

## Called to Stewardship 1 Corinthians 3:18-4:21

God gave us everything we have and calls us to be faithful with it.

God has given us resources and gifts to steward and use wisely. Think of all you've been given (intelligence, positions of influence, money, personality, time, discernment, musical talent, etc.). You can use every gift to advance God's kingdom.

But we face two dangers. First, we might use our gifts to exalt ourselves rather than Jesus. Second, we might feel inferior and hide or bury our gifts. We don't cultivate them or we squander them.

Paul was concerned about those issues in 1 Corinthians. This group was tempted to either exalt teachers to the point of neglecting their own gifts, or they boasted about their own gifts and tried to build their own kingdoms. The church in Corinth was thinking like the world, believing that prestige and power and talent ought to rule the day, when in fact God was asking for faithfulness.

Paul provided a solution in the reality of the Judgment Seat of Christ. Everybody will be judged based upon faithfulness, not based on talent. In the meanwhile, we wait for our rewards and don't look for applause or wealth or power right now. We serve faithfully and wait for God's judgment.

God gave us everything we have, and calls us to use it faithfully.

If we're honest, we know that some people are born with more talent, money, or resources than others. But God judges based on how well we steward what we have, not based on what we start with. That is antithetical to the world's view of power and success, so we are truly swimming upstream!

Ask yourself: What has God given me, and am I being faithful with it? That's the emphasis of 1 Corinthians 4.

### **I. God owns everything, but He lets us share (3:18-23).**

The world's wisdom insists that the strong, wise, and powerful ought to own the world and the church. But God's wisdom says that He owns everything and has delegated it all to His people.

We often have a selfish attitude toward our resources. Paul says in one sense you are right – the church owns everything because we are connected to Jesus. So yes, all gifts and teachers and resources in the church are OURS, because God lets us use it together.

We have no inherent right to ownership of anything, but because God gives everything to His Son, we get to share when we're connected to him.

What we do, then, is take everything we have been given and simply bring it back into God's service. If you teach, you belong to the church. If you serve, you belong to the church. If you have a position of authority, you belong to the church. If you are hospitable, you belong to the church.

This is the reverse of Greek culture, which believed that skilled teachers had followers who "belonged" to them. They would raise an army of like-minded thinkers to carry their ideas forward. Paul says, "No. Everybody belongs to the church because the church belongs to Jesus."

In the church, it's not Communism, because in the church nobody loses. And nobody is forced. We give out of gratitude and appreciate for the grace of God. What you lack, somebody else has, and vice versa. (College students might lack money, but they have time and energy).

God owns everything and lets us share it.

## **II. God judges our faithfulness, not our ability (4:1-7).**

What is required of you? To simply be faithful.

You need to have good eyes to be a pilot. You have to have a base level of intelligence to become a neurosurgeon. You have to have good ears to be a music producer.

That's the way the world works. But it's not how God judges. God judges based on how well we steward what we have been given. Some are giving more than others. Not everybody in here is a genius. Not everybody is particularly good-looking. Not everybody is extroverted or athletic, or whatever.

But God gave all gifts, and He judges based on faithfulness.

Two errors: (1) assuming your advantages make you superior; or (2) assuming disadvantages make you inferior, so you hide your resources.

**Luke 19:11-27** – Parable of the minas (10 talents, 5, 1), each rules over cities based on faithfulness. The final man lost his because of his unfaithfulness, not because he only started with one. Don't make the mistake of assuming that God evaluates you based on what you start with!

Monopoly game experiment: Those who started with more money acted proud, as if they were actually better players! The others became timid, and didn't play all out.

Don't do that. Use everything God has given you, and use it faithfully. You're hospitable? Adopt-an-Aggie or Conversation Partners. You're athletic? Help coach kids or organize games and show them the character of Jesus. You're smart? Teach others to know the Scripture. Grow and cultivate your gifts, and use them faithfully.

## **III. God rewards faithfulness in His ways and in His timing (4:8-21).**

Paul chastises the Corinthians because they wanted their reward right now. They wanted worldly rewards also: fame, prestige, power. Paul says that servants of Christ actually can expect sorrow and suffering right now, and the reward will come later.

You can't manipulate the reward system. You can't take them early.

Have you ever tried to "manipulate" an award from somebody? Fished for compliments (I like your shirt! You're so pretty!)? Or even rewarded yourself? (I ran a quarter mile. I'm eating a large pizza tonight!)

God rewards out of his generosity, in His own way.

**Matthew 20:1-15** – Workers hired at 9am, noon, 3pm, and 5pm. All are paid the same! The early workers are angry. God is generous, though, and pays according to faithfulness. Not according to when you started, or your ability. Everything is his, and He rewards as He sees fit. It's not like the world does it.

**We will all stand before Christ's judgment seat (1 Cor 3:10-15).** Not to determine if you will go to heaven, but to determine whether you receive praise from God and to what extent you will reign with him.

Not talking about eternal life. Instead, we're saying that our lives will be evaluated to determine how we'll be rewarded by Jesus.

So simply use your gifts faithfully. Don't try to steal or claim rewards right now. If you want recognition or money or prestige right now, you can have. Then congratulations, that is your reward. Or you can look forward to an eternal reward that will last forever.

Everything you have comes from God, so use it faithfully.

### **Application**

Ponder for a moment: What are the resources God has given you?

- Natural abilities
- Personality
- Positions of influence
- Money or possessions
- Time
- Health

Everybody has resources the church and the body of Christ needs. Whether you're the next Martin Luther or your influence is smaller, God has placed you where you are with the gifts you have for a reason.

Are you using those resources faithfully? Developing and serving the church with them?