Judge Nothing Before The Time
1 Corinthians 4:1-5 (NKJV)

- Paul is writing to the church of Corinth—a carnal church, an immature church that he had a great passion to see grow up.
- And here in chapter 4, Paul reminds them of how important it is to be careful of being hasty in their judgment.

Vs. 1 – “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

- When Saul was on the road to Damascus and he had a holy encounter with Jesus, do you remember the words he said when he realized who he was persecuting?

“So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” Acts 9:6 (NKJV)

- “What do you want me to do?”
- It was not only evidence of his conversion but it was the attitude of his heart. “What do you want me to do?” In other words, “You’re my new boss.”
- Many of us can look back and see the day that we gave our lives to Christ.
- There was a belief in Christ, we understood our need for forgiveness of sin, we saw the cross, and we realized it was there that sin was dealt with.
- But it might have taken many years before we realized that Jesus had a better plan for our lives than we did.
- And when that happened, we surrendered total control of our lives to Christ.
- Which brings up a good question—can a person be saved and not allow the Lord to have total control of their lives?
- Yes—the church of Corinth was evidence of that. They were saved saints but they were struggling with carnality in their lives.
- There were some areas that were not yet under the authority of Jesus Christ.
• Now, I don’t suggest this type of lifestyle—it’s a miserable way to live.
• To have Jesus living in you but not living totally through you; well, it’s a battle.
• To believe you have a better plan for your life than the creator of the universe does—that’s ridiculous, and it’s miserable.
• It’s a good day when you not only make Him savior, but you also surrender to be His servant. That’s what Paul did. “Lord, master, what do you want me to do?” Savior, surrender, and servant.
• Many years later, he was still living by the same mission statement: a servant of Christ. Nothing had changed. Churches had been started, thousands had come to Christ, the persecution had been horrific and oftentimes overwhelming—but Paul had not changed.

Servant = huperetes: an under-rower.

In Paul’s day ships were powered by true manpower. In the belly of the ship would be those who were called the under-rowers. They moved the ship across the water by paddling their way across. They had giant oars moving in and out of the water, like canoeing today, but a hundred times bigger. Paul saw himself like those who were in the belly of a large ship. He was one of many just doing his part, keeping his paddle moving back and forth in the water, moving the ship forward under the leadership of the captain.

• Paul was not the captain of the ship, he was not giving the orders, he was only receiving orders as a servant of the captain—that being captain Jesus.
• Notice the next phrase, “…stewards of the mysteries of God.”
• “…Servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

Stewards = oikonomos: a house manager or distributor.

• Like the manager of a household, the household is not his, he is just a steward over it, keeping guard, watching over, and managing the master’s possessions.
• So what was Paul a stewards over?—the mysteries of God.
• What were the mysteries of God?
• The mystery of the gospel, something that was woven throughout scripture but hidden to the natural eye, was not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles, the mystery of the Holy Spirit and His gifts, the mystery and insight into the age of the church and what will happen in the last days, including the rapture, the great tribulation, the second coming.

• These were mysteries that God had allowed them to protect and preserve, but also distribute to the church and even the world.

• But let me remind you, by definition the word “steward” was not only one who protected and guarded, but also distributed.

• What good would it be if it was just protected and preserved but not distributed?

• God wanted His truth distributed.

“Whenever Paul would hear criticism of his style or manner, he could simply ask ‘Did I give you the truth?’ As a good steward, that is all he really cared about.” – David Guzik (www.blueletterbible.com, 1 Corinthians 4 A.1.d.i)

• Paul knew at the end of the day what mattered most was that he distributed the truth, that he gave them the goods, and that he did not let his fear grip him and strip him of getting the truth into the hands and hearts of those who were in need.

It’s like the UPS guy—his job is to deliver what has been put into his possession and get the box to its destination. His personality is not the major factor. If he is wearing brown socks or blue, it’s not going to matter to me. The goods are what are important.

• Notice what Paul says about being a steward and notice what is required of stewards...

Vs. 2 – “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.”

• When the master would come home what he wanted to know from the steward was that he was faithful.

• There is a great emphasis on faithfulness in scripture.
Paul told Timothy that one of the important characteristics he was to look for in leadership was that they were faithful men…

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” 2 Timothy 2:2 (NKJV)

The places of leadership were not given to the famous but the faithful...

“Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint.” Proverbs 25:19 (NKJV)

Nothing like a bad toothache—so let’s commit to being faithful.

Vs. 3-4 – “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.”

Remember, the propensity in their flesh was to separate over the human leaders they were following. One would say, “I follow Paul, the founder of the Corinthian church,” another, “I follow Apollos, the current pastor of the church.”

Paul is reminding them that their judgment and estimation of him was not as important as the Lord’s judgment.

He does not say it’s totally invalid; he just keeps it in perspective. He uses the word “small” in relation to their judgment towards him, in comparison to the Lord’s judgment—that’s the judgment that will matter.

I think it’s important to make sure that we are not just blowing off those who may love us and want to see us move forward in the faith, that if they approach us in love and speak the truth, it’s important that we listen up.

It’s a healthy part of being connected to the family of God.

It’s a healthy accountability for us.

But we can, if we are not careful, get this out of balance where we are living to please everyone who has anything to say about us.
• Get on *that* treadmill and it will not only wear you out, it will burn you out.
• Keep it in balance, as Paul said, it’s a small thing.
• The most important thing is that we are concerned about what the Lord thinks.
• Others can be off, we can even be off. Paul would even say, “I don’t even judge myself.” He knew that his own estimation of himself was shaky.

My father-in-law, my brother-in-law, and I were making our way to the Men’s Retreat. We were talking about how we need to start eating right and lose some weight. My father-in-law, who is in his sixties, said, “My biggest problem, when I look in the mirror, is I still think I look good.”

• I wonder how many of us are looking into the mirror of God’s Word and find ourselves saying, “I still look good” when there are major issues in our lives, or we only see the flaws instead of the major reconstruction that the Lord has worked on our hearts.
• I like what Paul declares here…

Vs. 5 – “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart. Then each one’s praise will come from God.”

• Did you get that? Judge nothing before it’s time.
• In other words, if we are not careful we can prejudge something before it’s time.
• What’s the right time? Ultimately, it’s the final judgment that’s going to count. When the Lord comes He will judge the motives of the heart, He will bring to the light the hidden things of darkness.
• Now, I don’t believe Paul would say there is never a place for exhortation to take place…

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear
them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17

“Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” Romans 15:14 (NKJV)

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” 2 Timothy 4:2 (NKJV)

“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Galatians 6:1 (NKJV)

“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me remove the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the plank that is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck that is in your brother’s eye.” Luke 6:42 (NKJV)

- He did not say you can’t help those with splinters in their eyes, just make sure that you’re removing the plank from your own first.
- We are a community of believers, we are family, and so there are going to be times, when prompted by the Holy Spirit, that we reach out to a brother and speak the truth in love.
- But make sure it’s in love…

“Truth without love is like a kiss with bad breath.” – Author Unknown

- Paul, in chapter 5, will speak of judging a brother who is living in a sexually immoral relationship. He will speak about judging the brother and removing him from the fellowship.
- In chapter 6, Paul speaks about judging those who are suing one another.
- So judgment was not off limits. When someone is in sin, those who are mature need to minister to them and exhort them.
- What Paul was getting at here is that the only judgment that is going to really matter is the judgment that takes place at the bema seat.
• When we all stand before Jesus, what goes down there will be the final judgment.
• And notice, He gets to the heart of the matter.
• He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness.
• He will also reveal the counsels of the heart.
• He knows what’s going on in the heart and He knows the motives of the heart. You and I can’t see that far. We might be able to see some outward manifestations of the heart, but ultimately the motives of the heart are not an easy read.
• Remember in the Old Testament when Samuel asked Jesse to line up his boys because the Lord was going to anoint a new king over Israel, one to replace Saul.
• Do you remember how that went down?
• He lined up seven of his boys and Samuel saw Eliab and said, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him!”
• He must have had the “kingly” look.
• But the Lord spoke to Samuel and said…

“Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7 (NKJV)

• So Samuel would pass by Eliab and come to Abinadab, then Shammah, and eventually all seven sons passed by—but the eighth and youngest was not present.
• His dad didn’t even bring him to be presented to Samuel.
• He was overlooked, in his dad’s eyes he was not kingly, and so Samuel asked, “Are all you son’s here?” And Jesse said, “There is one more, the youngest son—he is out tending the sheep.”
• And when Samuel saw him he knew that the Lord had chosen him.
• And so he anointed him and the Spirit of the Lord affirmed by coming upon him from that day forward.
• I am sure that if Samuel was not listening to the Lord that day he would have anointed the wrong king—he was ready to anoint Eliab, the one that stood out!
• But the one that was left out was the one that God had chosen.
• Do you remember what was said about David?
“But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.” 1 Samuel 13:14 (NKJV)

“And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’” Acts 13:22 (NKJV)

- God knows the things that are going on in the heart.
- We only see dimly, but He sees it all!
- And ultimately there will be a day when we will see it all too.
- And did you notice what he writes in verse 5?
- “Then each one’s praise will come from God.”
- The faithfulness, the diligence, the sweat, the tears—all those things you did for Him will be rewarded by Him.
- Crazy! He is going to praise you and me for those things He did through us. Why?—because He is a God of grace.
- And that’s just the beginning—we will spend eternity experiencing His amazing grace.

“But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’” 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV)

“I’ve read the last page of the Bible. It’s going to turn out alright.” – Billy Graham