

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/31/94 PM  
I Corinthians 4:1-2 "Seeing Ourselves as Stewards"

**Intro:** It has been our privilege this evening to enjoy the ministry of several of our young people. They have used their musical abilities to honor God and encourage God's people. We are grateful. We would say to them, "We appreciate you. Thank you for using your God-given abilities for the Lord."

We are facing a perplexing problem in the decade of the 90's in America. It's a perspective problem. We are part of a "Me" generation. We look at life with these questions in mind, "What's in it for me?" and "What will I get out of it?"

As Christians, we know that is wrong. We know self-centered and self-focused living does not please God. Yet tragically, too often, we also wrestle with this perspective problem. We find ourselves breathing the air of a very self-focused brand of Christianity these days (just glance at the best sellers in the Christian bookstore).

How should we see ourselves? We need to see ourselves as stewards.

What does that mean? What is a steward? I want to say up front the biblical concept of "steward" is one of the most helpful images I know to correct the perspective problem. The apostle Paul can help us learn how to see ourselves as stewards, as we examine his instruction in I Corinthians 4:1-2.

**Proposition: When I see myself as a steward, it affects two views in my life, according to I Corinthians 4:1-2.**

Background:

The Corinthian problem was an age-old problem. There were divisions in the church (1:10). Divided loyalties. There was a spirit of competition. Some liked Peter, others Apollos, still others Paul (3:22). The comparisons hindered the work of the ministry.

We have the same tendency today.

"Well, I like Chuck Swindoll. He's the best."

"No, he's not from our denomination. The best preacher is Charles Stanley."

"No, you're both wrong. MacArthur is the man. He's a careful Bible teacher. We need more men like him."

How can we overcome this spirit of rivalry? It comes back to this. We need to see ourselves, and others in the Church, as stewards. What happens when I see myself as a steward?

**I. When I see myself as a steward, it will affect my view of my Role (1).**

V 1 "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." Paul knew the Corinthians were playing the game of comparisons. So speaking in behalf of himself and his fellow ministers (Peter, Apollos, and the others), he said, "Hold on! Don't compare us. I want to let you in on some inside news. Let me share with you my view of myself, my role."

Here's how Paul viewed himself. He shared two key words:

A. Minister

The Greek word Paul used is a special word. In 3:5, he writes, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers..." That's a different Greek word. The word in 4:1 is "huperetes." It means "servant." It literally refers to an "underrower." The picture is that of a slave in the bottom of a ship, pulling on the oars. Lines of slaves rowed in sync to move the ship through the waters.

Who decided where the ship was to go? Not the underrower, but the captain on deck. The captain makes the decisions on where the ship is to go, and the underrower takes it there.

Think of the implication. Jesus is the Captain of our ship. As Christians, we are the underrowers. He is on deck right now. His orders are clear. "You have the oars in your hands. Now pull on them, and I'll take the Church where I want it to go."

What a beautiful picture! There's a second image that shaped Paul's view of his role.

### B. Stewards

This word comes from another common scene in Roman life. The "steward" was the person in charge of a house or estate. He was a slave. He did not own the estate. His master did. But the steward possessed great privilege. The master had delegated great authority and responsibility to him. The steward was in control of the household staff. He ordered supplies. He used the master's money to accomplish the master's plans.

Paul saw himself as a steward. He teaches us we must view ourselves as stewards. Jesus Christ is the Master of the household. We are stewards. We are here to do His business. We have no rights of our own. We have no possessions of our own. But we do have something.

What has the Master delegated to our care? V 1 We are "stewards of the mysteries of God." What are the "mysteries of God"? Don't think of a Sherlock Holmes mystery. Paul is not saying that God is "mysterious." Our English word "mystery" has connotations of something spooky or shady. The Greek word has a different shade of meaning.

In the 1st century, there were various "mystery religions." These groups had "secrets" known only to the members of the group. An outsider was in the dark to these "mysteries." You had to be initiated to know the "mysteries."

Let this sink in. Paul says God has entrusted to our care the "hidden things" unknown to the rest of the world. We are stewards of God's secrets. He has put in our care things not known by others.

But my job is to make these "mysteries" known. What are the "mysteries"? Col 1:26-27 tells us, "Even the mystery which has been hidden for generations...which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Christ in us, that's the mystery. That's the treasure. We are stewards of this mystery. Never forget that. And never forget these truths, these mysteries are God's not ours. We enjoy them, but we don't own them. There's no room for pride. We are stewards. Our job is to do with the mystery what the Master wants.

Have you ever been hurt in the ministry? Maybe somebody let you down, or disappointed you. And you thought, "My feelings got hurt. I deserve better than that. I'll show them. I won't serve any more."

When that happens, we need to remember our role. We are stewards. We don't serve in the church to please people. We serve to please our Master.

## **II. When I see myself as a steward, it will affect my view of my Responsibility (2).**

What is my responsibility? V 2 "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." My responsibility is to be faithful doing what the Master wants. Trustworthy (NASB). Reliable (Barclay).

Listen. When I get a handle on my responsibility, it affects the way I view the church, and the ministry. My job is not to be successful, but to be faithful. It's not to get results, but to be faithful proclaiming the mysteries. My job is not to get people to walk the isle, but to be faithful in proclaiming the truth.

Our responsibility is not to keep other people happy. It's to be faithful to the Lord, and our calling.

Key: Once we see ourselves as stewards, we will realize this. We do not own anything. God owns it all. What we "have" belongs to Him. He has entrusted it to our care. He expects us to use it to accomplish His agenda, not ours, for His gain, not our own.

What has He given to us? Of what are we stewards?

### 1. He has given us talents.

We all have talents. Some of us have musical talents. Others are gifted with our hands. Others are super with kids. Maybe yours is sports. Whatever it is, remember this. God didn't give us our talents to hoard, nor to bring attention to ourself. We are stewards of those talents. Some day we will give an account to the Master.

### 2. He has given us time.

Have you ever said, "There just aren't enough hours in the day"? No doubt we all have. I heard Stuart Briscoe in March say this, "That is blasphemy. God put just the right number of hours in our day! The problem is when we allow others to control our schedule, instead of God."

God doesn't want 2 hours on Sunday morning. He wants the whole week. We are stewards of 168 hours a week.

### 3. He has given us treasures.

Our homes, our recreational items, our computers, our cars, our money. Think about this. These are not ours. God has temporarily entrusted them to our care. He expects us to be faithful stewards in their use. Are you honoring God with your treasures?

We are to see ourselves as stewards of our talents, stewards of our time, stewards of our treasures. Our one consuming goal must be this: To be found faithful.