



Pastor Hugh Whitfield Mar. 26, 2025 Pearl Baptist Church
The Cross and Church Leaders (Part 1)
1 Cor. 4:1-4

1 Cor. 4:1-4 (CSB)

A person should think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God. 2 In this regard, it is required that managers be found faithful. 3 It is of little importance to me that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I don't even judge myself. 4 For I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I am not justified by this. It is the Lord who judges me.

- A. We're going through the book of 1 Corinthians, and we're getting CrossFit.

And remember, the Church of Corinth was a mess. And the only way Paul was going to get them to clean up their mess was to get them TO THE CROSS. That is, get the people in the church CrossFit.

Last week we discovered how to stop disunity and division in the church. And here's God's solution: Get everyone to the cross and experience:

- Examination
- Humiliation
- Revelation
- Anticipation
- Subjection

- B. Tonight, we come to 1 Cor. 4, and Paul wants the church to have a godly and biblical understanding about their leaders, and particularly the pastors and teachers who lead.

If you haven't noticed, Paul brings up leadership frequently in his letter to the Corinthians. So far, Paul has brought up leadership implicitly or explicitly in every chapter.

- C. Why does Paul keep bringing us back to leadership? Because **as leaders go, so goes the church.**

- Godly leaders produce godly people.
- Praying leaders produce praying people.
- Bible-believing leaders produce Bible-believing people.
- Soul-winning leaders produce soul-winning people.

The attitude and the altitude of a church is most often set by leadership.

D. So, the question is, why do you think Corinth was such a mess?

Because of leadership.

I think the leaders at Corinth enjoyed being starstruck by the church.

And those preachers got caught up in preacher-worship rather than the Jesus-worship (and so did the members).

E. That's a warning to all of us.

May we never put anyone (especially the leaders) on par with or above Jesus.

And may those who lead never think of themselves as "big shots" and "hot shots."

We're all just little shots compared to Jesus.

F. And Paul makes that clear in 1 Cor. 4.

Paul helps the church think rightly about their leaders.

And hopefully, the church leaders will think rightly about themselves.

So, let me share with you 2 thoughts about church leaders.

1. Every Leader Needs a Godly IDENTITY

1 Cor. 4:1-2

A person should think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God. 2 In this regard, it is required that managers be found faithful.

A. What is Paul saying? He desires the church think rightly about their preachers. In other words, he wants the church to have the right picture in their mind of their preacher.

So, when I say the Apostle Paul, what picture comes to your mind? When I say the name of any other preacher or key leader in the church, what picture comes to your mind? When I say Pastor Hugh, what picture comes to your mind?

B. Paul has already given us several pictures of the preacher in his letter.

Servant (diakonos, 1 Cor. 3:5)

Planter (1 Cor. 3:6)

Waterers (1 Cor. 3:6)

Builders (1 Cor. 3:10)

And then, here in 1 Cor. 4:1, Paul gives us 2 more pictures.

Servants of Christ

Stewards/Managers of the mysteries of God.

C. Servants of Christ

The word in the Greek is not diakonos (cf. 3:5).

It's the word hyperetes.

What a picture?

PICTURE 1: Movie – Ben Hur –

PICTURE 2: He's on a Roman warship; guess how it's powered; by 3-levels of rowers (572 rowers) powering the oars.

They were called under-rowers. They were slaves. All they did was follow the voice of their Captain, who would shout, "Row, row, row."

And they had to row together or the whole ship would be thrown off course.

- D. Paul's saying that's the picture I want you to think of me. That's the picture you should think of your preacher.

He's just a rower in the ministry. He's just an under-rower, following Captain Jesus, who is saying, "Row, row, row."

And he's not a "big shot." He's just a "little shot" doing his part for the team.

- E. In other words, the preacher is not the boss, the Pope, the president, the potentate, or the "dictate." He's not the CEO, CFO, CIO, CTO, CCO, or any other CO. He's just an under-rower. That puts him not at the top, but at the bottom. The bottom of the boat, where's one job is to listen to Jesus and Row, Row, Row.

- F. He's not there to make a name for himself. He is not there to become famous. He's there to make Jesus famous.** He's there for the world to know nothing about him, but all about HIM – Jesus, that all might bow down and worship Him, and give Jesus the glory He so deserves and desires.

- G. As I told you before, I love what my professor, Dr. Howard Hendricks, reminded all us preachers.

What do you do each Sunday after the "glorification of the worm" ceremony?

After the sermon, as the people are leaving, the people give the preacher praise for his sermon, but it's nothing but "glorification of the worm."

- H. How I need to remind myself, that I'm nothing but a worm. I'm nothing but an under-rower, helping row the boat for Jesus.
- I. But notice, Paul also wants you to picture the preacher/leader as a "manager of the mysteries of God."

A steward managed the household of his master. He was entrusted with the owner's property while the owner was away.

- J. Our Owner, Jesus, is away, and He has entrusted the preachers & teacher with His precious Gospel, and the job of the preacher is to deliver the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

In other words, as I have said many times, he's not to be preaching a word or even his word. He's to be preaching God's Word.

- K. **I can preach all day MY words, but my words won't convict you, convert you, or conform you to Jesus.**

Only the preaching of God's Word will change you and transform into the likeness of Jesus.

And if that is not what you are getting at your church, you either need to change your preacher or you need to change your church.

Because if you don't have the preaching of the Bible, you don't have Church. What you have is a religion that is just feeding you the words of a man and not feeding you the Word of God.

- L. And Paul says preachers as stewards should be "found faithful" (v. 1) in preaching the Word.

He didn't say "successful."

God is not looking for you to be successful.

He's looking for you to be faithful.

That means, don't cave to the culture.

Preach Heaven sweet.

Hell hot.

Eternity long.

And Jesus saves.

Preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and don't hold back.

If God's says, preach it, and don't apologize for it.

And that brings me to the 2nd thought.

2. Every Leader Needs Godly ACCOUNTABILITY

1 Cor. 4:3-4

3 It is of little importance to me that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I don't even judge myself. 4 For I am not conscious of anything against myself, but I am not justified by this. It is the Lord who judges me.

- A. When you take a stand for Jesus, you'll find quickly find there's people for you and people against you.

In fact, people will run to you, run from you, or run over you.

B. Ministry is messy.

Because when you preach the Gospel, it offends.

When you preach Jesus, it offends.

When you preach the cross, it offends.

When you preach salvation by grace alone, by faith alone, by Jesus alone it offends.

When you preach the whole counsel of Scripture it offends.

When you preach God's view on sex, marriage, and divorce, it offends.

When you preach God's way for raising kids, it offends.

When you preach dying to self and living to Christ, it offends.

C. The Word of God is offensive, because it confronts sinful, selfish, self-absorbed, self-centered selves.

And God tells us to die to self and surrender all of ourselves to Jesus.

And that is so offensive to people.

Because they like Jesus. They just don't want to be LIKE Jesus.

D. And Paul says, preach Jesus and don't be concerned what the people think. Be concerned what God thinks.

Because it's not people you will answer to.

It's God you will answer to.

God is my Judge.

And one day I will give an account before God not for what the people thought, but for what I taught.

E. And that's why those who preach the Word should preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and don't hold back delivering the truth.

Get over people liking you.

Get over people applauding you.

Get over people paying you.

And just deliver the mail God's given you, and let Him take care of the results.

F. You're not going to answer to the people. But you will answer to God.

And can I share the results of preaching the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

God is going to grow His church.

I didn't say YOU are going to grow God's church.

Why? Because people are realizing this world is feeding them a bunch of lies. And when they hear the truth, it is going to set them free.

Conclusion:

Mt. Vernon Baptist – heard the teaching/preaching of the Word and God changed my life.

1. Every leader needs a godly identity
2. Every leader needs godly accountability