



## A Lesson on Leadership -- 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

The division in the church at Corinth had at the core worldly wisdom that was used to place one teacher above another teacher. Paul has just rebuked the Corinthians in the previous verses calling on them to think honestly about themselves and their leaders, to consider the origin of their wisdom, to be careful about their boasting, and to remember that they belonged to Christ and not to a human leader.

Paul turns his attention to himself (and by extension other leaders like Peter and Apollos) to provide teaching about how a teacher should regard themselves and how the Corinthians should regard their leaders.

### I. Leaders are Servants

Paul begins chapter four with the instruction to regard himself, Peter, and Apollos first as **servants**. The word “*regard*” calls on Christians to think about their leaders and to have a reasonable estimate of them.

The most common words for servant in the New Testament are the words *diakonos* which means servant or minister and *doulos* which is usually translated as servant or slave. The word Paul uses in verse one is the word *hyperetes* and means attendant or under-rower. The word picture is of a servant in the lower regions of a large ship who rows beneath the passengers above. Under-rowers were unnamed and unseen, but were vital to the navigation of the ship. The multiple rowers had to undertake the backbreaking work together and laboured under the direction of the captain.



In this illustration of a servant, the leaders were the under-rowers, the captain was Christ, and the ship was the church. We do note that they were servants “*of Christ*.” They laboured under his direction, for his purposes, to build his church. Under-rowers do not set the direction, but give their effort to carry out the captain’s course.

1. Describe what it must have been like to have been an under-rower in a first-century Greek ship.
2. What are some reasons why Paul might describe himself as an under-rower?
3. How does this definition of leadership contradict the factions being set up by the Corinthians?

## II. Leaders are Stewards

A *steward* was responsible for a master's house and belongings, but he was not the owner of the house or belongings. For Paul to call himself a steward indicates that he had a great responsibility to guard and use what had been entrusted to him, but that he was not the owner or originator of what had been entrusted to him. Paul was a steward of the "*mysteries of God.*"

**4. Would you say that a steward was a position of great responsibility? Why or why not?**

**5. To whom was a steward subordinate?**

When the Bible uses the word "mystery" it refers to a truth that cannot be known except by a revelation from God. These mysteries are undiscoverable by human efforts or reasoning. Man cannot know the method whereby he might find salvation apart from the direct instruction from God through his Word.

**6. Name some of the "mysteries of God."**

## III. Leaders are to be Faithful

Perhaps the most important quality of a steward is faithfulness or trustworthiness. The steward is to be "found" faithful indicating that an examination has taken place and the conclusion has been reached that the steward has handled those things that have been entrusted to him in a trustworthy, honest, and reliable manner.

**7. To whom was a steward to be found faithful?**

**8. What would constitute faithfulness as a teacher or leader in the church?**

## IV. Leaders Will be Judged by God

The judge of whether or not Paul (or any other leader) was to be found faithful was God alone. In fact, Paul makes the following declarations:

- A. It really didn't matter if the Corinthians judged him as faithful
- B. It really didn't matter if a human court found him innocent or guilty
- C. It really didn't matter how Paul judged himself
- D. It really does matter how God judges.



The Corinthian Christians had been judging between Paul, and Apollos, and Peter, but Paul declares in verse 5 that they are not to pronounce judgment before time. The tense of the original language indicates that he is instructing them to stop doing something they were in the process of doing. Stop judging! The time in verse 5 refers to the Second Coming and the final judgment.

**9. What if any lessons do we learn in 1 Cor. 4:4 that could be applied to those who claim to let their conscience be their guide?**

**10. 1 Cor. 4:5 along with Matt. 7:1 are used by some to claim we cannot make any judgement of others as Christians. Read 1 Cor. 5:5, and 1 John 4:1 and discuss how we can reconcile their teachings.**

#### **V. Lessons Concerning the Judgment**

The word “therefore” in verse 5 tells us that Paul is bringing this particular thought to a close. He has given reasons why making judgements about leaders is improper and then gives three teachings concerning the judgment.

1. God will bring to light things hidden in darkness (See also Hebrews 4:13)
2. God will disclose the purposes of the heart
3. God will provide the commendation.

**11. What do the teachings about the judgement above tell us about God?**

**12. What is meant by “the purposes of the heart?”**

**13. Why is God alone capable to flawless judgement?**