

# 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Chapter 4.

The first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.

Bill Holdstock

Ministers are accountable to God.

Verse 1/2

*Let a man so account of us, as of the Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the Mysteries of God. 2. Moreover it is required in Stewards that a man is found faithful.*

Paul is asking the congregation to look upon him as a ministering servant of Christ; a Steward or Trustee of the mysteries of God. The Apostle is challenging the respect due to him on account of his character and his office. He shows the Corinthian church that far from being heads and chiefs, he and his fellow True apostles consider themselves as servants, employed under the headship of Christ; from whom they receive their appointment. Reading other letters from Paul one can see this is not a sanctimonious stance but that there is a genuine humility on his part recognising that it is Christ that should get the praise and the glory.

It is the responsibility of all who are called to minister the Gospel of Christ *to study the Word of God to show themselves approved of God, a workman who needs not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.* (2 Tim: 2: 15). So as to give the congregation the pure Word of God and to pass on what the Lord wants to say to the people. They have no authority to propagate their own ideas or opinions but simply to spread the Christian faith.

Verse 2 says *Moreover it is required* (or it is essential) *that a man should be found faithful* (proving himself worthy of trust.)

With so much falseness being preached today, faithfulness to the scriptures and faithfulness to His calling is sadly lacking. It is obvious the Lord wants a man here on earth to spread His Word that He can trust. Paul had only been away a short time but all manner of false teaching had erupted, all manner of favouritism had set in and the leaders of the church were not strong enough or mature enough, recognise or to deal with it and bring order. Ministers are not to be undervalued so long as they remain ministers of Christ and true to His Word. They are not Stewards of worldly things but of divine mysteries of God with the responsibility to teach those mysteries to the people and those mysteries are known only by revelation from God which can only be achieved by much prayer and Bible study.

Verse 3

*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgement: yes, I judge not mine own self.*

A believer is not qualified to judge himself much less others, but he does! The Corinthian church had no doubt given their reasons for preferring Apollos or Cephas over Paul which may have been unfavourable to his character as a man, as a Christian or even as an Apostle. But Paul said this was a small thing to him, he was not seeking his own glory but the glory of God in souls being saved, and that to Paul was much more important.

#### Verse 4

*For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified but He who judges me is the Lord.*

Paul says I am not conscious that I am guilty of any evil or have neglected to fulfil the duty I am called to as a Steward of Jesus Christ. He had obviously examined himself before the Lord as we are all told to do particularly before the taking of the Lord's Supper, and he found that he could stand before his maker with clean hands and a pure heart. He adds that even if he has misjudged and there was any transgression it was the Lord who was the master judge and he says 'I leave those things to God'. These words were directed to the Church who preferred one minister over another, judging out of turn and other actions which were to assume the seat of God.

#### Verse 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.*

There is time coming when the Lord, the righteous Judge, will bring to light all hidden darkness of man's hearts and make them known. It is He who has the right, the legal right, having been the only one worthy to open the book of life, to Judge and Judge righteously. We should be very careful how we censure others, when we ourselves have to stand before the righteous Judge, Jesus Christ from whom we cannot hide our deepest thoughts that will need His attention.

#### Verse 6

*And these things, Brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that you 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.*

Paul said that he applied these principles to himself and to Apollos. He was concerned that if he were to name the culprits on such a serious subject it would only bring further troubles in the church. Paul encouraged the church not to think of men above their calling. We all must be lined up to the scriptures and anything beyond that can only lead to much pride and be puffed up and boastful.

#### Verse 7

*For who makes you to differ from another and what have you that you did not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?*

If you read this verse carefully you will see the extent of the sin and backsliding the church had declined to. The leaders were competing with one another for popularity thereby causing the church to take sides preferring one minister over another. The main sin was the sin of pride. Paul asks the question 'who makes you to differ'? It is likely he was addressing the puffed up teachers who were glorying in new found gifts but who had little knowledge of the gospel. And he says 'What have you that you did not receive? In other words if you did not receive the gospel message from Jesus or from one of us Apostles where or by whom did you get it? These men were preaching as though the message came from them and the Lord was not given any glory although it was he who went to the cross. We must remember those who receive all

should be proud of nothing. We have no reason to be proud of our attainments or our performances, all that we have, do, or are is given by the grace of God.

#### Verse 8

*Now you are full, now you are rich, you have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God you did reign that we also might reign with you.*

Now you Corinthians are full of secular glory, now you are rich, in both natural wealth and spiritual gifts (1Cor: 14; 26) the church was so puffed up with the teaching selected from their favourite teachers and their own spiritual attainments they behaved like 'kings' who prided themselves with their spiritual riches that they felt no need of the godly authority and wisdom of the Apostles to steer them in the right path and keep them from spiritual error. Consequently, left to their own devices they strayed into sin that brought the church into disrepute.

#### Verse 9

*For I think that God has 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.*

An allusion is made here to the Roman amphitheatres where the victor did not escape with his life but was only reserved for further combat. The general meaning is that the Apostles were exposed to continual danger of death that is why they were set apart by God that is why God said at Paul's conversion 'For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake'. The office of an Apostle was a hard and hazardous one 'For we are made a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men'. They were witnesses for all to see their persecutions, their patience under trials and their suffering for the sake of the Gospel and the glory of God.

#### Verse 10

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

Paul still carries on the allusion of the public spectacle among the Romans where they were mocked, hissed at, spat upon and insulted. We pass for fools in this world and are despised as such so that the message of the gospel may be secured and displayed. You on the other hand are wise in Christ, you have the fame of being wise and learned Christians but you put little value on it. You are comfortable in being 'babes in Christ' in your carnality your divisions and strife leading to gossip and backbiting. The hyperbole in this verse is intended to wake them and shake them up so that they could see what was really going on. As we all know the Apostles were neither fools, weak nor contemptible.

#### Verse 11

*Even to this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; 12. And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it. 13. Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the off scouring of all things unto this day.*

Having reminded the church of their comfortable life when all they were interested in was listening to other 'Christians' backbiting, slandering each other and telling tales and listening to their favourite preacher teaching them falseness but no accountability

to the Lord and Saviour who had given them eternal life. None of them seemed concerned about their spiritual stature and their eternal destiny save the family and house of Chloe. (see 1 Cor 1: 11). Paul contrasts their way of life with his and his fellow Apostles. In verse 8 he reminds them they live like 'kings', now he tells them how he lives, not even having a home to call his own and often going without food. There is no doubt Paul suffered to the extreme, it is very brave of him to go into such detail and in the translation we do not have the full meaning of some of those details. The original Greek is far more explicit in some areas such as the phrase we are made as the filth of the world and the off scouring of all things is rendered 'purgation'. To understand the full force of these words we must observe that he eludes to the customs of the heathens, who at the time of some public calamity wanted someone to blame so they chose a handful of men of despicable character to be a public example to the world. They heaped all manner of curses upon their heads; some were burned alive and their bodies were thrown into the sea. To all this the people chanted 'Be thou our propitiation' and were judged to be fit for nothing but to be victims to the infernal gods for the safety and redemption of others. This was a copy of the sacrificial goat that was sacrificed in the Old Testament, and a mirror image of the sacrifice of our Lord at Calvary where Jesus took on Himself the sins of the world to give us eternal life.

#### Verse 14/15

*I write these things not to shame you but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have you not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the Gospel.*

Paul did not want to shame or embarrass the church he wanted to encourage them, he called them his beloved sons. He also recognised that the church had many 'teachers' and 'instructors' most of whom were carnal but the church lacked many good fathers. Fathers who would care for them unconditionally, shield them from danger, teach them good and evil and pray with them in times of trouble and to be an example to these babes in Christ.

Paul classed himself a father to the church because he had won them to Christ by the preaching of the Gospel they were his spiritual children. He was the instrument of their new birth and claimed the relationship of a father to them.

#### Verse 16

*Wherefore I beseech you be followers of me.*

The original Greek word for this is 'Mimetes' from which we get our word mimic. Paul is not saying we must follow him as such; he is encouraging us to mimic Christ, do what Christ would do and say what He would say as Paul does. Another word associated with the word 'Mimetes' is the word imitators; we are to imitate the Lord. (Ephesians 5:1. 1 Thessalonians 1: 6; 1. Peter 3: 13)

A few verses back Paul tells the church they are 'babes in Christ' now he tells them they are to mimic or copy him as he leads them into a deeper walk with God. Just as a baby copies the mother and father so as to grow to maturity, so the church under good leadership should become mature in Christ.

### Verse 17

*For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved son, and Faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*

Paul led Timothy to the Lord some years earlier and had taught Timothy the ways of God and Timothy had become a strong man of God able to support Paul's ministry. Paul was able to rely on him to teach Christ crucified and the true gospel. This is different to the so called teachers who had not taught the church in the ways of God and with no guidance, no love and not being true shepherds; they had allowed the church to drift into sin and away from God. Paul knew that Timothy would remind the church of Paul's teachings and bring back some order to the fellowship.

### Verse 18

*Now some are puffed up as though I would not come to you but I will come to you shortly if the Lord will and will know not the speech of them which are puffed up, but of power.*

Paul confirms that some leaders in the church are puffed up or full of pride, they felt safe because they thought that Paul would not visit them. But he warns that he will come to visit them shortly.

He will expose their haughtiness, their show and pretence and will examine if they speak with any real power or authority from the Holy Spirit. The power in the preaching of the gospel is from the Holy Spirit who comes with enlightening, quickening, converting and sanctifying of the believers. All else is showmanship. Paul says he is interested in seeing the power of the Holy Spirit manifest in the church, and nothing else.

### Verse 20

*For the Kingdom of God is not in words but in power.*

Paul is telling the Church that the Kingdom of God is not in eloquence, excellence of speech or even in doctrines; but in the power and in the mighty energy of the Holy Spirit that enlightens, quickens, and sanctifies believers. Congregations can recognise the difference between the two. Most want to see, and feel, the empowering of the Holy Spirit in their lives, not the feel good factor but the challenge, and conviction to live a closer walk with God. What Paul is showing us all is that when space and time is given to the work of the Holy Spirit along with the preaching of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, the church is changed, souls are saved, bodies healed and men's hearts are more like the heart of God.

### Verse 21

*What will you? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?*

He reminds them of the content of verse 15 that they have many teachers that they are listening to who, in their carefree example allow the enemy to take the church down a path that leads to waywardness, with no discipline, no commitment but in need of correction. What they, and all churches everywhere need are fathers who care, shepherds like the Lord who encourage his flock to walk on the highway of holiness rather than in darkness. Paul gives them a choice, as does the Lord, shall he come to visit them with a rod of authority and discipline or in the tenderness of a father

wishing the best for his children.

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Be blessed

Bill@Holdstock.com

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