LIFE BIBLE MINISTRY

1 Corinthians 4

Stewards of the Mysteries of God

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Hey, everybody. Let's open our Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 4 as we continue our study through the book of 1 Corinthians. Ever since chapter 1, the apostle Paul has been talking to the Corinthian people about their divisions and the fact that they are rallying around certain personalities, such as himself and Apollos and Peter and so forth. And Paul has been talking to them about how this is a worldly sort of a thing. It's not kingdom-mindedness.

It is worldly-mindedness that brings us to this whole idea of rallying around people and having basically a popularity contest with people and exalting them, putting them on a pedestal and that sort of thing. And the apostle in the last chapter said, you know, we're just servants, and that's all we are. So you shouldn't be treating us as anything other than a servant. To do so is to show pride, right? Instead, how should we think about our leaders?

How should we think about the church leaders that we love, our pastors, teachers, elders, that sort of thing? Well, we should just be grateful for them. They're a gift from the Lord. And so we respond with gratitude. We say, thank you, Lord, for giving us solid, godly people to lead us and that sort of thing.

So as we get to chapter 4 now, Paul is going to complete his comments on this whole issue of the divisions in the church before he moves on to address other matters. So let's begin reading in 1 Corinthians chapter 4. It says, this is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Wow. Have you ever thought about that?

Have you ever thought about yourself as a steward of the mysteries of God to be able to proclaim those mysteries to people? It's kind of a cool thought. When you think of a steward, a steward is someone who's been given something that doesn't belong to them, but they've been given it so that they might use it for the good of the owner. In this case, we have been given stewardship of the word of God and the mysteries therein to convey them in an honest and truthful way. He goes on to say, moreover, verse 2, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

But with me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself for I am not aware of anything against myself, but I'm not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

You see, what the Corinthians were doing is they were giving special commendation to whichever personality or leader they thought deserved it the most. I think Peter deserves the highest commendation. No, I think it's the Apostle Paul. No, I think Apollos is the smartest one and therefore deserves the most commendation. And Paul is saying, no, you're doing this wrong.

It is God who commends, which is exactly what he says there in that final verse that we read. Each one will receive his commendation from God, right? We're just thankful for those whom God has given. Paul now says, I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. What does he mean by this?

He's saying, I've given myself and Apollos as examples to you. And he's already quoted several passages from the Old Testament in such a way as to say, we are following what is written. We're not going beyond what is written. And we want you to learn from our example that we're not going beyond what is written. And what is written is we are servants of the Lord and let him who boasts, boast in the Lord, right?

So we're not going beyond what is written about us. We're not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think about ourselves. So he says, we want you to learn from our example. He goes on in verse seven, for who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive?

If then you received it and we've all received gifts from God, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? So why are you boasting in men? Why are you saying this gift is better than that gift over there? Or my gift is better than his gift. He says, what do you have that you didn't receive?

You received it all. So why are you boasting in what you didn't even come up with? It's kind of like when somebody comes up and sees your new car or your new house and they come over and they go, oh, this is beautiful. Well, actually I didn't build it. I didn't make it.

I just bought it. And so you're kind of congratulating the wrong person, you know, but we do that, don't we? So he goes on now and says, already you have all you want. And you can tell there's a little sarcasm going on here. Already you have become rich.

Without us, you've become kings. And would that you did reign so that we might share the rule with you. In other words, if you really were ruling and reigning, that would mean Jesus had already come and we'd all be ruling and reigning. So Paul says, would that that would be true? So we would all be in a better place.

But now what place are we in? Look what he goes on to say in verse nine and following. For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong.

We are held in honor. Excuse me. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour, we hunger and thirst. We're poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless.

And we labor working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure. When slandered, we entreat. We have become and are still like the scum of the world, the refuse.

In other words, garbage of all things. What is Paul doing here? He's giving things a thoroughly biblical slash kingdom of God sort of understanding. Because you see, the Corinthians had built these things up, these people up in a very worldly sort of a way. But Paul is telling the truth and he's saying, here's how we really are.

We're homeless. We have to labor hard to just get enough money to feed ourselves. We're distressed. We're buffeted. We are in trouble.

And when we get into trouble, rather than cursing people, we bless people. You see what he's doing? He's talking about the things that matter in the kingdom of God. The Corinthians have been all about the things that matter to the world. And they've been exalting those things.

And Paul is now exalting the things of the kingdom. And the things of the kingdom are suffering for the cause of Christ. And that's why he begins to bring out some of his own sufferings. And he's speaking of himself and the other apostles who are sharing in that same suffering. So you can see that Paul is bringing these Corinthian believers back to a proper understanding of what it's like to be a servant of God

and to give your life away and not to boast and to be prideful, but instead to serve the Lord with a whole heart.

He goes on in verse 14 and says, I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. And this is where Paul is going to be take on a more fatherly tone with the Corinthians. And he says here in verse Verse 15, for though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. And he's referring to the fact that he brought them into the kingdom through the preaching of the gospel message.

And in that sense, he says, I became your father. So he says now, I urge you then, be imitators of me. That takes a lot of guts. I mean, stop and think about it. To say to someone, imitate me as I imitate the Lord.

How would you do saying that to someone? What if you were discipling someone? Maybe you had a couple of people you were meeting with on a weekly basis, just to read through the word and these are brand new believers. Would you be comfortable enough saying to them, I want you to imitate me. It almost sounds a little vain, but it's not.

Paul is not being vain. He is encouraging them to take on a godly, heavenly attitude and to reject the attitudes and ways of the world. He goes on now and says, this is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. And again, Timothy was not his biological child. He's his child in the Lord, just as he was their father in Christ Jesus.

So you can see that these relationships are what they are because of the Lord. He says, to remind you of my ways in Christ. As I teach them everywhere in every church. So once again, Paul is laying himself out in a very vulnerable sort of a way as an example to these Corinthian believers. That's why he says, I sent you Timothy.

Now remember, Paul was in Ephesus while he wrote this letter to the Corinthians and he was very much involved in the work that was going on there, but he knew that the Corinthians needed guidance. And so he sent Timothy, but why did he send Timothy? To remind them of the ways of Paul. In other words, again, his example. He says in verse 18, some are arrogant as though I were not coming to you, but I will come to you soon.

And we can only assume that Paul had heard some things from the Corinthians related to their attitudes about him. And while some people seemed to elevate Paul, there were others who were critical of him. And he'll bring that out later on in this letter as well. And those people who were critical of Paul were

saying things like, maybe they were saying, well, he has to send Timothy because he's too afraid to come on his own. He won't come and confront us about what he doesn't like.

So he has to send somebody else to do his dirty work. So again, he says, but I will come to you soon if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people, but their power. And he's gonna make a point about that in just a moment. But I wanna bring out the statement that he makes here, which shows Paul's attitude of surrender to the Lordship of Jesus. Notice he says in verse 19, but I will come to you soon if the Lord wills.

Isn't that exactly what James tells us to do? He says, for those of you who say, we're gonna move here or there, and we're gonna start a business and we'll make money. He says, as it is, you boast and brag. What you ought to say is, if the Lord wills, we will move there and so forth. So this is the attitude that we're all supposed to have about our lives.

You know, the Bible tells us that we are not our own. We've been bought with a price. And so we're to literally speak like people who have an owner. Now, your owner is Jesus, and he's about the best master you could possibly ever wanna have. But we still submit to him.

We still submit to his Lordship in our lives. And the things that we do, we want to clear with him. We wanna pray about it. We want to make sure that we're doing the Lord's will. And that's why he says, I will come to you if the Lord wills, right?

And this, again, is something that we ought to convey when we're talking to people so that they hear in our language and in our speech, our submission to the Lord. So he says, when I come, I'm not gonna listen to these people talk. I'm not gonna listen to their words. I wanna see their power. I wanna see, you know, because anybody can talk.

Talk is cheap, and that's kinda what he's saying here. So I'm not coming to hear what they have to say. I'm coming to witness their power. Do they have power from the Lord, or are they just all talk? And here's where he goes on to make this important statement in verse 20.

For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk, but in power. Well, now there's a statement right there that can probably stand on its own, and it would be good for us to think about it and even meditate on it. What exactly is Paul saying here when he says, the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk? Well, it certainly doesn't mean that we never discuss things related to the kingdom of God, or that we don't study the word of God and talk about what these things mean. He's simply saying, if somebody is just all talk, and there's no power and authority behind what they say, their words are empty.

And so he says, the kingdom of God is about power. It's about power to transform a life. Our lives should be showing transformation. That's the power of the kingdom. When we see that in people's lives, when somebody testifies of God's power for them to do something, whether it's to forgive someone who has done something horrible to them or their family, or for someone to get victory over some area of sin, and to be able to testify to that victory and say, I used to be addicted to this or that, or I used to talk like this and do these sorts of things, but I've been changed.

God has transformed my life. That's power. That's what make our personal testimonies so powerful. When we tell people, this is how God has changed my life. This is how God has healed my marriage.

That's one of the testimonies that Sue and I have thankfully been able to share with people for many years now, for well over 40 years. We've been married for over 47 years. And after the first five years of our marriage, things pretty much fell apart because although we knew the Lord briefly, we weren't really walking with the Lord like we should. And so we invited the ways of the world into our marriage. And of course, when you do that, things are gonna go bad.

And that's the way it went for us. I've shared this many times. Things did not go well for Sue and myself in the early stages, but we gave our hearts to Jesus. We opened our hearts to him for forgiveness and lordship. And we began to learn over a protracted period of years what it means to be a married couple.

And God has transformed our marriage. After 47 years, I can say that I love this woman more than anything. And I love being with her. And I know that our marriage is strong and secure today, but not because of anything we've done, because of what the Lord has done in our lives. That's the power of the kingdom.

You see, in the world, people can't make those kinds of claims because the world destroys things. God restores things. And so Paul says, listen, the kingdom of God is not about talk, it's about power, power to change a life. How has your life been changed through the power of Jesus Christ, since you've come to know him? You know, sometimes we're hard on ourselves in this area.

Other people see the differences in our lives, the transformation. Sometimes we don't. And so if you don't see as much change in your life as you would like, just be patient, okay? And pray and stay in the word and just trust that as you consume the word of God, which is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword As you continue to yield yourself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, that transformation will

take place because Jesus isn't going to leave you alone. He's not going to leave you sit right where you are today.

He's going to keep doing that work of progressive sanctification in your life. So Paul ends this chapter by asking them a question. He says, so what do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod? And that of course means with an attitude of punishment or with love in a spirit of gentleness.

You know, it's really kind of up to them, isn't it? How Paul is going to come. Are they going to submit to the word of the Lord or are they going to continue on in worldly pride and allow these divisions within the church? Well, as we get into the next chapter, we're going to see Paul switching gears a little bit here and beginning to address some more pretty serious issues. And I told you at the very beginning, this is a corrective letter.

So we need to kind of be prepared for that. But these are important things for us to see. And we'll get into that chapter next time when we come together. So let's pray. Heavenly Father, I want to thank you again for this chapter that we've gone through here in 1 Corinthians.

Thank you, Lord, for your word. Thank you that it is living and active. Thank you, Lord, that as we consume it, as we open our hearts to it, as we desire to walk it out in obedience, that there will be a work of transformation. Help us, Lord God, not to reflect the ways and means of this world, but to reflect the kingdom and the attitudes of the kingdom of God. We thank you and praise you for our time together.

And we ask your blessing on our week as we meditate on the things that we've learned here and continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of your word through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.