

# Faithful Stewards: What God Requires of Those He Entrusts

## "It Is Required"

### 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

As we've spent the past several weeks looking at what God has promised to do in His sovereign plan for the future, we find that Scripture also calls us to consider how God expects His people to live faithfully while we're here.

We are beginning a series this morning on the subject of stewardship. We will consider "The Stewardship Principle" this morning, and then "Stewardship of the Gospel and Church," "Stewardship Through Service," "Stewardship of Resources," and "Stewardship of Influence and Testimony." These may change slightly, but that will give you the idea of what this series is about.

The word "stewardship" is often used today almost exclusively in reference to money, but in Scripture it is a much broader concept that begins with faithfulness to whatever God entrusts to us. It is often defined as the responsible use of resources – especially time, talents, and material means – in the service of God.

With that definition in mind, stewardship begins with a simple but foundational truth found in Psalm 24:1: *"The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."* If God owns all things (and He does), then nothing we possess – whether resources, opportunities, responsibilities, or service – ultimately belongs to us. All we have is entrusted to us by God as His stewards. To be entrusted means that something of value has been placed into our care, with the expectation that we will handle it faithfully.

With that understanding, we will consider the Apostle Paul's words to the church at Corinth as recorded in 1 Cor. 4:1-2. Writing to a divided church that had begun evaluating ministry by worldly standards, Paul reminds

them how God defines His servants and what He expects of those to whom He entrusts His work, but before Scripture tells us what we are to do, it tells us who we are – and what is required of us as stewards.

## **I. HOW GOD DEFINES HIS SERVANTS (VS. 1A)**

“Let a man so account of us...”

### **A. God is concerned with how His servants are viewed.**

1. The Apostle begins by addressing perception – not by defending himself, explaining his ministry, or correcting personalities. In other words, *this is how God intends His servants to be regarded.*
2. The issue in Corinth was by what standard the leaders would be evaluated. They had begun to measure spiritual service by human categories – personality, preference, prominence – rather than by God’s definition.
3. Paul is helping them understand that stewards of God are to be understood God’s way, not man’s way.

### **B. God, not the church, sets the definition.**

1. Notice that Paul does not say, “*Let every man decide for himself,*” or even, “*Let the church define its leaders.*” He says, “*Let a man so account of us*” – *in this way*, according to what God has already established.
2. This is important, because stewardship does not begin with function or authority. It begins with identity – before we ask what a servant does, Scripture tells us what a servant is.

3. That principle applies first to the pastor/teacher – but it does not stop there. Anyone God entrusts with responsibility is first defined by God before being evaluated by others.

### **C. Right understanding protects the church.**

1. When the servants of God are misunderstood, two things usually follow: misplaced expectations and unnecessary division.
2. That was true in Corinth, and it remains true today. The solution given by the Apostle is not one of argument or correction, but one of clarification. He brings the church back to Scripture and says, in essence, *"This is how God wants His servants to be understood."*
3. It is only after this point is clear that Paul describes who they are and what they have been entrusted with.

## **II. WHAT GOD CALLS HIS SERVANTS (VS. 1B)**

We are now given two defining descriptions that establish both identity and responsibility:

“...as the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

The first point showed *who defines the servant* while this point shows *who the servant belongs to and what the servant is entrusted with*.

### **A. “Ministers of Christ” – Who we belong to**

1. The word for “minister” in this verse is not the one that is seen in other portions of Scripture when dealing with the issue of ministry. That one deals more with what is involved in the service to the church – this one deals with who the person is in their service to their Master.

- a) The more common word (what his duty is) is διάκονος – a waiter of tables, literally.
- b) This word (who he is) is ὑπηρέτης. It's used 20 times in the New Testament – translated "officers" (relating to soldiers or Temple police) 10 times, "servants" 4 times, "minister" 3 times, "ministers" 2 times, and "officer" one time.

#### Luke 4:20

<sup>20</sup> And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

#### Acts 13:5

<sup>5</sup> And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

#### Acts 26:16

<sup>16</sup> But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

2. At its core, the word describes someone who serves under command – one who carries out the will of another. Paul deliberately uses a word that strips away dignity and replaces it with submission.
  3. The point is simple but foundational: God's servants do not serve themselves, the crowd, or personal ambition. They serve Christ.
  4. In other words, whatever service is rendered – to the church, to one another, to the world – it is ultimately rendered unto Christ.
- Stewardship begins with submission – not with

responsibility.

## **B. "Stewards" – what we are entrusted with**

1. A steward is not an owner – he manages what belongs to another and does so on behalf of the owner.
2. A steward is entrusted and responsible, not empowered and autonomous.
3. Whatever God gives – truth, opportunity, influence, responsibility – is not given for personal use or personal definition. It is entrusted to be managed according to the will of the One who owns it.

## **C. "Of the mysteries of God" – what has been entrusted**

1. In Scripture, a "mystery" is not something unknowable, but an as yet undisclosed truth of the Scriptures; something that had yet to be fully known. It is not something unknowable, but something once hidden and now revealed.

### **1 Timothy 3:16**

<sup>16</sup> And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

2. The "faith" in 1 Timothy 3:16 and the "mysteries" referred to in our text as being "of God" is speaking of the gospel of the Kingdom of God; something that had been hidden in times past (only revealed in types in the Old Testament), but now has been revealed to the world in the New Testament in the work of Christ on the cross. The "mystery of God," (and

"of the faith") then, is the revealed truth of Christianity.

3. This means stewardship is not merely practical; it is profoundly spiritual. Handling God's truth carries weight, responsibility, and consequence.
4. The Apostle is speaking directly to the pastor/teacher here as the one that is to manage and oversee the teaching and application of the Word of God, but the principle extends to all believers: Every Christian is entrusted with something God has revealed and expects to be handled faithfully.

#### **D. Identity comes before expectation**

1. The order given in the text is important: who the servant is and what he is entrusted with come before what is required of him.
2. If we reverse this order, stewardship becomes a burden. If we keep it, stewardship becomes a calling.

### **III. WHAT GOD REQUIRES ABOVE ALL ELSE (VS. 2)**

Once the Apostle has established who the servant belongs to, and what the servant is entrusted with, he moves to the central statement of the passage – the one requirement that governs all stewardship: Faithfulness.

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”

#### **A. Faithfulness is not optional**

1. “Moreover it is required...” – the word Paul uses for “*required*” literally means “*what is sought after,*” pointing forward to being “*found*”

*faithful*” – faithfulness is the very quality God looks for when He evaluates a steward.

2. God does not lower His standards based on circumstances, ability, recognition, or comparison with others. What God entrusts us with; He requires us to be faithful with.

## **B. God’s standard is faithfulness, not success.**

1. God didn’t say that a steward must be successful, or impressive, or widely approved. He says the steward must be faithful.
2. Faithfulness speaks of trustworthiness, consistency, and reliability in handling what belongs to another.

Matthew 25:21

<sup>21</sup> His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Colossians 1:7

<sup>7</sup> As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

3. There is great encouragement here – faithfulness is not measured by outcomes beyond our control, but by obedience within our responsibility.

## **C. Faithfulness is personal, not comparative.**

“That a man be found faithful”

1. “A man be found” – this language is individual (not gender specific – the Greek word is a neutral pronoun meaning “they,” in this case).

2. Stewardship is not measured against someone else's gift, opportunity, or role. Each steward is responsible for what he has been entrusted with – no more and no less.
3. That means different responsibilities, different capacities, but the same requirement – faithfulness.

#### **D. Faithfulness is ultimately determined by God.**

1. The phrase *"be found faithful"* points forward. It assumes evaluation, but it does not specify the evaluator here. Paul will address that in the verses that follow – but for now, he makes one thing clear: The steward's primary concern is not how he appears to others, but whether he is faithful before God.
2. That truth keeps stewardship from becoming performance, pressure, or people-pleasing.

#### **Conclusion:**

In the coming weeks, we'll see how this principle of faithfulness applies to our lives, to the church, and to the way God orders service among His people. But everything begins here – *"it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."*