

Dealing with a Bad Preacher

1 Cor 4:1-5

INTRODUCTION

- A. Cal Johnson, the former Republican congressman from Illinois, used to tell the story about the minister who knew he was preaching the worst sermon of his life.
 - 1. When he had finished, a normally testy member of the congregation praised the sermon to the skies.
 - 2. “But why?” asked the minister.
 - 3. “Because,” answered the new admirer, “I don’t like no preachin’ at all, and that’s as near no preachin’ at all as I ever heard.”
- B. We’ve all been there, haven’t we?
 - 1. We’ve all found ourselves sitting and listening to someone preach whose preaching ability left much to be desired.
 - a. Perhaps he didn’t have the time to prepare the lesson during the previous week that he should have had.
 - b. Perhaps he’s just having one of those bad days where his mind isn’t as engaged in his preaching as it really ought to be.
 - 2. For those of us who preach, there are times when we realize we are preaching an absolutely horrible sermon.
 - a. I once heard a preacher describe the situation as though you had just chopped off the head of a chicken, but the chicken just keeps running and running without going anywhere.
 - b. I must confess there have been times when I’ve been preaching that I have been more than embarrassed by the sermon.
 - 1) There have been times I’ve wanted to throw the notes down, look at the song leader and say, “Lead us in that invitation hymn and let’s go home.”
 - 2) There have been several times that getting to the end of the sermon is a very happy moment, because I just couldn’t take preaching that sermon another five minutes.
- C. As we have been discussing, there were several in Corinth who apparently had that opinion of Paul—he wasn’t really a preacher they wanted to hear.
 - 1. As I mentioned last week, it seems that Paul had that opinion of himself—“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God” (2:1).
 - 2. What are churches to do when they’ve heard someone like Apollos, someone with great learning and oratorical ability, and someone like Paul, someone without that ability Apollos had?
 - a. Paul tells the Corinthians how they should view both him and Apollos and the preaching they had done in Corinth.
 - b. How do you deal with a bad preacher? YOU RECOGNIZE HIM AS A SERVANT & YOU RECOGNIZE HIS JUDGE.

YOU RECOGNIZE PREACHERS AS SERVANTS, vv. 1-2

- A. The apostle writes, “So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God,” v. 1.
 - 1. Instead of boasting about and following Paul or Apollos, the Corinthian Christians were to view them as servants of Christ.
 - a. Paul often emphasizes that he is a servant of Christ.

- 1) He did so as he began this epistle: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God” (1:1).
 - a) “An apostle of Christ Jesus” actually means “an apostle who belongs to Christ Jesus.”
 - b) Paul is saying that as an apostle he belongs to Christ; therefore, he doesn’t control his own ministry; he is a servant of Christ.
- 2) In opening his epistle to the Romans, the apostle wrote, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God” (1:1).
- b. What does it mean that Paul regarded himself as a servant of Christ?
 - 1) In context, this obviously details the preaching style Paul chose in Corinth.
 - a) Paul did not go to Corinth to wow the Corinthians with his oratorical ability, for he was concerned with honoring Christ since he was his servant.
 - b) Paul did not go to Corinth and preach what the Corinthians wanted him to preach, for he was concerned with preaching what God told him to preach as a servant of Christ.
 - c) Paul was not concerned with preaching the wisdom of this world, for he was concerned with preaching God’s wisdom as a servant of Christ.
 - 2) What does it mean for us to view preachers as servants of Christ?
 - a) We must understand that the preacher has higher marching orders than the local church; in other words, he must preach the truth in love regardless of whom he offends.
 - b) We must understand that the preacher must preach what God has said regardless of what the influential people in the congregation think.
 - 3) Let’s think in larger terms for a moment. Are we, all of us, servants of Christ?
 - a) In context, Paul is saying, “It doesn’t matter what you Corinthians think I should do. I’m a servant of Christ.”
 - b) Do we view ourselves as servants of Christ in similar situations?
 - i. Are we able to say to those encouraging us to do wrong—family, neighbors, employer—“I can’t do that. I’m a servant of Christ”?
 - ii. When the elders need someone to teach Bible class, to help care for the less fortunate, or to help spread the Gospel, do we say, “Sure I can. I’m a servant of Christ”?
 - ii. Are you this very morning a servant of Christ?
2. Not only should Paul and Apollos be regarded as servants of Christ, but they should also be regarded “as those entrusted with the secret things of God.”
 - a. If you’re reading from a translation other than the NIV this morning, you have a more literal translation of the Greek.
 - 1) The KJV translates this verse like this: “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.”
 - 2) The Greek word is actually steward.
 - b. Who were stewards in the ancient world?
 - 1) Stewards were slaves whom the master placed over his household; at times they served even like landlords and had control over the entire household staff
 - 2) Even though it was several centuries before, the biblical narrative of Joseph in Potiphar’s house well illustrates a steward.
 - a) We read, “Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned” (Gn 39:4).
 - b) When Potiphar’s wife encouraged Joseph to have an illicit affair with her, Joseph responded, “With me in charge, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am” (Gn 39:8-9).
 - 3) Even though the NIV does not translate the term as “steward,” that translation quite

accurately portrays the idea—God had entrusted his mysteries into the care of Paul and Apollos.

- 4) As stewards, then, God had given Paul and Apollos charge of his mysteries.
 - a) This is not the first time that Paul has mentioned God’s mysteries.
 - i. Previously Paul used the term “mystery” to refer to the message of Jesus Christ crucified—“We speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began” (1 Cor 2:7).
 - ii. Undoubtedly Paul references God’s mysteries in the same way he spoke of God’s secret wisdom.
 - b) As God’s stewards, the Lord trusted Paul and Apollos to use his message faithfully.
 - c) Preachers must be regarded as stewards of the message of God today.
 - i. Those of us who preach have been entrusted with the message of God.
 - ii. Angels do not preach the message of Jesus.
 - i) When the Lord found a suitable prospect in the Ethiopian eunuch, we read, “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza’ (Acts 8:26).
 - ii) The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, undoubtedly he could have spoken to the eunuch. But, that is a role given to men, not angels.
 - c) There is no more solemn responsibility a preacher has than proclaiming the truths of God—“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word” (2 Tm 4:1-2). This text speaks of the solemnity of preaching: the charge was given in the presence of God and Christ, it is because Christ is the judge of all men, and it is because Jesus is coming again.
- c. Yet, we are all stewards of the message of God, aren’t we?
 - 1) Do we not all have the responsibility of sharing the message of Jesus?
 - a) “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20).
 - i. Some of you might want to say, “Wait a minute, Justin. That was said to the apostles. It applies to them, not me.”
 - ii. Yet, notice what the disciples were to teach those whom they converted: “to obey everything I have commanded you.”
 - iii. New disciples, that includes us, are to obey everything Jesus taught and that involves making disciples of all nations.
 - b) After Stephen was martyred and persecution arose against the church, the apostles remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).
 - i. We then read, “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4).
 - ii. Those early Christians didn’t say, “We have the apostles. We’ll let them preach, and we’ll do as little as we can get by with.”
 - 2) Are we acting as stewards of the mysteries of God?
 - a) Will we be willing to teach Vacation Bible School in a few weeks or help prepare snacks?
 - b) Will we be willing to bring kids to Vacation Bible School?
 - c) Will we be willing to speak to newcomers in the assembly that they might feel comfortable in hearing the mysteries of God?
 - d) Will we invite our friends and family to come with us that they might hear the mysteries of God?
 - e) Well did Ruth Johnson Carruth write, “Millions are groping without the gospel, Quickly

they'll reach eternity's night, Shall we sit idly as they rush onward? Haste, let us hold up Christ the true light. Into our hands the gospel is given, Into our hands is given the light, Haste, let us carry God's precious message, Guiding the erring back to the right."

f) Will you carry God's precious message given into your hands?

- B. Those who have been given a trust must prove faithful, v. 2.
1. Obviously masters would not want to entrust their affairs to someone whom they could not trust. You recall that in the Parable of the Talents, the servant who did nothing with the funds entrusted to him was cursed by his master.
 2. Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians, "It doesn't matter what you thought of my preaching, it oratorical or scholarly ability, as long as it was pleasing to God."
 3. May we always recall that our primary objective in whatever role we fill in the church is to be faithful, not to men, but to God!

YOU RECOGNIZE THE PREACHER'S JUDGE, vv. 3-5

- A. Paul writes, "I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself," v. 3.
1. These words seem to be directed at the ancient idea of judging speakers after their oratory.
 - a. Once someone got up and spoke on any topic, the audience would judge the speaker.
 - b. The Corinthians, living in a very cultured city, likely understood it as their duty to judge Paul based upon his abilities.
 2. Paul says that he didn't care about the Corinthians' judgment or the judgment of any human court.
 - a. The word 'judgment' here is a judicial term and refers to the final examination prior to the pronouncement of the judgment. The term is quite akin to closing arguments in the modern judicial system.
 - b. If we keep the idea with that of a contest where the Corinthians were judging their preachers on the basis of their oratory, it seems that these word references the final push before they announce their verdict.
 - 1) In the Olympics, figure skaters or gymnasts or any other athlete to be judged by people is going to want to finish very strong.
 - 2) Paul says, "I'm not concerned with finishing strong. I'm concerned with my whole message. I'm not concerned on how you judge the ability."
- B. Paul says, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me," v. 4.
1. Paul changes the metaphor here from one where he was judged on his performance ability to where God judges him based on his faithfulness.
 2. He declares that his conscience is clean, but that does not clear him.
 - a. We know that consciences can be clear but people can be lost.
 - 1) Before the Sanhedrin, Paul declared, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day" (Acts 23:1).
 - 2) Paul was a persecutor and murderer of Christians. He was far from right, but his conscience was as clean as could be.
 - b. We dare not make our conscience our only guide, or, as was the case with Paul, we may be as wrong as can be, but have a clean conscience before God.
 3. God would judge Paul.
 - a. God, of course, will judge us all—"God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ" (Rm 2: 16).
 - b. Paul didn't have to worry what the Corinthians thought or didn't think of him, for God would judge him. We don't have to worry about what others think of us, for God will judge us.

- c. How wonderful it is to know that God will judge preachers.
 - 1) If he teaches error, the elders need to sit him down and shut him up, but more severe than that will be the judgment God renders.
 - 2) If he preaches a message which offends, his motives, whether pure or impure, shall be judged by God.
 - 3) If he's good and he becomes arrogant, God will judge him.
- C. Paul concludes by saying, "Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God," v. 5.
 - 1. The Corinthians didn't need to worry about judging Paul or Apollos, for God would judge them. We don't need to worry about judging anyone, for God will judge everyone.
 - 2. God will judge what's hidden in men's hearts.
 - a. There will be nothing secret at the judgment—"God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl 12:14).
 - b. Are you ready for that judgment this very morning?