The Good & The Bad

1 Cor. 4:1-13

As we have been looking at Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we have seen that Paul is dealing with several issues that church had developed.

The first concern was of unity which we saw in chapters 2-3 and now in chapter 4 we see the next concern, servanthood. Not that being a servant was a problem but rather not being a servant was the problem.

So, turn to chapter 4 where we will see in the first 5 verses of this chapter:

I. What your Pastor should be. 4:1-5

Here Paul provides us with 4 things a pastor should be.

1. A Servant

1 Corinthians 4:1, "This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed."

Paul is teaching the Corinthians how they should regard himself, Apollos and Cephas…their pastors. He says to regard them as 'servants'. The word he uses here is one that was used for the lowest of galley slaves and that this service is done for Jesus.

In just a few chapters Paul writes this:

1 Corinthians 9:16, "For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

Looking back at verse 1 we see that these leaders were entrusted with the mystery. This mystery is the revealed truth of the gospel.

As a servant of Jesus Christ, the pastor has two prioritizes, one is to dispense God's Word well and the other is to live in personal holiness. If a pastor does this, he is to be free of judgement from man.

But if there is sin involved or he is not preaching the Word he is to be brought before the elders for correction.

A pastor should be:

2. Trustworthy.

1 Corinthians 4:2, “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”

To be a pastor does not require brilliance, cleverness, creativity or even popularity. But it does require one to be trustworthy.

A pastor should be:

3. Examined by the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:3-4, “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.”

No human is qualified to determine the legitimacy, quality or faithfulness of our work for the Lord. I’m not even qualified to judge myself, only the Lord can.

On what standard would we judge ourselves? Our own standard? By the standards of man? All of this fall short.

A pastor’s focus should not be on human examination or with the goal to please men, it must be on pleasing the Lord. We must completely surrender to the Lords judgement, to His will alone!

A pastor should be:

4. Evaluated completely by God

1 Corinthians 4:5, “Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.”

On that day of judgement our motives will be revealed. We can run through this life and be completely blind to our own motives.

Call upon the Lord, ask Him to reveal our motives through the ministry of His Holy Spirit in us.

We don’t have to wait until judgement to have the Spirit show us our motives and to align with God’s desires, but that requires humility which we see as we move on in 1 Corinthians.

II. Conceit & Humility 4:6-13

Paul provides two examples here for us to understand clearly how we are to live.

1. The example of conceit: The Corinthians

1 Corinthians 4:6-8, “Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!”

What Paul is saying in this passage and why he used metaphors is to help the Corinthians understand that everything they have, everything, comes from God. He is teaching them not to exalt themselves.

The attitude we have when we realize all we have is from God is one of gratitude and results in loyalty to God. But when we think we are smarter than everyone else, that we have what we have out of our own efforts and neglect God’s mercies towards us we become proud and conceited. This my brothers & sisters weakens the church and causes divisions.

The examples we should follow are these:

John the Baptist, who when Jesus came to him to be baptized proclaimed that he was not worthy.

Moses, when told to go to Pharoah in Exodus 3 declared, ““Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

Moses knew that he was no one special, but when he became the tool of God he was able to face Pharoah and demand that he let God’s people go.

Peter in Luke 5 when Jesus told the disciples to go into the deep water and cast their nets after a night of fruitless fishing, cast the nets and hauled in a load of fish. Peter responded to Jesus by saying, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

These men, these leaders of the faith, responded in humility understanding their position compared to God.

In verse 8 Paul uses sarcasm when he refers to the Corinthians as kings, but then he twists it by reminding them that in the millennial kingdom they will truly be kings.

2. The example of humility: The Apostles

Humanity looks for success, riches, beauty and lavish lifestyles as the signs of success.

The life of the Apostles demonstrated a different path. God's path for them was to lead people to see God's glory. That path is contrary to what humanity defines as success. Their path is where they are spectacles, fools, sufferers and scum.

1) Spectacles

1 Corinthians 4:9, "For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings."

The concept here was like the prisoners of war when taken by the Romans. They were marched behind the Roman military leaders and troops in order to mock and humiliate them. This was done before they were taken to the arena to fight wild animals and ultimately die.

They were mocked, spit upon, beaten, imprisoned. Fun job this Apostleship, want to sign up?

2) Fools

1 Corinthians 4:10, "We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!"

The worldly wisdom wants glory, honor and recognition. So, the world looks on the Apostles as fools. In this the world shows us that they are the foolish ones.

If I am going to be a fool, I want to be a fool for Jesus!

3) Sufferers

1 Corinthians 4:11-12, "To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;"

As the church members in Corinth are bragging about what they have and the pride they are taking in those things, Paul is pointing to the Apostles, who by their standards are poor.

In Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians, he has to address this matter again. In that letter he says this?

2 Corinthians 11:23-28, "Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I

have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. 27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."

Paul hated using his own example to show them that they hadn't arrived yet. If anyone had a right to boast it was Paul, not the Corinthians. Not us.

4) Scum

1 Corinthians 4:13, "when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment."

They are the thrown away scraps from others dinner plates. Here is a great Biblical promise for you:

2 Timothy 3:12, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,"

How many prosperity preachers claim this promise? Is it a cost you are willing to pay? Godliness has a price! But this is a promise. Let's complete it:

1 Peter 5:6, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

God will lift you up…in due time. That's where I want to be church. I want to lay crowns at my Saviors feet. I want to hear those words, well done good and faithful servant. I want to do what He has called me to do. Will you? Will you follow Him no matter what the cost?