

Stewards Of God's Mysteries

"Let a man so account of us as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Here, moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not my own self. For I know nothing against myself, yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Wherefore, judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall each man have his praise from God" (1 Cor. 4:1-5).

"Let a man so account of us ..." In this passage Paul refers to himself, Apollos, and Cephas as belonging to the Corinthians and it was these of whom the apostle wrote when he said, *"Let a man so account of us."* The Corinthians were to account of these as *"ministers"* of Christ and *"stewards of the mysteries of God."* To further strengthen this conclusion, add to it vs. 6: *"Now these things brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes ..."* The Corinthians had been reprimanded for their division and party spirit. Paul showed in the closing verse of chapter 3 that neither Cephas, he, nor Apollos belonged to a special group but rather belonged to them all. In the appeal in this chapter, the Corinthians are urged to regard all these preachers and apostles as ministers of Christ, heading no party or sect; and that the Corinthians should thus regard them all.

The Corinthians were also to regard these as stewards of the mysteries of Christ. The mysteries of Christ refer not to things yet to be revealed; the mysteries is the gospel which Paul often designates as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:8-11, for example). A steward is one who tends the affairs of another and who gives account of his stewardship to that master. The role of a steward is seen in Jesus' parable of the unjust steward (Lk. 16:1ff). Because Paul was a steward of the gospel of Christ, it was required of him that he be faithful in his handling of it. In a sense preachers today are stewards of the gospel and they need to be mindful that it is required of them that they must be *"found faithful"*: faithful in the proclamation of it.

Because Paul was the steward of Christ, it was to Christ he stood or fell. Whatever judgment the Corinthians might have of him, negative or positive, would not change the fact that it was to his own Lord he stood or fell. True, positive ratings can be an impetus to do better ... to make one feel he is worthwhile, but such ratings do not alter Christ's assessment of His steward. Conversely, negative ratings or comments regarding one's preaching can be discouraging; but such ratings by man do not change the good report which

Christ might give. Even Paul's own judgment about himself did not change that which his master judged of him.

Faithfulness in presenting the gospel of Christ is the all important thing! Changing the gospel in any way to make it more palatable to the hearer results in God's condemning such a steward as *"unfaithful"*. While the good will and approval of man is not necessarily wrong; it should always be the stewards desire to hear his Lord say, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Thou has been faith in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."*

Jim McDonald