



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 25, 2006
Released on June 22, 2006**

"Servants in Ministry"

PRINTED TEXT: 1 Corinthians 4:1-13.

READ: 1 Corinthians 4:1-13.

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 23:8-12.

TIME: A.D. 55

PLACE: Ephesus

GOLDEN TEXT: "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Corinthians 4:1 NKJV).

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 4:1-13 (*New King James Version*)

Stewards of the Mysteries of God

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

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

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court.^[a] In fact, I do not even judge myself.

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

5 Therefore 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. Then each one's praise will come from God.

Fools for Christ's Sake

6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, 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.

7 For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*?

8 You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us-and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!

9 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.

10 We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored!

11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.

12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;

13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Corinthians 4:3](#) Literally *day*

[Scripture formatting and reference found at www.biblegateway.com]

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Examine a passage in which Paul addressed those who were judging him superficially.
2. Affirm that God's judgment is the only judgment we need to be concerned with.
3. Encourage other believers to be more concerned with God's evaluation of them and less concerned with what others might think about them.

INTRODUCTION

Do you know that you are being watched on a daily basis by non-believers as well as by fellow believers? In fact, you are continually being judged by these same non-believers on how you carry yourself in certain situations. This observation is not something that can be changed or affected by you-nor should you really want it to be. It's of benefit to you because it allows you to remain held responsible to the faith. Good, bad, or otherwise, people will continue to observe what you say and do, where you go, what you read, how you dress, what your pastimes are, where and how you worship, and how you get along with others.

Likewise in the line of observation is Christ's church-which we the body of believers all represent. If the saints are not exemplifying Christ in their words and actions and lifestyle, and in their relationships with one another, this sends a very poor message to those who might want to get to know Christ better and eventually make Him the Lord of their lives.

Christian leaders especially need to be out in front showing the way by example, but they also must be modeling faithful *servanthood*-the practice of serving others according to what the master expects.

Psalm 133:1 says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Not only is unity a great blessing from God to His people, but it also opens the door for evangelism (see John 17:20-21). A lack of unity speaks volumes to the non-Christian world the church is trying to win to Christ.

Such an approach is contrary to what is usually heard in the corporate world, where power and assertiveness are greatly valued. We must remember that Christ's kingdom is not of this world (see John 18:36). It does not have the same goals, nor does it utilize the methods so frequently employed by the world at large. All believers need to aspire to be servants of Christ.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In last week's lesson we saw how Paul took his readers-The Corinthians-to task for allowing themselves to be divided over personalities. In today's text, Paul pursued this matter further as he compared the true judgment of God with the faulty judgments of men.

QUESTIONS

Faithful Stewards-1 Corinthians 4:1-2.

1. What is the meaning of the word translated "ministers" (1 Cor. 4:1)?

The word "minister"-as Paul uses it in this verse-translates as servant, or "any subordinate acting under another's direction" (Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Revell). Paul was emphasizing the fact that he and other Christian workers were subordinates of Christ, who called them to serve. We should never forget that Christian leaders are to point others to Christ, not seek to make a name for themselves or divide the body of Christ in any way.

2. What was the role of a steward in an ancient household (1 Cor. 4:1)?

The word translated "stewards," chiefly relates to a person who manages another's estate or household. Stewards were common in the ancient world, and Christ used this concept to illustrate service in His kingdom (see Luke 12: 42; 16:1).

Whereas the word "ministers" (vs. 1) looked at the subordinate role of Christian leaders, "stewards" emphasized the responsibility given to those teaching or otherwise ministering to God's people. Though he was a very important servant in an ancient household, the steward was never to forget that he was still only a servant and ultimately answerable to his master.

3. How is the word "mysteries" used in Paul's writings (1 Cor. 4:1)?

The Greek word for mysteries referred to that which could not be comprehended apart from divine revelation. (See Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9; Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 3:16).

Paul used the term "mysteries" to mean the spiritual truths of the gospel that had been revealed through Christ. As gospel preachers, Paul and Apollos had been entrusted as stewards with what God had revealed to them (see Gal. 1:11-12).

Factual judgment-1 Corinthians 4:3-5.

4. What points was Paul trying to make when talking about judging in verses 3 through 5?

Paul-as both a servant and a steward-was not particularly concerned about whether he passed the scrutiny of the Corinthians. As the Lord's servant, it was a "small thing" to be judged by another servant, since all will have to answer to the one Master.

The reference to "man's judgment (v. 3)" is likely an allusion to a human court. And since Paul had already stood before civil courts for preaching the gospel and had suffered their wrath, he was not terribly concerned about this because he knew that in the end, the judges who judged him would themselves be judged by God Almighty. He was saying that it would be better to suffer the wrath of mankind for preaching Christ than to answer to God for failing to do so (see Psa. 9:16). What a *powerful* statement! Can we say the same-that we would choose to suffer at the hand of man for the cause of Christ rather than to answer to God for *not* doing the same?

The statement, "For I know nothing against myself (1 Cor. 4:4)" means that Paul's conscience was clear regarding his actions. However, he didn't want to give the impression that he was either proud or presumptuous, so he added, "Yet I am not justified by this." His own ignorance of any guilt on his part did not thereby acquit (or clear) him of any wrongdoing before God. God would still judge him accordingly-minister, steward, or not.

Fools for Christ-1 Corinthians 4:6-13.

5. Why did Paul use himself and Apollos as examples (1 Cor. 4:6)?

Because Paul and Apollos were the primary preachers in the earliest days of the Corinthian Church, it was appropriate for Paul to use himself and Apollos as examples.

6. What scene is pictured with the apostles being "last" and "appointed to death" (v. 9)?

The picture Paul used was probably that of a victorious Roman general being met by enthusiastic crowds. At the head of the procession were the conquerors, followed by the spoils of war-trophies, as it were, of a great triumph. The very last people in the procession, though, were prisoners who were condemned to death. These men would be taken to the arena, where they would be forced to fight the champions of Rome or to be devoured by wild beasts.

This was the lot of the apostles too. According to tradition, all the apostles except John died martyrs' deaths. They were therefore "made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men (v. 9)."

7. What were some of the things the apostles and others had to suffer in the early days of the church (v. 11)?

They were without proper food, clothing, or housing-even as they labored to supply their own needs (v. 12). Reviled (insulted or berated), persecuted (harassed), and defamed (slandered or talked about)-these godly men were treated like the "filth of the world" and the "offscouring of all things" (v. 13). (See Question 9 for a definition of "offscouring.")

8. In contrast, how were the Corinthians depicted by Paul?

Paul wanted the Corinthians to see how different their conceited view of themselves was from the circumstances of faithful Christian servants, who were reviled and persecuted.

9. What is the meaning of the word "offscouring" (v. 13)?

The word "offscouring" depicted refuse or rubbish and was used in reference to criminals or those of lower class and who were sacrificed especially so because of their wrongly perceived lesser value as humans.

10. How are believers still seen as "fools for Christ" (v. 10)?

That the world still sees believers as "fools for Christ's sake" is very evident. We are ridiculed for our moral stands, our belief in prayer and the Bible, our time spent in worship, and our confidence in the Lord's return. From the standpoint of unbelievers, none of these things make any sense. For those who know that they will one day stand before the Lord, though, it makes all the sense in the world-and all the sense for eternity too!

CONCLUSION

The Corinthian Christians had the common problem of holding a high opinion of themselves while being highly critical of others, such as the Apostle Paul. Paul assured them that their superficial evaluation of him was inconsequential. He was more concerned with God's judgment.

Paul encouraged his critics to remember that all they had came from God. He also reminded them that he and his fellow apostles suffered while the critics prospered. Who were they to judge? Many today should ask the same question.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Faithfulness is the true measure of a servant of Christ (1 Cor. 4:1-2).
2. The Lord, not man, is our Judge and the one we should strive to please (vss. 3-4).
3. We should not be quick to judge ourselves or others, for only the Lord and judge perfectly (v. 5).
4. Loyalty to Christ's servants must not distract us from loyalty to Christ (vss. 6-7).
5. Christ's loyal followers will always be branded as fools by the world (vss. 8-10).
6. Service for Christ never precludes suffering (vss. 11-13).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Man's judgment is always faulty, but God's judgment is always true."

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, in the Name of Jesus Christ we praise You for being the most righteous Judge that there is. May we be reminded today to not quickly judge others because this responsibility is Yours all alone. Thank you for humbling us to realize this. May we be more concerned with what You *know* about us than what man *thinks* about us. Thank You for helping us to do *all* things to Your glory and never to ours-for we are Your ministers and stewards. In Your precious Name we pray-amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Next week's lesson deals with the ethics of intimacy for Christians as set forth in 1 Corinthians 7, and is titled "Called to Relationships." Read for the lesson text 1 Corinthians 7:1-20 and 23-40; as well as 1 John 4:7-16 for a devotional.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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