

"FOUND FAITHFUL"

I Corinthians 4:1-5

There is set forth in this chapter the peculiar relationship between the church and her leader. This union between the leader and the led is a natural one. Furthermore, it is a divine one. Paul had sought to put the servants of Christ in their proper place in the thinking of the church members in Corinth.

Turning to consider the responsibility of the servants of Christ, Paul wrote, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." In this connection, people are inclined to go to one extreme or the other, either to laud and praise and overestimate the ability of God's servants, or to set them at naught and disdain the instruction and help God intended for them to give. Here we are taught to take the middle course by recognizing that we have a great responsibility toward them as they seek to fulfil their responsibility toward us. They watch for our souls as those who must give account, and we are not to be angry or indignant if they have serious things to say to us at times concerning worldliness, carelessness and carnality. We are rather to judge ourselves in the light of the Word of God, that they bring to us, for they are ministers of Christ. They are sent to sound forth His Word, and they are responsible to do it faithfully. People should regard their ministers as servants of Christ and dispensers of the truths of God's Word.

Quite literally, the meaning of the word "minister" is one who acts under direction, and asks no questions; one who does the thing he is appointed to do without hesitation and reports only to the One Who is over him. "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ," not of you Corinthians. If one is to act under His direction, he must keep in touch with Him, seek to know His will, not run ahead of Him nor lag behind Him, but live in daily contact with Him. What a minister must do is what Christ tells him, and when the day's work is over he does not have to report to a committee but to the Master. It is a great privilege and a tremendous responsibility to be a servant of Christ, to take orders from Him, do His work and report to Him only.

A steward is one to whom certain things are committed which he is to use for the benefit of others. God has committed His truth to us. The business of a steward is not to electrify people by his eloquent sermons, not to dazzle them by his wonderful ability, not to please them by flowers of rhetoric, but to open up the truth of God and to make known these mysteries in order that the people of God may appreciate the heritage that He has given them in the Word. In fulfilling this ministry, the servant of Christ may be open to criticism, but that is a small thing. In substance Paul said to them, as long as I am faithful in opening up the Word of God I am not concerned whether or not my sermons appeal to you; as long as I know that I am pleasing Him Who sent me I am not greatly concerned if I displease you.

Many professed Christians are more concerned with what men say or think of their stewardship than they are with what God thinks. There are those who care only for the praise and plaudits of men. Whether they are right or wrong in the sight of God means but little to them. There are some who care more for the praise of men than they do the praise of God. But, in reality, it matters little whether men praise or blame so long as God approves. Divine approval is more to be desired than the best of human approbation. The true judgment is not human, but divine.

In Paul's estimation, the opinions which the Corinthians entertained of him amounted to nothing. It mattered little to him whether they thought him faithful or unfaithful. His responsibility was not to them, but to the Lord. They had not sent him, nor told him what he was to preach. He was not their steward, but God's. He told them very plainly that neither they nor he could competently decide whether or not he was faithful. The Lord was the only judge of that. Since He is the only judge, we must wait for His appearance,

and neither assume His prerogative nor anticipate His decision. "He that judgeth me is the Lord." He sees, He knows and He appraises the value of our work. He will pronounce the correct judgment on our labors.

Faithful means trustworthy or dependable. A faithful person is one who is trustworthy in the transaction of business, the execution of commands, or the discharge of duties. Faithfulness is one of the most beautiful things in the world. It elicits our admiration wherever we find it. The fidelity of a dog to his master is a theme fit for a poem. The highest tribute a master can pay his servant is to say he is faithful. No matter how capable one may be, if he cannot be depended on, he is not worth much to another. The measure of any man's worth is his fidelity, his loving faithfulness to duty.

We are the stewards of "the mysteries of God." "Mysteries" are the things that in past times were unknown, but are now revealed to those who have believed on Christ. The message of salvation in Christ is the mystery with which we are entrusted. This message includes the forerunning mercy of God, the pardon of sins, the liberation of the soul from slavery to evil, the infusion of new energy into the will, the union of the soul with Christ; in short, the creation of a new man with a new world for his home, a new spirit for his work, and a new outlook on life and eternity.

I. The Requirement.

A steward is a person who has been entrusted with the management of the affairs of another. Stewards have a trust committed to them. They occupy a position of trust, of responsibility, of influence, of some peril, and of much honor. Faithfulness in stewardship is a principle approved by both God and man.

"Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." Stewards are required to be faithful to their trust. The reasonable expectation is that the man who is entrusted with a responsible position and work will be found faithful in the doing of that work. As stewards of the gospel we are responsible for dispensing what the Lord has placed in our care according to the directions which He has given us. The first thing required of us is that we should be faithful. If we are to act under the direction of the Lord, we must keep in touch with Him, we must live in daily contact with Him, we must seek to know His will, and we must do that will without running ahead of Him or lagging behind Him.

Faithfulness is a requisite for any service, but especially for one involving such responsible trusts as stewardship, the care of what belongs to another. How wonderful it is that we have been placed in charge of so priceless a treasure as "the manifold grace of God!"

II. The Realm.

1. We must be faithful to the truth.

Carefully pass on the truths we have received.

2. We must be faithful to our ideals.

Ideals do not realize themselves. Man does not become honest by thinking about the beauties of the honest life. Honesty involves a keeping of all our obligations. If it is necessary to contract a debt, it is necessary to pay it. It is in these things that faithfulness is tried. The ideal is beautiful although the path leading to its attainment may not be so attractive. Fidelity to the ideal implies fidelity in every step along the path that leads to it.

3. We must be faithful to others.

The charming thing about friendship is the absolute security that friends feel in each other's confidence. Without faithfulness friendship is impossible. Without faithfulness men cease to be good neighbors. The very warp and woof of social

life is faithfulness. Nothing can tear asunder two hearts that are living in the assurance that they can always depend on each other.

4. We must be faithful to Christ.

(1) In our own hearts.

It is with Him that we have to do. It is a matter between friends. "I have called you friends," is His own gracious characterization of believers. Now, what do you call being faithful to a friend? It is to have such a real love for him in the heart that we shall seek His company and delight in it. Let it be so with Christ. In the homage of private prayer seek Him. Seek His face and hear His word day by day.

Moreover, faithfulness to a friend would imply that you would be jealous of his good name. You would never hesitate to speak up for him in his absence. You would correct any one who spoke ill of him. You would declare that none would so speak who really knew your friend. In like manner, let us speak well of our Lord, and let our speech be supported by a witness that confirms the friendship we profess with Him. Let us commend Him in every way we can, and especially by being as much like Him as God's grace enables us to be.

(2) In the church.

Christ closely identifies Himself with His people. He says that kindness to them is kindness to Him. He says that neglect of them is neglect of Him. He told Paul on the Damascus road that persecution of them was persecution of Him. Perhaps you had thought, as many have mistakenly thought, that being faithful to Christ is one thing and faithfulness to the church is another. But Christ does not think so. Christ identifies Himself with His people. We cannot be faithful to Christ in the highest way if we are indifferent to His people. Cultivate an intense loyalty to the church. Let nothing alienate your affection.

(3) In His service.

There is something admirable in the steady faithfulness of many we know in the churches. Through long years they have toiled, and they are still at their posts. Through days of success and days of delayed success, they have continued undismayed. Through days of patient sowing and through days of glorious reaping, they have carried on the work.

Think of that Christian who is known to be faithful in his service for Christ. The faithful servant is the one who seeks to carry out the will of God, and God can depend on him. Moses was a man who was faithful in God's service. God could depend upon him.

The story is told that during the battle of Waterloo, Wellington posted a certain captain with a big force by a certain bridge, a little distance from the battlefield, and he was told to stay there, as he would be needed at the end of the battle. This captain, and the men under him, saw the fighting going on, and they longed to be in the conflict. At last the captain could resist the temptation no longer, and he took his troops to join in the fight, and the battle was won; but the French retreated along the very road where this captain and his men should have been. After the battle was over Wellington found out that this captain had disobeyed him, and he reproved him before the whole army as one who had been unfaithful to his charge. Can our great Captain depend on us? Remember that His eyes are set on faithfulness, so let us renew our loyalty to Him and do whatever He commands us to do.

Just what reason are we going to be able to give which Christ will accept for not being loyal and faithful to Him? John the Baptist was loyal to Christ

even though he had to go to jail to prove his loyalty. For twelve years John Bunyan was jailed, but the verdict on the last day will be that he was loyal to Christ. Three million martyrs would not have had to die if they had spoken only one word in denying Christ. But knowing the unflinching loyalty of Christ in dying for the eternal welfare of their souls, they prayed for grace to be loyal to Him even though they should die for their faith. Oh, how we need to be faithful in the service of Christ whether our resources be ample or slender, whether our powers be brilliant or dull, or whether our opportunities be rare or commonplace! Our lives belong, not to ourselves, but to Christ. He died that we might live, not for ourselves, but for Him. No one has any right to live for himself, for the world, or for sin.

III. The Results.

1. Satisfaction over duty done.
It means so much for one to know that he had discovered and done the will of the Lord.
2. Realization that have helped others.
Having done so, one enjoys the admiration and appreciation of those who have been helped.
3. Promotion to a larger field of service.
Look into any department of life and you will see that he who has faithfully filled the humbler position has both fitted himself for and been promoted to a higher one. Joseph, the slave, became the premier of Egypt. The captive Hebrew youths were made presidents of Chaldea. He who is faithful in a few things becomes ruler over many. When we do small things well, greater opportunities will open up for us. Our Lord always rewards work well done by giving more and greater work to do.
4. Commendation of the Master.
The Master seeks and expects to find faithfulness when the steward renders his account. The question is not whether we have five, two, or one talent, but what have we done with what was given us, much or little? In the final estimate of life the highest place is given not to brilliance, nor to success, but to faithfulness. If we are faithful, at the last the judge of all will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." What a happy and encouraging thought that, though it may not be within our power to be brilliant and successful, it is within our power to be faithful, and if so, we shall not lose the commendation of the Master at the end of the way.

So, whatever else you may do, let the Lord Jesus Christ have your life, because He can do more with it than you can ever do.

"Only one life; 'Twill soon be past;
Only what's done for Christ will last."