comment. Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Sun, said, *"... fame is a vapor; popularity always an accident; riches take wings; those cheering today will be cursing tomorrow; only one thing endures: character!"* The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise as opposed to being strengthened by criticism.

(2) The second court, which is higher than the first court of *"others"* is the court of oneself. That's conscience. Unfortunately, conscience is never a safe guide because it's rarely accurate; however, having an enlightened disposition, we should be able to discern when something lines up with Scripture or not, and make a judgment accordingly. When it appeals to easy ways, or our vanity, we need to be wary. Shakespeare said, *"... to thine own self be true."* Someone else said, *"... within ourselves lies dormant triumph or defeat!"* Well, we have already had an age of conscience that

ended in a flood, friends. The honest man is never influenced by or guided by others; he operates on what he believes is the truth. Self-judgment is a brave formula and a noble rule, to be sure; but even Paul says he doesn't follow that rule. Paul said he knew of nothing against himself; but that didn't clear him, either. Sins of ignorance are likely the biggest problem in a Christians' life today.

See, it's human nature to be harsh on others, but we're very lenient on ourselves. That was King David's problem, you may remember; he could see the evil in someone else — but not in himself. No, we're not apt to be severe with ourselves. We all cast ourselves in the best possible light in every situation — bad or good. Generally, it's a grossly distorted image we portray of ourselves.

(3) The Bema of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Each one of us will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and some a lot sooner than you think, friends. Of course, we believers aren't going to be judged for our sins — because those have been removed; and God remembers them no more - but - our stewardship is going to be inspected and judged to determine our rewards. Our physical possessions, bodies, material resources and *GIVING* to the Lord's work — *ALL* of those things will be judged at the Bema Seat. You can just write that all down. We should live in the light of that truth, friends....

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.

~ See, we aren't to judge one another because the "*hidden things of darkness*" are going to be brought out into the light in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Judgment is His prerogative — not ours. After that, we will have praise from God. I cannot imagine being praised by God, personally. I think I'm going to be a little embarrassed — maybe even ashamed — at that. Remember the priests during revival in Chronicles were ashamed. Have you

ever noticed how some people have nothing but good things to say about others? I could use some improvement in that area – how about you? ~

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.

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?

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.

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.

¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

¹¹ Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;

¹² And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:

¹³ Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

¹⁴ I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.

15 For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

16 Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

17 For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

18 Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.

19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

20 For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

21 What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

~ We all need to thank God for our spiritual gifts today and take care to *only* boast in the cross of Christ. There is a whole lot more we could say about verse nine; but I'm just going to leave it to speak to your heart – or not. Other men have labored, and we have entered into their labors. Paul suffered beyond our imagination to write these epistles, friends. Paul poured out his life to get the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ out to the world – specifically, to *Y-O-U!* Paul also fought for the integrity of the Word of God in the churches he started. See, these things will be all-important to any genuine child of God; because we know, understand, love, discern and cherish our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. A-Men ~

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Page 6 of 6