

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

“Be Found Faithful”

The bible says, “*Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, But who can find a faithful man?*” Prov 20:6 It’s relatively easy to find a fickle man, but a faithful man is hard to come by. You know it’s like the young man who poured out his heart’s devotion in a letter to the girl of his dreams. and He wrote, “Darling, I would climb the highest Mt, swim the widest stream, cross the burning desert, die at the stake for you. P.S. I’ll see you on Saturday, if it doesn’t rain.” and I find that more than not that’s exactly how we are when it comes to the things of God. We’re committed as long as it’s convenient. But that’s not faithfulness, that’s flighty, it’s not true commitment, it’s inconsistent, yet it’s required in a steward that one be found faithful.

We’re coming to the conclusion of this context that deals with division that Paul has been discussing in this his 1st letter to the Corinthians. They were debating and dividing over who they felt was the greater gospel communicator, who was the most profound preacher, or who articulated the most eloquently, some were siding with Paul, others with Apollos, some said Peter was the man, and the super spiritual said, “We don’t need any man but the Man Christ Jesus, we’re of Jesus.” and Paul has been seeking to set the record straight, that there aren’t different factions, or various parties under which we reside in Christ. Christ is one, and we’re all 1 in Him, oh He may’ve called us to various roles, but we’re all on the same team, seeking to accomplish the same objective. We want to see people saved, the kingdom increase, God glorified and magnified their lives. There are all kinds of players on a football team, and they’re assigned various roles, but they’re all after 1 objective, a win. So whether they’re seeking to get the ball to the end of the field, or to keep the other team from doing the same, whether they’re playing offensively, or defensively, doesn’t matter, they’re all working towards the same objective and need each other to accomplish the goal. Paul used the illustration of farming out in a field, God may use one to plant, another to water, but they’re both one, seeking the same thing, life to burst forth and grow from that seed. The planter needs the waterer and the waterer needs the planter, and so it’s silly to set them against one another when in reality they work together. and The fact of the matter is that the planter is really nothing, and the waterer is really nothing, the One to magnify and glorify is God who gives the increase. (Look at Vs 21 of Ch 3, thru Vs 23)

Paul is saying, “Man you’re thinking way too small when you start seeking to identify with one at the exclusion of another, because *all* are yours in Christ. Paul, Apollos, Peter, for that matter the world, life and death, things present or things to come, all are yours.” and The idea here is that God has so much for you, but you’re saying you’re going to isolate yourself to Paul, or Peter, or Apollos, God has given them *all* to you, for the building up and benefit of the body. Remember Paul told the Ephesians that when Christ ascended on high that He gave gifts to men. and He said, “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*” Eph 4:11-13

God raises up various individuals, equips them by His Spirit in such a way as to benefit His body, and then gives them as gifts *to* the body, that He might bless and build up the body by them.

Paul says, “It’s all yours, but not even just the men of God, even the creation of God, it’s all yours.” This world belongs to you, but here’s the hook, you belong to Christ, and Christ is Gods. What does that mean? It means that all things are yours so much, or so long as you are Christ’s.

The bible tells us, “*For by Him (that is by Christ) all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.*” But under Him, He entrusts them to *you*, and that’s the idea that leads us into this particular portion whereby Paul paints this picture of servants, and stewards and as such being found faithful.

Vs 1-2

I find that as humanity we’re prone to vacillate toward extremes. Perhaps you remember that old Billy Joel song called, “I go to extremes.” and One particular chorus goes, “I don’t know why I go to extremes, too high or too low there ain’t no in-betweens, and if I stand or I fall It’s all or nothing at all Darling I don’t know why I go to extremes.” Well, I have a suspicion that I know why, it’s called sin tainted human nature, that particular tendency isn’t limited to Billy Joel, it’s common to man. and It can creep into the church when it comes to evaluating men and their ministries. **We either have relatively no guard at all so that we’re open and susceptible to just about anything anyone says, or we become so hypercritical that we’d find fault if Paul himself were on this platform behind this pulpit. We’ll hear from maybe one person, and that’s it, “I’m of Apollos, not Paul.” Yes, we want to “test” the spirits to see if they be of God, but we don’t want to grieve the Spirit in becoming consistent, persistent, unrelenting fault finders.**

and I say that to say this, Paul is here speaking about the balance as to how we’re to perceive and have proper regard for those men of God that He has given *to* us as gifts *for* us, for the building up and benefit of His body. Not overly exalted, yet not so low that there’s a sense of disdain and disrespect. He says (read Vs 1)

So there’s 2 words here that Paul utilizes to help us get a grip on the proper perspective the people of God. Now specifically he’s in regards to church leaders, that would be the interpretation, but the application fans out to include us all, because as the body of Christ we’ve been deemed as #1 *Servants* of Christ, and #2 *Stewards* of the mysteries of God.

Paul says, “Let a man so *consider* us,” which is to say, “This is how we’re to be perceived.” This word “consider” means, “to count, or to deem,” it’s a word that deals with reality, he’s not speaking hypothetically. As if to say, “Hypothetically speaking you could consider us this way,” that’s not what he’s saying. **He’s saying, “This is who we are, and how we need to be perceived.”** and He uses these 2 words to create a balance so that they’re not exalted above measure, but neither are they to be scorned, disrespected and disdained, the fact is that God has vested authority into their lives that needs to be recognized and conceded to. The 1st word deals with the fact that there’s not to be an over exalting or creating celebrity like status amongst church leaders, various pastors or people of God. He says, “1st of all we’re servants.”

Now one thing that most all of you are familiar with is that the Greek language is much more expressive and articulate than is the English language, I love you, and I love my wife, but the way I love is different than the way I love my wife. However the only way you're able to discern the type of love I'm in regards to in the English language is based upon the context of my conversation, perhaps the inflection of my voice. But the Greek language has at least 4 different words (each with its own implication and connotation) that translate into the single English word "love." The same is true for this word, "servant." There's at least 3 words that translate into the word "servant" from the Greek. The most common is "Doulos" which means "Bondsman, or bond slave," Paul, a "bondservant" of Jesus Christ we see him start his letters frequently like that, it's the word "doulos." But then there's another word, which is this word, "huperetes" and it speaks of a couple of things.

The "huperetes" was the "under-rower," you know who that guy was; you've seen them in the movies. The ones below the decks on that big Roman galley all chained together sitting at the giant oars just rowing to the beat of that big kettle like drum. They don't have a say in the heading of the ship, they simply row to the beat of the drum. and So in one sense Paul is saying, "That's who we are, we're not the ones in command, Jesus Christ is the captain of the ship, we're simply rowing in the direction of His heading." Last time I checked the under-rower wasn't much of a position to be envied or held in celebrity-like esteem. But this word spans a bit more than that as well, the "huperetes" were also the soldiers of the king, they would be those who would administer penalties and proper discipline when the situation called for it. The bottom line is that they were hands on type laborers, but definitely simply servants, not to be exalted.

The 2nd word Paul uses to describe himself (and church leadership as goes the interpretation, but we're broadening the scope to include all of us in the application) is the word "stewards." Now what is a steward? A steward was much higher, as a matter of fact the highest holding that a slave could have in a household. In fact the steward of the house would be over everyone and everything in the house with the exception of the master of the house and that was it. So that as far as every other servant was concerned the steward was the master, but as far as the master was concerned, the steward was a servant. and The steward was the manager of everything that belonged to the master, his finances, his business transactions, he managed the other servants, he made sure everyone was fed, was clothed, tended to and taken care of. He took care of everything, kept detailed ledgers so that at anytime the master could require an account and he'd have it ready to go. So in one respect we're servants (Paul was saying) not to be overly exalted, but in another respect God has given us authority that needs to be acknowledged and regarded, you see there's that balance, not one extreme or the other. We're stewards of the mysteries (that is the doctrines of God revealed by the Spirit in Christ). We're to tend to kingdom matters. Now Vs 2 is where I want our focus to turn towards.

Vs2

I want you to notice 1st of all that there's a non-option clause that's included in the "job description" of the steward. We read, "Moreover it is required in stewards." There's no gray area there, it's a requirement, what does it mean to have something "required" of you? Well the Webster's collegiate dictionary defines it as something that's claimed or asked for by right and authority, as something called for as suitable and appropriate, or to demand as necessary or essential. It's a word that demands something back, or exacts something due, and the idea is that "I've given or entrusted something into your care, now in lieu of that I demand something back from you." Well, God has entrusted some things into your care, not only various gifts spiritually, assets materially and financially, but also counsel of His Word specifically. Now in lieu of that He demands something back of us...what is that? Eloquence? Great oratory skills? That we be popular with the people, well pleasing to everyone? No, there's one requirement made of a steward that's that he/she be found *faithful*. That is that you, or I can be relied upon, confided in, trustworthy in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of official duties.

Remember Jesus said, "*Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.*" Luke 12:42-44 The faithful steward is a doer, a diligent worker as it pertains to the matters of his master, and God raises up the faithful and rewards the faithfulness found in our lives.

David recognized this same principle regarding the requirement of faithfulness and wrote "*My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, That they may dwell with me; he who walks in a perfect way, He shall serve me.*" Ps 101:6 and As I thought this through regarding those whom God raised up and used throughout the scriptures, by and large the common quality that characterized most all of them is this quality of faithfulness. Think about it, who is probably the quintessential steward of the OT? Joseph right? and What I want you to realize about these guys that I draw to your attention is that for each of them there was the Divine initiative, God called them. and Such is always the case, Jesus said, "*You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain,*" John 15:16 God always initiates the call, but then there's the human responsibility, I have a choice to respond to that call and then to be faithful or unfaithful to the Lord *in* that call. Something else you should realize is that God called each of them in uniquely different and distinct ways. God knows where you're at and what your needs are, and His call to you, and the way in which He reaches out to you will most likely be completely different from the way He's called out to me. He deals with you uniquely, distinctly, personally, right where you're at. Something else still yet that you should be aware of is that these guys were faithful to the Lord and His call to stewardship upon their lives through thick and thin, good times and bad, it wasn't always smooth sailing, or convenient climate in which they were serving the Lord. Yet they remained faithful.

Think of Joseph, God called *him* through a series of dreams, he knew God had great things in store for him, and he was faithful. He was faithful with his dad's business (wasn't the brothers favorite, wasn't real popular, didn't always respond to a situation just right, but he was faithful). Then he was sold into slavery, he didn't go, "God I thought you had great things for me, if this is the way it's going to go, forget it." He stayed true, remained faithful, God raised him up, rewarded him, he was made the ruler over all of Potiphar's house. Gen 39 tells us, "*The LORD was with Joseph, and he was a successful man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight, and served him. Then he made him overseer of his house, and all that he had he put under his authority. So it was, from the time that he had made him overseer of his house and all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had in the house and in the field. Thus he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he did not know what he had except for the bread which he ate.*" Gen 39:2-6 Joseph was made the steward of the house, and he was faithful, probably thought he was on his way to the big things God had revealed to him. But then he was cast into prison through false allegations, was in the dungeon for over 2 years. and You know the story, God ultimately raised him up out of that situation, caused him to be set in place as the 2nd most powerful man on the face of the earth right under Pharaoh whereby God used him to make a life saving impact on this entire globe. There were tough times, but he was faithful and God honored that.

Moses, more than likely in line to be Pharaoh himself, yet submitted himself to the call of God. and It cost him position, prestige, power, yet he committed himself into God's care, spent 40 yrs in the wilderness, then God called him. Not through dreams or visions, but He spoke directly to Moses, via the burning bush. But His call wasn't a walk in the park; he was called to another 40 yrs of leading a few million people around the desert. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm overwhelmingly honored by the call God has placed on my life. But at this point I only lead a few hundred, in relatively plush conditions, and it can be tough. (Now there's nothing more rewarding, and I couldn't ask for anything more) But we as people have a tendency to be temperamental, not everyone always gets along, we have problems from time to time, and we hang out in the A/C for the most part. ;0) But Moses had that quantified 10,000 times over, out in the hot, miserable desert.

Yet when God is rebuking Aaron and Miriam for coming against Moses He tells them that generally speaking He reveals Himself to prophets via dreams or visions. But He says, "*Not so with My servant Moses; He is (Check it out) faithful in all My house.*" Num 12:7

Joshua was faithful, even though he had to wonder around in the desert for 40 yrs waiting for an entire generation to die off before he could enter the Promised Land, nor did he win every battle *in* the Promised Land, but he remained faithful.

God called out to Daniel in a vision, used him tremendously, and he remained faithful emphatically, God used him in the Babylonian kingdom during the captivity. Even after Babylon fell to the Medes we read, "...*Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.*" Dan 6:3-4

and We could just go on and on, Samuel (whom God called out to in the night) was faithful, Gideon, Noah, Abraham, Nehemiah, Elijah, Elisha, men who were faithful to God and with the things He'd called them to and committed to their trust. **Now on the other hand there are men like Saul, Saul wasn't faithful, so God lowered him, took the throne from him. and Gave it to David, remember what Ahimelech told Saul concerning David?** He said, "...*who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house?*" 1 Sam 22:14 and Look at the way God used David's life, promised that the Messiah would come through his lineage, was the greatest king that Israel ever knew. **Now if we had time we could go through these guys and find plenty of faults in each of them, they weren't always popular with the people, they didn't always make the right decision, weren't by any means perfect, but they were faithful. and God used them incredibly, because it's not required of a steward that one be found faultless, but that one be found faithful, committed to and trustworthy with those things that God has entrusted to you.**

Question; what has God found in you? Faithfulness, or fickleness; commitment or convenience, self sacrifice, or self centeredness? Listen, God desires, in fact God *requires* faithfulness. Let me encourage you to be found faithful, the bible says, "*Like the cold of snow in time of harvest Is a faithful messenger to those who send him, For he refreshes the soul of his masters.*" Prov 25:13

How awesome to be counted as refreshing source to the soul of our Master, Jesus Christ Oh He's not weary or worn down, but there's that sense whereby we want Him to be well pleased with our lives. Leave 1st Cor turn quickly to Matt 25:14-29

Be found faithful, God will bless your life, both here and now and in eternity to come, what has God committed to your trust? How are you handling it? Maybe you're not sure what He's committed to your trust, allow me to reiterate. If you have a family God's entrusted them to you, how are you doing there? Are you keeping Jesus in the center of it? If you have a job, God's given that to you, how are you representing the Lord there, whatever you make financially, He's blessed you with that, are you investing any of it into the kingdom? Or do you use the resources that God's given you to simply serve your own wants, gratify your own desires? As it pertains to our text, God's entrusted to you the principles, precepts and practicalities of His Word, the gospel message. **Are you being faithful in the execution of it, communicating to people the truths found in it, or even encouraging people, inviting people to come and partake of the washing of the water by it as we sit week by week under the waterfall the living waters of God's word? Be found faithful, that's one way in which these principles become practical, we want to be faithful in tending to those things that matter to our Master, that we might be good stewards. Now in keeping with the big picture, Paul being compared to Apollos and Peter, he says here.**

Vs3-5

Paul speaks here of 3 different judgments, 2 of which are of little to no value (with in the proper context) and 1 of which were to be completely concerned *with* and care *about*. The 1st is the judgment of other people.

He says, “You’re judgment *of me* is of little value *to me*.” Now there’s a part of us that really likes this, “Hey, I couldn’t care less what you think, He who judges me is the Lord.” and We think, “Yeah, that’s how I feel, so back off everyone.” But the question is; is this an attitude that we (you and me) are to take? Well, I believe that context is critical here. He’s saying, “You’re judging me, scrutinizing me as if I’m 2nd best before God, as though you’re the determining factor in how God establishes who’s a worthy servant and who’s not been so hot.” But they were judging in a carnal fashion, wowed by words, awed by eloquence, so they thought Apollos was the man, Paul says that’s not the qualifying factor, faithfulness is, and Paul was faithful. **But again the question is, is it right for us to take this attitude, well I believe it could be is as much as we’re being faithful to the Lord’s call on our lives. Not as justification to cloak rebellion, compromise, or sin in our lives. You see if God has placed authority over us, and so that authority comes to us with concerns about us and we say, “Hey, I don’t care what you think, it’s the Lord that judges me.”** That’s a problem, its pride, and it’s a rebellious disposition, try telling your boss that at work and see how far it gets you. So if we’re to respect and uphold authority in the world, how much more in Christ?

The fact is we’re called to care, care about other people’s perception, the image we’re portraying, now some people are simply fault finders. **But if you’re living your life *for Christ*, truly seeking to be set apart *to Christ*, and people have a problem with that, then you can’t worry about what man thinks at that point. Your concern is what God thinks, judge not doesn’t mean not to distinguish right and wrong according to the clear cut guidelines of the Word of God, it means don’t judge the inner motives of a man’s heart. Because only God can do that.**

The 2nd judgment is that of oneself. and Again this generally goes to extremes, we’re either harsher on ourselves than we need to be, always condemning ourselves. Or we find a way to justify whatever we want and we’re harsh on everyone else, but super lenient with ourselves. **But with Paul he’s saying, “I’ve done some serious soul searching, but I have a clean and clear conscious before God, I don’t know of anything I’m doing wrong, either in deed or in motive.”** But he says, “That doesn’t mean a whole lot either, just because I’m not aware of it doesn’t mean I’m clean before God.” He still had a sin nature even if he wasn’t physically or mentally acting out in sin. Remember he told the Philippians that it didn’t matter what things seem to count for his plus in this world, he said all he wanted was to be found in Christ. He said, “...*not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;*” Phil 3:9

It’s this 3rd judgment that we need to concern ourselves with. When the Lord comes, the bema seat of Christ when both the hidden things of darkness, and the counsels of the heart will be revealed and brought to light. Let me put this to you plainly, “...*the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*” 1 Sam 16:7 God doesn’t just look to the outward action, but the inward motive, God knows *why* you do *what* you do. Hebrews reminds us, “...*there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*” Heb 4:13

We've been called to be servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God, be found faithful, you might lose your popularity in the eyes of men, but you'll be secure in the approval and praise that comes from God. and Believe me, when it all comes down, you aren't going to be worried about man's approval, but you'll desperately desire God's. and You'll find it in Christ, be a good steward of the manifold grace of God that He's given *to* you and poured out so abundantly by His Spirit *upon* you.

Prayer Points:

God help us to be found faithful, that we might be good stewards of the manifold grace that You've poured into our lives. God You've blessed us so abundantly, entrusted so much to us personally, and collectively, help us to be wise as we tend *to* and take care of those things that concern You, that have to do with You. We want to hear those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Help us not to be fickle, but faithful, not about convenience but commitment, giving of self, rather than centered on self, Lord that we might be transformed into Your image as from glory to glory by the renewing of our minds. Have your way in us, for Your glory, and Your names sake.

We've been reminded today that God is searching our hearts; He knows what's going on in your life, the hidden thoughts of your heart. You may seem good and well on the outside, but on the inside things are crumbling and falling apart. God wants to renew and refresh you today, maybe as God looks in your heart, the reality is that He has *no* place in your heart at all. You've never given your heart to Christ. Today Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart, and if you'll open the door and invite Him in, He'll come into your heart, into your life, forgive you of your sin and make you brand new. God wants to do that work for you today, it's no coincidence that you're here, God has called you here because He's calling out to you, He wants to forgive you and make Himself real to you. **It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done, how old you are, how young you are God loves you, and He wants to cast your sin as far as the east is from the west, but you've got to let Him, open your heart, receive Him today.**