

MINISTERS AND STEWARDS

1 Cor. 4:1, 2

Intro: It is apparent that we are in a battle, that the work of the Lord is not easy. We all long to be more fruitful.

This time together has been planned in the hope that it would be an encouraging time--that we might go back to our work strengthened and refreshed. We do not want to be like the policeman who stopped the man who was getting ready to jump off of a bridge he was so discouraged. When he finished telling the police officer his sad story, the policeman jumped off with him.

In independent works one thing that we usually lack is fellowship with other pastors.

One way we can get encouragement in between the times we are able to get together is by our reading--reading in the Word, first and foremost and always, but also reading the writings of men of God in past days--such men as Spurgeon, Charles Bridges, William Bridge, the Puritans (who were great pastors), Lloyd-Jones, and many others. Biographies are especially helpful.

I feel a real sense of responsibility in speaking to all of you today, pastors and wives, and I have prayed that this would be a time of great blessing for all of us--me included, and Lucille!

I had planned on using a certain text, but just early this morning the Lord seems to have led me in another direction, and I want to talk to you about what Paul said about himself and his fellowworkers in the Gospel in 1 Cor. 4:1, 2.

I. THE TEXT.

He called himself by two titles:

- 1) The ministers of Christ.
- 2) Stewards of the mysteries of God.

He used a special word here for ministers, a word which literally means an under-rower. Applied to the ministry it means a subordinate. One who is appointed to carry out the will of Christ--to go and to do and to be what He wants us to go and do and be.

A steward is one who is entrusted with that which belongs to another, and he is responsible to that other one, his master, as to what he does with it. In this case it has to do with "the mysteries of God"--which is another expression for the Word of God.

This is what we are. Paul used the term, "stewards of God" in Tit. 1:7.

But look at 1 Cor. 4:2 because here we find the word that I want us to think about. (Read.)

We are not required to be fruitful, or to be well-known, but to be faithful!

Now let me go back to pick up two expressions that I passed by:

- 1) "Let a man so account of us"--that is, this is the way Paul wanted all people to think of him, and of those with whom he worked.
- 2) "It is required of us"--obviously by the One Who has given us this position, i.e., God, "that . . ." This means that this is the minister's primary objective in his ministry. This is his goal. This is what he wants for himself more than anything else.

If these things were true of us many of the problems we have would disappear. Our trouble is usually that God isn't doing with us or for us what we think that He ought ought to do, and so we get discouraged. But that should not be our aim in life.

A faithful person continues on with what he has been called to do even when things are difficult, even when there is little or no visible fruit. He trusts God. He believes the promises of the Word. He is steady, consistent, teaching the Word to a few just like he thinks he would if people were coming by the hundreds to hear him.

II. FAITHFUL PEOPLE IN SCRIPTURE.

Timothy -- 1 Cor. 1:9.

Paul -- 1 Cor. 7:25.

God -- 1 Cor. 1:9 and 10:13.

Abraham -- Gal. 3:9.

Moses and Christ -- Heb. 3:1-6. Christ in Heb. 2:17, 18.

Job -- Jas. 5:11.

Women -- Lydia -- Acts 16:15.

Wives of deacons -- 1 Tim. 3:11.

Epaphras -- Col. 1:7.

Tychicus -- Col. 4:7 and Eph. 6:21.

Onesimus -- Col. 4:9.

And look at what Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:1, 2.

Joseph was a faithful man. Daniel was. So was Jeremiah, and many, many others we could mention. Once you start to notice this, it is all through the Scriptures, the OT and the NT.

But what basically does this involve? Where and how do we need to be faithful?

III. Let me suggest the following which grow out of the Scriptures.

A. We need to be faithful in our personal relationship with God -- in the Word (for ourselves), in prayer, and in our own personal obedience to the Word. A faithful man or woman does not try to get others to do things which he is not doing himself.

*Faithful
in exhorting
our people to
be faithful.
Heb. 6:11, 12 (NIV).*

B. We need to be faithful in our ministry of the Word-- whether people want it or not, whether they accept it or not. Look at Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Tim. 4: 1 ff. THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE.

C. We need to be faithful to our people, setting a godly example before them, praying for them, loving them, teaching them--never giving up.

D. We need to be faithful in the world--have a good report of them who are the outside. See 1 Tim. 3:7.

E. Turn to Rev. 2:10. "Be thou faithful unto death . . ." Note the parable in Matt. 25:14 ff.

Concl: Zeph. 3:17, 18.

The Lord has not promised an easy time, but He will be faithful to us, and He wants us, by His grace, to be faithful to Him.