



## First Corinthians 4:1-7

### Chapter 3:21-23 [From Session 9]

**Let no man boast in men** Don't boast about men (e.g. Apollos, Cephas, Paul); remember they are only men who plant and water (3:5-7). **For all things are yours**: this is rather unclear until the context is studied. In context, we see the church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ (3:11), and we are the temple of God (3:16). Because of that, we are in Christ and Christ in us and we possess all things together as one body of Christ.

Which **things** are ours? **All are yours** no matter who, what, when, or where we may find ourselves, when we are one in Christ, as his body, **you are Christ's; and Christ is God's**. The foundation of our church is Christ.

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### Chapter 4

#### Verses 1,2 -

Now, in verse 1 Paul says, **so consider us** (the **us** probably meaning Paul and Apollos). Let's review who Apollos was for a moment. He first shows up in Acts 18:24-28. There are several things that we learn about him:

1. He was eloquent, meaning he was skilled in speech.
2. He was mighty in the Scriptures. He could use the Scriptures mightily to speak of Christ.
3. He was fervent in spirit. The word fervent means to *boil or to be hot*. He was on fire for the Lord.
4. He was a bold speaker. He had confidence.

Now contrast Apollos with the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:3-4. Also, Paul writing about what people say about him, says in 2 Corinthians 10:10,

*"For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible."*

Paul and Apollos were two different kind of men. The people in the church were taking sides, many probably leaning toward Apollos because of his eloquent speaking skills. And Paul has made it clear that he and Apollos are not divided, they are working together to bring the good news to all men.

So Paul says in verse 1, **Let a man consider us** also to belong to Christ like you are! In other words, we are in this together. We are as **servants of** Christ. The word in Greek used here for **servants** is ὑπηρέτης [*hyperetes*], *hyper* from the word *hupo* meaning under, and *ertes* from the word *eresso* meaning rower: Under rowers. Paul seems to be saying, "Look, don't elevate either one of us above Christ or even equal with Him. We are like you, **servants of Christ**, we are under rowers with Christ, let's row together!"

And, to be **stewards of the mysteries of God**. The word **steward** in Greek is *oikonomos*, *oikos* means house, and *nomos* means law, so the word is *house law*, that is, one who keeps the law in the house. It can also be translated *dispensation* (1 Corinthians 9:17).

Another way to look at the word steward is as a *manager* of a household or household affairs. Paul states he and Apollos are managing the mysteries of God, or in this case managers of the mysteries of the dispensation or, age of grace.

God revealed several mysteries about the church to Paul. Paul then, as the steward of the mysteries is the one who is making them known. He uses the plural for mysteries. What are the **mysteries of God?**

1. Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews.
2. Both Jew and Gentile are of the same body of *Christ*. For believers, there is no longer Jew nor Greek.
3. Both Jew and Gentile partake in his promise of Christ by the gospel (Before this time the Gentiles were "without hope" (Ephesians 2:12).

There are several mysteries throughout the New Testament. Paul makes known another mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:51.

All of these mysteries were hidden from the prophets, according to Ephesians 3:6,7: "*Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister...*"

These are no longer mysteries since God has made them known through his ministers, and stewards.

Paul, in verse 2 uses the word **Faithful**. What is required of a steward of the Word of God? Faithfulness. Paul is faithfully teaching the mysteries of God to the church as it transitions from the dispensation of Law to the dispensation of Grace.

The Seven Dispensations							
	Innocence	Conscience	Government	Promise	Law	Grace	Kingdom
Scripture	Genesis 1-3	Genesis 4-8	Genesis 9-11	Genesis 12 - Exodus 18	Exodus 19 - Acts 1	Acts 2 - Revelation 19	Revelation 20
Duration	From the creation of Adam to his fall.	From the fall of Adam to the flood of Noah.	From the flood to the call of Abraham	From the call of Abraham to the giving of the Mosaic Law	From the giving of the Mosaic Law to Pentecost (?)	Transitions from Pentecost to the Rapture	From the second coming of Jesus through the new heaven and new earth
The Responsibility Before God	Fill and steward the earth; do not eat from the tree.	Obey the dictates of conscience.	Replenish the earth; rule righteously	Live in light of the promise	Keep the Mosaic Law	Believe the Gospel by faith alone	Worship and obey Christ, the King
The Judgment From God	Separation from God	The flood	Confusion of language	Egyptian slavery	The curses of the covenants and captivities	No judgment for believers. Rapture.	Fire from heaven after 1,000 years.

Stewards are **required** to be **found faithful**.

Stewards are to faithfully and rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). They are to be faithful stewards of the word of God. This would hold for any leader (especially a pastor) within the church. Many men today are not being faithful stewards of the Word of God. They are not studying the word of God, they are not rightly dividing the truth of the word of God. They are not showing themselves approved. Studying the word of God is hard word, and it takes faithfulness. We need faithful men!

Often the Bible is never opened in some churches. Could it be that too many programs and the drive for success can be leading men away from faithfulness? There is a tendency for churches to compete with the world to get people in the doors. What if we just said, "*We want to be faithful to God's Word*" and then do it, study it, teach it, faithfully--I wonder what would happen in our churches?

And by the way, **one be found faithful** (vs. 2), Paul writes this word **one** in the masculine. He is making the point we need faithful men. We also need faithful women, but it is men Paul is saying God is looking for in the church.

In the sense of teaching the word, all men are required to be stewards. Stay faithful to the Word, don't place your hope and trust in men. Be faithful in what God has entrusted to you.

### Verses 3,4 -

Since we do not have the letter the Corinthians sent to Paul, we have to do a little surmising about some of the accusations or, as we read in 1:11, the *contentions* within the church. It appears that church members, divided among which leader is the best, and some were accusing Paul of not being a faithful steward. And we looked above at some of the reasons this may have been happening.

So as Paul mentions faithful stewards in 4:2, he now addresses which appears to be judging by the Corinthian church members toward him. Paul says, **it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you**. Even **man's judgment** (literally, court, as in man's *court*, or a secular court) is of very little account to Paul. He did not base his faithfulness as a steward on what men thought of him. His goal was to always be faithful to God first and to only boast in the Lord.

**I do not even judge myself** (vs. 3). I don't think Paul is saying he shouldn't examine himself (See 1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5). We should self-examine to make sure we line up with Scripture. His point is, no matter what he thinks of himself, ultimately the **Lord judges** (vs. 4) and that is all that matters. How do we know God's judgment? We only learn it from Scripture. So, as a good steward, Paul looks to God's word and lets the word of God examine him whether or not he is faithful.

A few weeks ago someone wrote to me and criticized my use of a certain word in an article I wrote for our Cambodia ministry. This well-intentioned person thought a particular word I used was derogatory and that since, as he quoted, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" I should address everyone as equals. I agree. I do consider everyone as my equal. But my response to the man was, "*Look at our ministry and the redemption we present through the Lord Jesus Christ and him only. I think it speaks for itself.*" In other words, don't just judge me by one word, let the whole body of what I have written be the judge of how I treat people.

The apostle Paul is saying I'll look at what is written in Scripture and let it be my judge.

**For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this** (vs. 4). This is a difficult sentence to understand exactly what Paul means, but I think what Paul is saying is *no matter what I think, I am not declared righteous before God by my own opinion*. Therefore, **he who judges me is the Lord**.

### Verse 5 -

People in the Corinthian church were not being faithful stewards and were judging others **before the time** (prematurely). The only pure Judge is the Lord.

For us today in the church, it is not our function to be the judge and the jury. The tendency is for us to moralize the lives of others. We need to be careful of that. There is a degree to which only a man's conscience can convict him--I can't do it. It has to come from the spirit. Our judging of others will not bring them to the point of conviction.

Rather, let us lay the word of God before people and let the word do its work. And by that, I do not mean open the Bible and start quoting verses to someone who is living in sin. What needs to happen is for the pastor to teach the Bible week after week, line by line, word by word, and for those who come faithfully and hear that word, it will convict them without someone else judging them.

Hebrews 4:12 (NKJV)

*12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

**Until the Lord comes** then it will be the time of judgment. His judgment won't be premature judging like man's. The Lord's judgment will be at the right time and drive deep into the soul, Everything hidden in darkness he **will bring to light**.

**Hidden things of darkness.** Once we confess our sins before the Lord they are no longer hidden, and when he comes to judge Christians (at the Judgment Seat of Christ), if we have confessed, there will be no hidden things of darkness to **bring to light**.

**Reveal the counsels of the hearts.** This could be referring back to faithful stewards, those who are not judging and striving to be faithful. Each faithful one will have **praise...from God**. And that praise will probably come after the Rapture of the church when we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Verse 6 -

We are establishing from the previous verses that a problem of judging others was prevalent in the Corinthian church. Paul and Apollos were not the ones struggling with it, but Paul makes it clear he is including himself and Apollos **figuratively** in the discussion.

Mature believers are needed to set an example in a local church. The Corinthian church can see that Apollos and Paul are not divided and are not **puffed up** against each other, as are the men in this local church.

Since Paul and Apollos are not **puffed up...one against another**, neither should the church members be puffed up against one another. What he means here is we are to lead by example. Men, lead in the church by example; lead in your home by example; and, lead in your work by example. Lead and don't be puffed up, boastful and antagonistic against one another.

### Verse 7 -

Paul was speaking to the entire church body, but for some reason in this verse he shifts pronouns from the plural to the singular; **For who makes you differ from another**, he is addressing one person. The **"you"** used here is a singular pronoun in the Greek. Is he referring to the figurative "a man"? It's a tough verse to interpret, but interesting that he uses a different pronoun nonetheless.

So when he says, **Who makes you differ from another** he asks the question rhetorically--the answer: God does. God distinguishes those who received the spirit of God, from those who received the spirit of the world.

**What do you have that you did not receive?** Why are you acting like you are a natural person who has not received the Spirit of God (2:14).

**If you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it,** or, why are you boasting about about being right in this dispute in the church? Quit depending on your human reason and skill and depend on the Spirit of God.

Here is his point. Anything spiritual we have in our lives is from God, we have no reason to boast. We live in the age of grace and because of that we did nothing to earn our salvation. It is a gift of God. Therefore, you and I have to be humble people, and realize that anything we have comes from God, and not our own doing.