

The Corinthian's concept of leadership was worldly. When God's wisdom is applied to leadership, it will look different than that which the world values. Having corrected wrong ideas of competitiveness and results in chapter 3, Paul concluded with warnings about self-deception and boasting in men. He then brings much of the arguments together in chapter 4. We can draw three general conclusions from what he writes.

I. Teachers of the Gospel are stewards (4:1-2).

"Stewards", which the NIV translates as "those who have been given a trust", were servants who had been given responsibility and authority to manage an entire household. Cf. Joseph in Potiphar's house (Gen. 39:6); the parables of Jesus (Luke 12:42; 16). Paul highlights three characteristics of this stewardship.

1. *They are willingly subordinate to Christ* (4:1a). The word translated "servants" is only used here by Paul and is different from other words for servant or slave by its emphasis on willing subordination. Paul, Apollos, Peter and others had willingly taken on Christ's goals and purposes and willingly assumed the tasks which Christ had given.
 - All who would serve Jesus Christ must willingly subordinate their own plans and desires to the will of Christ, to aid Him, their Master, in all He wishes to accomplish.
2. *They are entrusted with the Gospel message* (4:1b). Being entrusted with something (belonging to the person the steward serves) is fundamental to the sense of stewardship. The "secret things" or "mysteries" entrusted to Paul and others refer to the Gospel (cf. 2:7), God's wisdom which man could not understand unless God explained it to him. As a "trust" it was not their own message.
 - We have been entrusted with the same message. Neither may we add to or subtract from it, to make it more attractive or less offensive. All that we as believers possess has been entrusted to us as stewards and should be handled correctly. Cf. 1 Peter 4:10.
3. *They are required to be faithful* (4:2). The steward was not closely supervised and had to be reliable. Paul recognized that his first responsibility (and the first of Apollos, Peter, and the others) was to be faithful to Jesus Christ and to fulfil all that Christ had given them to do. Faithfulness is a special characteristic and prerequisite of all who would lead in the church. Cf. 2 Timothy 2:2.
 - All believers are called to be faithful as Jesus taught in the parable of the talents (Luke 19:12-27; Matthew 25:14-30). Faithfulness begins in and is to be measured in the small things. See Luke 16:10. All believers can begin by being faithful in all the little things which God gives.

II. Teachers of the Gospel are accountable to the Lord (4:3-4).

On the basis of this stewardship Paul broadly concludes that those who minister the Gospel are accountable to the Lord. Stewards give account to the one whom they serve. Paul develops three results.

1. *Judgment by others is insignificant* (4:3a). It does not matter what others think, since it is the master of the steward that will evaluate the work. The Corinthians apparently valued what people thought, but they were not Paul's boss and their skewed evaluation meant little to him.
 - We also may struggle at times with what others think, but it draws our attention away from the ultimate judge, Jesus Christ, and places a wrong emphasis instead upon the evaluation by others.
2. *Self-judgment may reveal a clear conscience but is also insignificant* (4:3b-4a). Paul did not judge himself, although he certainly recommended self-evaluation. He knew, however, that self-evaluation is an insufficient judge. A clear conscience does not make one innocent. Since we have imperfect knowledge, either limited or wrong, our conscience cannot be a final judge.
 - People commonly allow their own consciences to be their judge. When it does not accuse them, they think that all is well. Don't be deceived. The conscience is inadequate.
3. *Judgment belongs to the Lord* (4:4b). The steward is judged by the master and not by other servants and not even by himself. Paul considered the judgment of others and even his own conscience to be insignificant because it was not their place to judge. Jesus Christ was the Master who would judge.

III. Teachers of the Gospel will be judged by Christ (4:5).

There will be a judgment by Christ of all teachers of the Gospel – indeed of all His followers – of which Paul explains three elements.

1. *This judgment has an appointed (future) time*. True judgment will occur but only when the Lord returns. Until then it requires of us that we wait and not make premature judgments. This does not forbid discernment or judging sin or false teaching, but rather it forbids judging the quality of one's ministry based upon the visible results, or the "style", or human expectations of that ministry.
 - A common failure is using the "success" of a ministry to "judge" the value of what a man says.
2. *This judgment involves absolute disclosure*. Hidden things such as motives will be revealed and judged. Whether a person was truly faithful, self-less, and hard-working or lazy and self-centered, it will be shown.
 - Ask God to search our hearts now and show us if there is any wicked way in us. Be patient and do not judge the motives of others.
3. *This judgment will include appropriate praise*. Each will be evaluated on their individual merits, what they have done, what were their motives, etc. and be rewarded or praised accordingly. Paul lived with this perspective and encouraged others to do the same. Paul wanted praise from God. So should we.

By choosing to follow Christ, we have chosen Him as our master and we are his stewards. He has entrusted us with His message and His grace. He is our judge and He alone. He will reward us and His reward alone is worth pursuing. This should affect how we live **and** how we think of and relate to other believers.