

“Let a Man So Account of Us”

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

The first phrase of this text demonstrates what and who it is dealing with – those in “the ministry,” as it is called today. But there is a greater context, or greater application, for every believer to understand, as well.

In that first phrase is the introduction to this particular text (and chapter, for that matter). This chapter is a continuation of what began in chapter one and is continuing to deal with the issue of division in the church. This issue of division was the leading cause for all the other problems the church in Corinth had, and it is still the leading cause for problems in the church today. The cause for those divisions is seen in these five verses – that of esteeming one better than another.

The title of this message is the lead-in for the text – “Let a man so account of us.” The word for “a man” is the word from which we get our word “anthropology” (*άνθρωπος*), and it is speaking of humanity in general (non-gender specific). It is not the same word as was seen in chapter three when it spoke of the “any man” (specifically speaking of the pastor/teacher). This has in view those that view the pastor/teacher (“ministers”) – those within the church that he pastors, primarily.

The second part of this phrase, serving to introduce the context, is “so account of us.”

1. The word *so* “gathers up the preceding argument (3:5-25) and applies it directly by the *as* that follows” (Robertson).
2. The word for “account” in this text is the word *λογίζομαι* – it’s a legal accounting term that means either to remove something from one’s

account or to put something into one's account. Most often, it was both – removing something and imputing something. It's used all through Scripture (both Old and New Testament), but nowhere is it seen more often nor more clearly than in Romans 4 where it is used ten times to demonstrate what Christ did for us in taking the requirement for payment for our sins from us and putting His righteousness in its place.

Romans 4:6–8

⁶ Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

⁷ Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

3. This word for "account" ("impute" in Rom. 4) comes from the root word *logos* (speech, uttering a word, what someone has said) and means to put together with one's mind, to occupy with reckonings or calculations (Zodhiates). "This word deals with reality. If I 'logizomai' or reckon that my bank book has \$25 in it, it has \$25 in it. Otherwise I am deceiving myself. This word refers to facts not suppositions" (Thayer and Smith. "Greek Lexicon entry for Logizomai". "The NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon"... 1999 – as found at <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/logizomai.html>).
4. "Of us" – Paul, Apollos, and Cephas primarily (1:11-17)

I say all of that about this word because of what follows in this text – when a person in the church

looks at the pastor/teacher, or any of the leadership (deacons, elders, teachers, etc.), they are to base their “accounting” on who they are, who they serve, what they are to do, and who they are accountable to. If those three things are done properly then the church will be able to succeed at its primary duty – equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry.

I. WHO WE ARE – VS. 1

A. “Ministers of Christ”

1. “Ministers”

- a) This sets the whole of the point – the one who “feeds the flock of God,” who takes his job seriously and does all that he can to provide what is needed for the children of God is accountable, primarily, to the One who owns the sheep, the One who died for them – Christ, and Him alone

[Acts 20:28](#)

²⁸ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

[1 Peter 5:2](#)

² Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

- b) 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.

- (1) The former word (what his duty is) is *διάκονος* – a waiter of tables, literally.

Colossians 1:25

²⁵ Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

- (2) The latter word (who he is) is *υπηρέτης* (huperetes). 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. A few of the texts will give us an idea of how the word is used.

Luke 4:20

²⁰ 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

⁵ 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

¹⁶ 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;

- c) This brings us to the definition of the word – and this is paramount for the pastor to know in understanding who we are before we can understand what we are to do. If we don't know who we are, then what we

are to do will be of little consequence to others. (This is true of every believer – not just the pastor).

- (1) The word “minister” does not give the original Greek word justice in our application today. In our mind, when we hear the word “minister,” we conjure up an image of dignity and honor. That is not what the original word meant, in any way.
- (2) It comes from two words – *hupó*, meaning under, beneath; and *erétes*, meaning rower. Literally, it means an “under-rower.”
- (3) Ships at the time of the writing of the New Testament had up to three levels of rowers, depending on their size. The bottom rowers (under-rowers) were the lowest of all the slaves on the ship. Many times they were prisoners that were abused to the point of death and thrown overboard. They were considered the poorest of all slaves.
- (4) It then began to be used for a galley-slave, the most subordinate of all slaves at the time.
- (5) Considering this particular word was used by the Apostle Paul himself, about himself, shows just how he viewed himself in his service to Christ. What would happen to the church today if all pastors, and all leaders, and all believers, viewed themselves this way?

2. “Of Christ”

- a) Here is the crux of the matter – when any of act as the servants we are supposed to be, it is not to anyone but Christ

- b) This is not to say that we are not servants of one another, for that is equally scriptural – but, when we forget who we are and whom we serve we will cease to be the right kind of servant

Galatians 5:13–14

¹³ For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

2 Corinthians 4:5

⁵ For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

- c) We are servants of Christ, and Him alone. When we get to chapter 9 of 1 Corinthians, we will see this point more clearly, but the text there demonstrates for the church why the pastor is to consider himself a “galley slave,” an “under-rower” for Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:16–18

¹⁶ For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

¹⁷ For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.

¹⁸ What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

B. "Stewards of the mysteries of God"

1. "Stewards"

- a) We will only look briefly at this word this week – we will look further into it next week in the next verse
- b) Along with being a "minister" – an "under-rower" – a slave – to Christ, the pastor is a "steward." The word is one that has to do with managing a household or business.

2. "Of the mysteries of God"

- a) The pastor, along with being a "minister of Christ," is also one who is to manage, or oversee, the affairs of the "mysteries of God"
- b) The "mysteries of God" are referred to as "the mystery of the faith" in 1 Timothy 3:16

1 Timothy 3:16

16 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.

- (1) The word "mystery" (*μυστήριον*) in the apostolic writings is a word referencing an as yet undisclosed truth of the Scriptures; something that had yet to be fully known.

Ephesians 5:25–32

25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself

a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

(2) The "faith" in 1 Timothy 3:16 and those 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.

c) Putting it simply, not only is the pastor a "minister of Christ," but he is one that is to manage and oversee the teaching and application of the Word of God

Conclusion to point one: Are we true servants of the Lord? Do we consider Him above all else? Do we aim to please Him above all others? If so, then we are where we need to be. Once we understand that part

of who we are, we will be better able to manage the “business” of serving Him. We will be more productive in our spiritual life, and more productive in being that witness for Christ we are to be.

A True Servant

Someone asked an elderly Scotswoman what she thought of Robert Murray McCheyne's preaching. She hesitated for a moment, then replied, “He preaches as if he was a-dying to have you saved.” Is that our spirit? Those who watch us will know.

How appropriate was Spurgeon's advice to a young minister who complained of the smallness of his congregation: “It is as large a one as you will want to give account for in the Day of Judgment.” The first thing others should discern in us, Paul says, is that we are servants of Christ--subservient, obedient to Him; that He is Master and we listen to what He says and do what He commands.

II. WHAT WE ARE TO DO – VS. 2

A. Be “stewards”

1. As will be seen in this word, one of the primary responsibilities of the pastor is to be the overseer of the “household” of God – the local church, in this case. This is why the pastor is seen as the administrator of the church – in every aspect, not just in the administration of the Word of God (although that is primary).
2. The word for “stewards” is a compound word from two Greek words
 - a) The first one (oikos) means “house” – the

second one (némo) means to deal out, to distribute

- b) It was a word used for the one entrusted with the master's household – buildings, fields, finances, food, other servants, and sometimes even the children of the owner (MacArthur)
- c) In this case (in fact, there is a Greek word in some manuscripts at the beginning of this verse that translates as the word "here" in some versions, or by the words "in this case"), the word "steward" is dealing with the household of faith that the pastor ("minister") is in charge of, and in particular, his management of the Word of God, in every sense of the word.

B. Be "faithful"

1. "Moreover it is required" – because of what verse one says, and because of the importance of the Word of God and the testimony of the "minister," it is "required" that he be "faithful"
 - a) The word for "required" is one that means to seek, or something that is sought for (pointing to the word "found" later in the verse)
 - b) The thing sought after in a steward (here, in the minister of Christ), the thing that is necessary, that is right, that is absolutely required, is that he be found faithful
2. "That a man be found faithful"
 - a) "A man" – (tis) – points back to chapter three in dealing with the pastor/overseer
 - b) "Be found" – goes to the word translated

“required,” in its original meaning of “sought after” – when a good steward is looked for, the main characteristic sought after in that steward is faithfulness

- c) “Faithful” (πιστός) – trustworthy – in handling the affairs of the household of faith (the church, in this case), the “minister of Christ,” the “steward of the mysteries of God,” must be found, in his life, in his testimony, to be someone that can be trusted with the Word of God and the administration of the affairs of the Master

Matthew 25:21

²¹ 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.

Luke 12:42

⁴² And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?

Colossians 1:7

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

III. TO WHOM WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE – VS. 3-5

A. Not anyone in the church (or outside of the church) – vs. 3

1. “For it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you”
 - a) The word for “judged” here is a different

one than the second "judgment" in the verse.

(1) This is a compound Greek word with a root (kríno) that is translated "judge" in Matt. 7:1, where it means to condemn or pass sentence. This word is where we get the word "critic" from, and it is in that sense that it is used in this verse.

(2) With the prefix (Aná – which means up, or upward), this word means "examined," and in this case it has a negative connotation.

Paul does not despise public opinion, but he denies "the competency of the tribunal" in Corinth (Robertson and Plummer) to pass on his credentials with Christ as his Lord. (Robertson)

b) It was of little importance to him what people thought of him as he administered the household of God as a good, faithful steward. Their criticism or even praise had no bearing on the motivations of why he did what he did.

1 Samuel 16:7

⁷But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

John 7:24

²⁴Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

2. "Or of man's judgment" (NASB – "by any human court")

- a) This second word "judgment" comes from a word that means day, daytime, occasion, or time
- b) The use of "man's" is speaking to the time or event of man's judging other men, as opposed to God judging man
- c) Paul had little regard for how he was perceived in "the court of public opinion" – "Paul is not being arrogant or saying that he is above fellow ministers, other Christians, or even certain unbelievers. He is saying that a human verdict on his life is not the one that matters, even if it was his own." (MacArthur)

3. "Yea, I judge not mine own self"

- a) This third word is the same as the first – to examine
- b) Even his own opinion of himself was of no value if it didn't hold to the standard of the judgment of the Word of God.
- c) We can think we are far better than we are and one's opinion of oneself is not a very good means to judge – even if we are critical of ourselves

B. Not ourselves, even if we are living a holy life – vs. 4

1. "For I know nothing by (against) myself"

- a) Paul didn't know of any outward sin that would cause reproach on either his testimony, nor (more importantly) on the name of Christ
- b) Even though he may have been holy, he was still in no way able to use himself as a test subject by which others are judged

- c) No matter who we are, or how holy someone seems, it is still the Lord that is both the judge that will examine us, and it is His life and Word that will be the test by which we are all judged, or examined

Romans 3:23

²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

1 Peter 1:15-16

¹⁵ But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

¹⁶ Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Leviticus 11:44

⁴⁴ For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

2. "Yet am I not hereby justified" (NASB – "by this acquitted")

"I do not pretend to say that though I am not conscious of any offense towards God I must therefore be pronounced innocent; no: I leave those things to God; he shall pronounce in my favor, not I myself. By these words the apostle, in a very gentle yet effectual manner, censures those rash and precipitate judgments which the Corinthians were in the habit of pronouncing on both men and things - a conduct than which nothing is more reprehensible and dangerous."

3. "But he that judgeth me is the Lord"

- a) "Judgeth" - ἀνακρίνω – examines; the Corinthians were doing it to be critical, to find fault – the only One that can be perfect in their examination and critique is the Lord
- b) The only One that has the right to judge is the Lord – it's that simple

Psalm 50:6

⁶ And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.

C. The Lord, and Him alone – vs. 5

1. "Judge nothing before the time"

- a) "Judge" – κρίνω – to pass sentence

Matthew 7:1

¹ Judge not, that ye be not judged.

- b) Webster's definition of "judge" – Presiding officer of a court; who considers a case and passes judgment
- c) One considered a "judge" is not just one who pronounces judgment, but one who "pronounces guilty", one who tries to destroy, and one who falsely accuses another brother.

Luke 6:37

³⁷ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

Romans 14:10

¹⁰ But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

James 4:11-12

11 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

12 There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

- d) These are what we're not supposed to do. We are not to look at someone else and judge him where we say he's guilty of something in order to destroy him by using false accusations (this does not mean we cannot point out heresy, but when we do we better be sure it isn't that we just don't like him and are trying to destroy him, for then we are guilty of judging whether he's right or wrong).
2. "Until the Lord come, who both will bring to the light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart"
- a) Again, He's the judge, and He will judge in His time – whether it is here, in this life, through events that He allows in our life to bring us into right relationship with Him (the Bible uses the word "chastening"), or at the Judgment Seat of Christ.
 - b) When the examining comes, and we are presented with our "rewards," it will be those "hidden things" that are done in "darkness" – the things in our thoughts and intents – that will be brought to light

1 Corinthians 3:13

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it,

because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

Ecclesiastes 11:9

⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

Ecclesiastes 12:14

¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Hebrews 4:13

¹³ Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

- c) "And will make manifest the counsels of the heart" – He will disclose, or manifest the motives behind what we do
3. "And then shall every man have praise of God"
- a) Let me point out that this context is speaking of believers, not the lost
 - b) Paul is speaking of himself and the other "ministers of Christ" referenced in verse one – this is not condemnation for sin but reward for service
 - c) Why we do what we do will be judged and rewarded, whether we are humanly successful or not.

Conclusion: When it comes to our service, what is it

we are doing, and for whom are we doing it? If we're not careful, our goal will be to please man and to look for man's applause rather than the Lord's, and when we do that we will become more and more critical of others, and become of no use to the Lord. We will cease to be the "ministers of Christ," the way God intends for us to be.

As we move away from His service, we become "the judge," and when we become "the judge" we become a very big problem to the cause of Christ.

The secret of our relationships with one another in the Christian Church, especially when we have our differences, is "Jesus Christ is Lord." To despise or stand in judgement on a fellow Christian isn't just a breach of fellowship. It is a denial of the Lordship of Jesus. I need to say to myself, Who am I, that I should cast myself in the role of another Christian's lord and judge? I must be willing for Jesus Christ to be not only my Lord and Judge, but also my fellow Christians' Lord and Judge. ... I must not interfere with Christ's Lordship over other Christians.

— John R.W. Stott in *The Gospel, the Spirit, the Church*