

1 Corinthians 4:1–21

Faithful Stewards, Humble Servants, and the Power of God

Introduction: How God Measures His Servants

The Corinthian church struggled with pride, personality-driven loyalty, and a distorted view of leadership. Paul now brings their attention back to God’s perspective. He explains how Christian leaders should be viewed, how Christian service should be evaluated, and why humility—not self-exaltation—is the mark of true spiritual maturity.

Servants and Stewards of Christ (1 Corinthians 4:1–2)

Paul begins by clarifying how believers are to regard spiritual leaders:

“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

A servant is not a celebrity, a ruler, or a spiritual superstar. A servant exists to carry out the will of another. A steward is entrusted with something valuable that does not belong to him. The apostles were caretakers of divine truth—truth once hidden but now revealed through Christ.

Paul immediately identifies the primary requirement:

“Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”

God is not looking for cleverness, charisma, or public success. He is looking for faithfulness—men and women who remain loyal to Christ, obedient to His Word, and consistent in their walk with Him.

God Alone Is the True Judge (1 Corinthians 4:3–5)

Paul explains why human evaluation is ultimately inadequate:

“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.”

Paul understood how unreliable human judgment can be—whether it comes from others or from within. Even personal introspection can be biased and incomplete.

He continues:

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

Paul is not claiming sinless perfection. He is speaking about faithfulness in service. Even when conscience is clear, final evaluation belongs to God alone.

Therefore, Paul exhorts:

“Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.”

God will evaluate not only what was done, but why it was done. Motives matter. Anything performed for self-glory, recognition, or pride will not endure. True praise comes from God, not from people.

Pride: The Root of Division (1 Corinthians 4:6–7)

Paul explains that he used himself and Apollos as examples to avoid embarrassing others, teaching the Corinthians:

“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.”

All ministry must be evaluated by Scripture, not personality or popularity.

Paul then asks piercing questions:

“For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?”

Every ability, gift, and opportunity comes from God. Pride has no place in the life of a believer, because everything we possess is a gift of grace.

Living as Though the Kingdom Has Already Fully Come (1 Corinthians 4:8)

Paul uses irony to expose the Corinthians’ self-satisfaction:

“You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us.”

They were living as if the time of reigning had already arrived—seeking comfort, honor, and ease—while forgetting that this present age is one of preparation, not coronation.

The church will reign with Christ when He returns. Until then, believers share in the reproach of a rejected Savior. It is disloyal to seek a crown before the King Himself is crowned.

The Apostolic Pattern: Suffering and Service (1 Corinthians 4:9–13)

Paul contrasts Corinthian comfort with apostolic hardship:

“For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.”

The apostles were mocked, misunderstood, and mistreated. They endured hunger, thirst, homelessness, labor, persecution, and slander.

Paul writes:

“When we are reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat.”

They responded not with retaliation, but with grace—reflecting the heart of Christ, who shed His blood on the cross for sinners and prayed for His enemies.

A Father's Loving Warning (1 Corinthians 4:14–17)

Paul explains his tone:

“I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.”

Though many teachers had instructed them, Paul reminds them:

“For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.”

Paul had led them to Christ. He cared for them with the concern of a spiritual father. He urges them:

“Therefore I urge you, imitate me.”

Not in personality or position, but in humility, sacrifice, and devotion to Christ. To reinforce this, Paul sent Timothy—a faithful example of a life lived consistently with the gospel.

Words or Power? (1 Corinthians 4:18–20)

Some in Corinth had grown arrogant, assuming Paul would not return. Paul responds firmly:

“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.”

He then delivers a defining statement:

“For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.”

True Christianity is not talk, image, or performance. It is transformation—lives changed by the power of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

A Final Choice (1 Corinthians 4:21)

Paul closes with a pastoral appeal:

“What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”

The outcome depends on their response. Repentance leads to restoration. Pride leads to correction.

Practical Application for Believers

- Measure success by faithfulness, not visibility.
- Refuse pride and personality-driven loyalty.
- Serve with pure motives, knowing God sees the heart.
- Embrace humility, sacrifice, and obedience as marks of maturity.

A Challenge to the Church

The church must resist the temptation to live as if the kingdom has already fully arrived. Until Christ returns, we are stewards, servants, and witnesses—called to reflect the humility of a crucified Savior.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ, understand this: He shed His blood on the cross to forgive your sins. He died in your place. He rose from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

You cannot earn salvation through effort or religion. It is received through faith. If you turn to Him today, confess your need, and trust in His finished work, He will forgive you, give you new life, and make you part of His eternal kingdom.

Today, choose humility over pride, faith over self-reliance, and life through Jesus Christ alone.