

Stewards of God's Mysteries

1 Corinthians 4:1–5 (NRSVue)



LITTLE BOYS AND GIRLS learn early to seek appreciation, acceptance, applause. It's a healthy part of growing up. Yet adults can allow it to be dangerous. Their kids may expect much in return—recognition, praise, attention. When young, a child whose ego is made too strong by parents and grandparents may become a bully who wants rewards for small things.

Too much applause makes greedy paws.

Today we consider a sacred calling—a vocation entrusted to us by the living God. Yet it can make us greedy for validation or recognition. Even mature Christians can crave a wrong sort of appreciation.

Paul addressed Christians at risk of spiritual immaturity. Listen to how he responded to weak virtues.

Servants and Stewards

Paul explained the striking identity of Christians: “Think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries” (1 Cor. 4:1). What a title! Not CEOs of spiritual enterprises. Not influencers of religious trends. Not elders or deacons. But servants. Stewards.

To serve Christ is to relinquish the throne of self. You kneel before the one who washed feet, who bore the cross, who emptied himself by love. And he expects this of you.

To be a steward of God's mysteries, what's this? It's no small task. We're entrusted with truths that transcend time, that cannot be reduced to formulas or slogans. We carry God's grace with us, the gospel's words, personal knowledge of Jesus, God's deep things. It's our Christian vocation. And it's mysterious.

But Paul adds a caution: “...it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Cor. 4:1). Not brilliant. Not popular. Trustworthy. Faithful. Consistent. In a world

obsessed with charisma and credentials, God looks for character. He seeks those who won't distort his mystery for personal gain, who won't dilute the gospel to appease a crowd, who won't abandon the sacred for the trendy.

So we ask ourselves: Are we trustworthy stewards? Do we guard the gospel from our own amendments? Do we point people to Christ, not to ourselves? Do we handle God's word with reverence? Do we practice the good news we proclaim?

You protect what's been given—the cross, resurrection, a call to repentance—even when culture demands an update. You don't soften hard truths to keep people comfortable.

Stewardship takes discipline. You're not the owner, but a caretaker. Your job isn't to invent, but to witness. What proves you're trustworthy isn't acclaim, but obedience.

Beyond Earthly Judgment

Paul made a bold declaration: “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court” (1 Cor. 4:3a). This isn't arrogance. It's spiritual clarity. Paul doesn't dismiss accountability. He rejects the tyranny of human opinion. Applause.

We live in a world saturated with judgment. Social media thrives on it. Institutions are built around it. Churches aren't immune to judging. Yet Paul says, “I do not even judge myself” (1 Cor. 4:3b). He recognizes the limits of human perception, including his own. “I am not aware of anything against myself,” he says, “but I am not thereby acquitted” (1 Cor. 4:4). His Christian vocation was a weighty matter, and he couldn't even applaud himself.

A clean conscience isn't the final verdict. The Lord's your Judge.

This liberates us. We aren't destroyed by criticism or gossip nor by fear of being misunderstood. We situate ourselves beyond earthly judgment. We're free from

human opinion because we know the one who sees everything. And he's our Judge. So we serve him.

But this sobers us. If the Lord's the Judge, then our hidden motives matter. Our secret thoughts matter. Our unseen choices matter. We don't hide behind a resume or reputation. We live with hearts open to divine scrutiny.

So, drop your need to be validated by others, to be appreciated. Silence your inner critic. It distorts your genuine worth. Fix your eyes on Christ, who judges not by what's outside, but by what's inside. Walk with humility, knowing your life and service are in his hands.

Eternal Evaluation Awaits

Paul concluded with a warning and a promise: "...do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes..." (1 Cor. 4:5a). A time for judgment is fixed, but it isn't now. Judgment isn't ours. It's Jesus' job.

When he comes, he'll "...bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart" (1 Cor. 4:5b). He won't just expose sin. He'll show the truth of who we are. The hidden sacrifices. The quiet faithfulness. The unseen obedience. God will unveil everything. Our faithful and faithless actions.

"Then, each one will receive commendation from God" (1 Cor. 4:5c). Not condemnation. *Commendation*. What hope we have! The validation of heaven. The Father's smile. The words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Here's the reward we seek. Not earthly trophies, but eternal affirmation. Not fleeting fame, but divine delight.

SO, LIVE AS ONE WHO AWAITS JUDGMENT DAY with eagerness. Be a good steward of God's mysteries. Accept no recognition but God's. Receive no adulation except his grace. Give your heart to the Master. Serve Christ with joy. Ignore the noise of human judgment or acclaim. Listen for the Shepherd's voice. He knows you, and you know him.

When he comes, may Jesus find you trustworthy.

Amen

All scripture text is from the NRSVue translation
Copyright © 2021
By the National Council of Churches of Christ

Copyright © 2025
by Larry L. Armstrong
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED