

1 CORINTHIANS 4 Stewards of the Mysteries of God (vs. 1-5); Fools for Christ Sake (vs. 6-13); Paul's Paternal Care (vs. 14-21)

OBSERVATION

Monday 7:00pm, H 105 (1st floor, High School--foot of stairs, behind the gym, by the vending machine area), Tuesday 7:00am, Family, Room, CCCM – Phil Twente, cell #714 425 9221; email – ptwente@gmail.com For past studies, audio plus notes, go to: www.ptwente.com Click on "Latest Studies" on the right side. References include commentaries by numerous pastor/teachers.

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

1 CORINTHIANS 4 Stewards of the Mysteries of God (vs. 1-5); Fools for Christ Sake (vs. 6-13); Paul's Paternal Care (vs. 14-21)

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD -A minister of Christ is to be a steward entrusted with what Paul calls "the mysteries of God," that secret and hidden wisdom of God, these valuable truths which are only found in the revelation of the Word of God and nowhere else. **They are responsible to dispense them continually to the congregation so that lives are changed and lived on the basis of these remarkable truths..** These mysteries, when understood, are the basis upon which all God's purposes in our lives are worked out.

The mystery of the kingdom of God (Mark 4:11)

This means an understanding of God at work in history, how He is working through the events of our day and of the days of the past and how He uses these events that fill the pages of our newspapers to carry out His purposes. It is the business of a minister of Christ to unfold that to people, and to help them to understand the events the world interprets on other grounds, but which God is intending to use in a quite different way in history and in their lives.

The mystery of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7)

This is the explanation we desperately need to be reminded of continually, of why we are never able to make any progress when it comes to solving human dilemmas -- why every generation without exception repeats the struggle, problems and difficulties of the previous generation. We do not have instinct to guide us as the animals do, and we never seem to learn from the past. That is why we wrestle endlessly with the same basic struggles and problems. There is no advance because of **the mystery of lawlessness, that evil, invisible company of forces that are constantly twisting and distorting the thinking of men. They lead us down garden paths into error and illusion and cause us to see things out of proportion and out of relationship with reality. We assume that something is true when it is not and act on that basis.** That is why we get mixed up all the time. You will never understand that if you do not understand the mystery of lawlessness

More Examples on next column)

The mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16). -- "Christ in you, the hope of glory," (Col. 1:27b).

This is the remarkable secret that God has provided by which a Christian is enabled to live right in the midst of the pressures of the world with all of its illusion and all of its danger, not to run away from it but to refuse to conform to it and do so in a loving, gracious way. What is the secret? It is the secret of an imparted life -- "Christ in you, the hope of glory," (Colossians 1:27b) . **Christ in you, available to you -- His life, His wisdom, His strength, His power to act available to you -- to enable you to do what you do not think you can do at the moment, but, when you choose to do, you find you have the strength to perform.** That is the mystery of godliness, the most life-transforming doctrine that has ever been set before man, radical in its effect.

The mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4).

Then there is the "mystery of Christ (the church) -**Eph. 3:1-6**, that strange **new society that God is building which is to be a demonstration of a totally different life style before a watching world, and which is to repel the impact of the world upon it, and, instead, be an impact upon the world around to change it.** That is a mystery. Those who are called to teach this and preach this in a church congregation are stewards of that mystery, entrusted with it to set it out and to help people to face the facts of life without fear and favor so that all can experience both the ecstasy and the agony of Christian experience

1 CORINTHIANS: CHAPTER FOUR:

- Vs. 1-7 - The true view of a minister of Christ.
- Vs. 1- 2 - The responsibilities of ministers.
- Vs. 3-5 - The proper evaluation of ministers.
- Vs. 6-7 - The freedom which they are to exercise when their flock sees them in the proper light.
- Vs. 8-21 – Fools for Christ's sake; Paul's paternal care

I WILL SERVE YOU!

*I will serve You, because I love You
You have given life to me
I was nothing until You found me
You have given life to me*

*Heartache, broken people
Ruined lives are why You died on Calv'ry
Your touch is what I long for
You have given life to me (2X)*

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INTERPRETATION

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1 CORINTHIANS 4 Stewards of the Mysteries of God (vs. 1-5);

The Ministry of Apostles

1Co 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants (huperetes, literally "an under-rower") of Christ and stewards (oikonomos, housekeeper, administrator, steward or stewardess) of the (divine) mysteries of God.

1Co 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful (trustworthy).

1Co 4:3 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.

v. 1a *servants (huperetes)* Paul is saying for men to consider himself and Apollos as slaves, literally under rowers, of Christ. The under rowers were the lowest of the lowly being used in the lower galleys of ships to man the oars.

v. 1b *"stewards of the mysteries of God."* The word for steward is *oikonomos*. The **primary requirement of a steward was to be faithful to the master in overseeing, administering, knowing the location of his master's goods.**

v. 2 *Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful* There are parables in the gospels of Jesus concerning stewardship of those that were good and bad, stewards of the things that were entrusted to them. The faithful were rewarded and the unfaithful were punished. As stewards of God, it's most important that we be faithful as stewards. They were also to be guardians over the word of God. They as we, are to be faithful in dispensing God's word and the truths of God as now being revealed by the Holy Spirit. **Notice the emphasis is on being found faithful (like Jeremiah?); not being successful (like Jonah?)**

v. 3 There were always those that would follow up after Paul's ministry, seeking to subvert it. People began to judge Paul because of these things. He said it's a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. It doesn't really bother me that I would be judged by you or by man's judgment. He said I don't even judge myself. The ministers of Christ should make it their full and continual endeavor to approve themselves trustworthy; and when they have the testimony of a good conscience, and the approval of their Master, they must slight the opinions and censures of their fellow-servants

v. 1a A minister of Christ in the New Testament churches was anyone, who by virtue of a gift of the Spirit was a preacher or a teacher of the Word of God. A minister **is not to be "a mild-mannered man standing before mild-mannered people, and exhorting them to be more mild mannered."** We are to consider ourselves as slaves, under rowers of Christ, who reacted simply to the cadence, **not knowing where they were going. This position, as the lowest of slaves, was always to completely and unquestionably obey the captain's orders. Does that describe your present relationship with Jesus Christ? Are you listening to anyone or anything other than Christ?**

v. 1b Additionally as a slave of Christ, we are to be stewards, an administrator or house/property keeper, **who were always to be found faithful at dispensing the mysteries** so people understand them. As faithful stewards in ministry, we're to be able to know the location of the riches of Scripture. **Mt.13:52** *Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."* Jesus is talking about the ability to relocate the illustrations, types, and stories of the Old Testament to His own life—and later to the entire New Testament.

v. 2 As stewards we are required to be found faithful. You may fail at many things as a teacher, a preacher, a leader of a class. You may not make it in many areas, **but do not miss it in this one – being found faithful. Be sure that you are setting forth the mysteries of God. That is what you will be judged on.** That is being "a good steward of the mysteries of God," if you set forth these truths. **Does your life reflect evidence of obedience and being faithful at dispensing the mysteries of God** so that people understand them?

v. 3 I do not even judge myself: Our estimation of our self is usually wrong. We are almost always too hard or too easy on ourselves. Paul recognizes this, and so not even judge himself. In the end, He who judges me is the Lord. **Do you agree?**

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1Co 4:4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.

1Co 4:5 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 (motives) of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Fools for Christ Sake (vs. 6-13);

1Co 4:6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other (factions, divisions).

1Co 4:7 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?

v. 4 *nothing against myself*, If you judge me, that doesn't bother me. I don't know anything against me. Not that's quite a thing to say. Paul had established his place in Christ. He knew that everything had been forgiven. There is no condemnation. So he could say, I don't even judge myself because I don't know anything against me. Any charges that may have been brought against me, have all been covered by Jesus Christ. He who judges me is the Lord.

v. 5 There is a time of judgement coming. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things that we have done while in our bodies, whether good or evil. Every thing will be naked and open. The Lord will judge our hearts, including our motives.. Our works will be examined by fire. Those that endure will receive their rewards. For others there will be the loss of our works, but we will be saved. He will bring to light or reveal the counsels of the heart. Amazing!
So Paul says, wait for the judgment. It's coming. And it will be a righteous judgment as Jesus comes to judge. Then, we will receive the praise of God and rewarded for the things that we have done for Christ out of a pure motivation.

v. 6 *I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes*, - We are husbandmen or farmers. We are builders and we are servants or stewards. The figures that Paul uses, of the husbandman, of the stewards, must be found faithful, and of the master builders, Christ the foundation. And building on that foundation with precious metal or gems or building on it with wood, hay or stubble. Not, I'm of Apollos! I'm of Paul, and you get puffed up against each other. But Paul said, I've written these things to you so that you really won't be attached to a man. **You need to be attached to the Lord Jesus Christ.**

v. 7 If I have anything of value, any gift, any talent, any knowledge, special knowledge, it's not because of anything that I have done or am. **I have it because God has given it to me.** If it is a gift of Him, then how can I boast about it? Therefore it is not something to be puffed up over as though I did anything to receive it. It comes as God's gift. If you have received it, how can you glory as though you didn't receive it, as though you are something yourself?

v. 4 Paul also recognizes that he does not stand in a perfect state of justification or innocence just because his conscience was clear. Even though he had a godly walk, he knew his righteousness came from Jesus, not from his own personal life. **Who or what are you looking at regarding your own righteousness?**

v. 5 Paul is saying, You Corinthians act like judges at athletic events, qualified to give some the trophy and to send others away as losers. But Jesus is the only judge, and you are judging before the events are over. When Jesus judges, it will be according to the motives of the heart, not only the outward action. Paul knew he had little praise from the Corinthian Christians, but that did not concern him. He knew there was a day coming when our praise will come from God, not from man. **How eager are you looking forward to that day of judgment and being face to face with the Lord Jesus?**

v. 6 Paul said, I've given you figurative examples of Apollos and me so that you really won't be attached to a man. **You need to be attached to the Lord Jesus Christ.** And you need not to be puffed up or lifted up one against another. **Are you sure you're attached, not to men, but to the Lord Jesus Christ?**

v. 7. It's so easy to take our God given gifts and feel we're somehow special that we have such gifts that maybe others don't have. **Do you ever boast, believe, or act like that the gifts that God has given you are your own and take credit for them? Have you learned to be content with what the God has given you?**

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1Co 4:8 You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!

***1Co 4:9 For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle (theater) to the world, both to angels and to men* (most likely evil angels-demons- and wicked men).**

1Co 4:10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise* (compromising for your own safety) ***in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!**

1Co 4:11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.

1Co 4:12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;

v. 8 This is sort of their opinion of themselves. You think that you have got it all. You're rich. You're full. You reign as kings. He said, I wish you really did reign that we also might reign with you!

v. 9 Paul said, I think that we apostles are sort of last or at the bottom of the list because to be called to be an apostle is like having an appointment for death. *spectacle to the world*, At that time, Christians were made a spectacle to the world. The Christians were fed them to the lions in the arena for the entertainment of the Romans. They became a spectacle to the world. They were entertainment for the world.

v. 10 Following Christ in those days **pretty much insured the death sentence**. It was a capital crime in Rome to not pay allegiance to Caesar by declaring “Caesar is Lord”, but the early believers refused to declare that. They declared that Jesus was Lord! *but you are wise in Christ!* (You Corinthians. We are fools for Christ. **We'll sacrifice our lives for Him, but you'll play it safe.** You'll compromise in order to get along with the world and to live in peaceful co-existence. *We are weak, but you are strong!* You look down upon us. You exalt yourselves. In your own eyes, *You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!*

v. 11 *We both hunger and thirst*: Paul's description of his own ministry focuses on deprivation and humiliation. These were things that the Corinthian Christians wanted to avoid at all cost. The church is heavy with this same attitude today. They were concerned about the image of worldly success and power, and many of them despised Paul and the other apostles because they did not display that image. Today, there is no shortage of ministers who want to display the image of worldly success and power, of Christians who will value that in their minister.

v. 12 Paul felt it necessary in order to defend himself against the false charges that were being made by these people, who were taking sides, taking sides against Paul. He felt it sort of a necessity to affirm to them again the price that he paid to bring to them the gospel. The price that he paid in order to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, the things that he suffered.

v. 8 You Corinthians are acting like you have it all! Isn't it rather strange that we apostles have nothing! His sarcasm here is to shake them out of their proud self-willed thinking. Wouldn't it be great if they really were reigning already? Then Paul also might reign with you! In this regard **what is the level of your humility regarding the gifts that the Lord has given you?**

v. 9 The image of the coliseum, or the parade of a conquering Roman general, with the defeated captives who would be condemned to die in the arena, so Paul now salutes the Corinthian Christians! *spectacle* (theater) He is speaking of how the apostles have been publicly humiliated. This kind of humiliation was the greatest horror to the pride of the Corinthian Christians. Note their two problems: **they were proud of their own spirituality**, and **they were somewhat embarrassed** of Paul because of his “weakness” and humble state. **What is our level of pride of our own spirituality and our compassion for those Christians being persecuted?**

v. 10 *fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ!* With contrast after contrast, Paul sarcastically shows how foolish it is for the Corinthians to think that they are more spiritually privileged, or blessed, or endowed, than the apostles were. **Are we thinking of ourselves as being more spiritually privileged or blessed than the apostles?**

v. 11 As you consider your fellowship, how impressed are you with worldly success and power? **Do you look down on believers who are more interested in their spiritual things of God as opposed to their material success?**

v. 12 The Corinthians, in their love of Greek wisdom, embraced the Greek idea that **manual labor was fit only for slaves**. It was **offensive to them that any of God's apostles would actually work with his own hands!** **Are you willing to do whatever the Lord has for you, no matter how menial the task?**

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INTERPRETATION

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1Co 4:13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth (refuse, world's garbage) of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

Paul's Paternal Care (vs. 14-21)

1Co 4:14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.

1Co 4:15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

1Co 4:16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

v. 13 People either loved Paul or they hated Paul. Those that hated him, those that were his detractors, really did their best to destroy him in the minds of others. Lest the Corinthians thought Paul lucky to be so gifted, he said, “You have it easy compared to what we go through daily. We’re beaten and defamed. We don’t even have a place to hang our hats. We’re put down, mocked, and persecuted.” Paul makes a very important point about ministry when he says, “**Be careful that you don’t think everyone else is lucky, gifted and blessed but you.**”

v. 14 These people that are causing the divisions, these people that are saying all of these ugly, nasty things, you are listening to them. You are forming your opinions. I don’t write this just to shame you, I just want to warn you about these things.

v. 15 Paul said, you may have a lot of instructors come along and give their credentials, you know. They try to discredit me, but you can’t get away from it, I’m the one who brought you to Jesus Christ. I’m the one who first brought the witness of Christ to you. I’m the one who brought you into the family of God. You are my children in the faith, and that you can’t escape. You may go out and you may listen to others. You may be ensnared in some of their doctrinal positions and be carried away and have all of these instructors, but you have only one father and I’ve begotten you in Christ Jesus. I’m your spiritual father.

16 Imitate me - You be followers of me. Some of these will lead you astray, be followers of me. The first reaction would probably be, “No way would we imitate you, Paul? You are regarded as a fool, weak, dishonored, hungry and thirsty and poorly clothed, homeless and beaten, working hard to support yourself with manual labor. People look at you and see filth and the offscouring of all things. And you want us to imitate you? Yes, not because of all these difficulties, but despite them, and often because of them, the glory and power of Jesus Christ shines through me.” Cf. **1Co 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.**

v. 13 *Being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now:* Paul is saying that When slandered, the apostles would reach out in kindness to the one who spoke against them. This was offensive to the Corinthians. They thought a man was a weak and cowardly if he didn’t fight back when slandered. Our problem is we often want a middle road; a little popularity, a little reputation, but still the anointing of God. We want the power without the cost. **God help us to choose Paul’s way!**

v. 14 *not . . . to Shame you . . . but to warn you:* With his biting sarcasm, Paul knows the Corinthian Christians might be pretty ashamed. He wants them to know his purpose hasn’t been to make them feel ashamed, but to warn them of a significant spiritual danger: pride. **How successful have you been in warning others of spiritual dangers? Do they usually end up just feeling ashamed?**

v. 15 The instructor was a *paidagogoi*, a guardian or “slave-guide,” who escorted the boys to and from school, and who supervised their general conduct. The instructor did have legitimate authority, but certainly not like a father. Paul had a unique place of authority and leadership among the Corinthian Christians, not only because he fathered the church itself in Corinth, but also because of his apostolic authority. Leading someone to Christ does not give you special authority over their lives, but it does give you a special relationship. **How do you view those you have led to Christ?**

v. 16 *imitate me -?? What kind of a spiritual father are you? Can you say do just as I do?* What would the body of Christ look like if everyone was just like me? If everyone **gave just as I give?** If everyone’s **prayer life was just like mine,** with the same consistency and fervency? If **everyone came and served just like I do?** If everyone was **faithful just as I am?** **Do just what I do? What if everybody was just like you? Therefore I urge you, imitate me.**

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1Co 4:17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

1Co 4:18 Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.

1Co 4:19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.

1Co 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

1Co 4:21 What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

v. 17 Timothy was a great assistant to Paul. Paul would send him to the places that he couldn't go personally. Timothy was Paul's son in the faith. Timothy, Paul said, has my heart. There is no one that really has my heart quite like Timothy. He is like-minded to me. So I am sending him to you. So, Paul is sending Timothy to Corinth, here, because **he will affirm to them the manner of living of Paul and the things that Paul taught to them.** He's my beloved son and he is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my ways, of the way I live, of the sacrifices that I have made for Jesus Christ. Of the way I live in a life of full commitment to the things of the Lord and the things that I teach everywhere in every church.

v. 18 Many of the Corinthians are just looking at Paul, for something to accuse him about. They're saying, he's too proud to come. He is sending Timothy! Why doesn't he come himself? And **there are those who are ready to find fault over anything.** Some of you are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you, sending a subordinate.

v. 19 I do plan to come to you if the Lord wills. (*James 4:13-15*). No man knows what a day might bring forth. So here is Paul practicing what James tells us we should do. **Keep open, keep flexible to the will of God.** Don't get set in a rut. My plan is to come to you shortly, if the Lord wills. and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up with their empty words, but the power.

v. 20 These people were **puffed up with all their vain words.** Paul said, we will demonstrate the power of God. They can have their vain words. **We will demonstrate the power of God.**

v. 21 I'll be coming, but would you rather I would come with a rod, or would you rather I just come in love and a spirit of gentleness? So Paul is **dealing with the problems.** He wants to minister in love. He **wants to come to them in the spirit of meekness.** He **doesn't want to have to come and correct a lot of these guys that have puffed up, creating the divisions and all.** He's calling on them **to not be carnal**, to not be like babies, but to mature and to grow up in Christ. May God help us to grow up and be mature in the things of the Lord.

v. 17 Timothy seemed to be Paul's chief “trouble shooter,” often being sent to problem churches. **Is your life one where you would be thought of as helpful in being sent as a spiritual trouble shooter?**

v. 18 Some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you: Some were so arrogant as to think that Paul was afraid to visit them. When they thought Paul was afraid of them, it made them all the more proud in their hearts. **What is your level of pride.** God hates a “proud look”. (*Prov. 6:17*)

v. 19-20 Many of the Corinthian Christians who loved high sounding words and the image of success had their words, but Paul had the true power of the gospel. The final test of wisdom is power; the Word of the Cross not only has the power to mentally illumine, but also to morally save eternally! **In or on what are you basing your spiritual power?**

v. 21 This is one 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! **Are you clearly depending on the work of the Spirit to allow your meeting such challenges?**

Summary:

Be faithful! Row as directed, one day at a time.

Be content in the gifting the Lord has given you.

Be thankful!

When Jesus comes, will we hear Him say, “Depart from Me” or, “Well done, good and faithful servant”?

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