

# **1 Corinthians 4:1-21**

## *Christian Leadership*

There are some times I watch Christian television and I am embarrassed. Some of the Christian leaders are anything but humble. I remember watching one lady with big pink hair and more makeup than a wax museum, talking about how we need to be more specific when we ask God for things. She told the audience, when she asked for a car she told God the model and the make of the car she wanted: And just for good measure; she told him the color. I saw another man who began waving his Italian suit Jacket like he was a Spanish matador at a bull fight. People that felt its breeze fell to the ground like targets falling in a shooting gallery. Several weeks ago I watched a news special where a Christian leader had just bought a personal jet because he hated flying commercial at the airport. I guess he couldn't stand paying five dollars for the snack box. The message in all of these is simple: Follow God like me and you can be as successful as I am.

But as we read what Paul has to say about Christian leaders; there is no flare or fanfare. There is no big jet, big hair, or expensive Italian suits. There is no such thing as one leader being better than each other. As we contemplate Christian leadership today; think about the perceptions you may have and find out whether they are congruent with Paul's message. Today we will look at how Paul describes Christian leadership from his apostolic perspective.

**4:1 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.**

There are a couple elements of Christian leadership in this passage. The first is this:

### **1. Christian leaders should regard themselves as servants and stewards**

Paul begins with humility. Christian leaders should be regarded as servants and stewards of Christ. We all know what a servant is. A servant is someone who serves you. Like a waiter or waitress, their purpose is to be of service to you

When I lived in Tacoma, I used to go out occasionally to breakfast on Sunday morning to a place known as BBQ Pete's. I realize that doesn't sound like a breakfast joint; you'll just have to trust me: They had the best country breakfasts I ever had that side of the Columbia. That might not mean much since I am a city boy. My order was basically the same: A Denver omelet minus the mushrooms, a bowl of fruit in place of the hash browns; mouthwatering bite sized homemade muffins, chocolate chip and blueberry; and a nice hot cup of cocoa. And to make the meal complete; I had the best waiter this side of Johnny Jump Up. He knew exactly what I wanted. I only had to order on my first visit and then never again. He would come to me and say, "Shall I get you the same as last week." "Sure," I said, thinking that he would forget to replace the hash browns or minus the mushrooms on the omelet. He never did; not once. Now considering that he had plenty of customers throughout the week; I found that quite impressive.

This guy treated me like a king: He gave me extra mouthwatering bite sized muffins, fruit and cocoa refills, all at no charge. Every time my plate was near empty, he was like a clingy girlfriend who wanted to serve me. I had never been known as a big tipper—my friends knew me as *Penny Pincher* Panas. But this guy was the best. Every time, I would give him at least a five dollar tip; sometimes ten. That's a pretty good tip for Penny Pincher. One time I brought a buddy and I was bragging on my waiter. My friend was a coffee drinker: When he finished his cup; my waiter came and gave him a whole pitcher of coffee. I must admit I was a little envious; that seemed quite generous. I told my buddy that has never happened to me. I wonder if he would get me a free pitcher of cocoa. My buddy thought I was dreaming; but I still thought I would ask because I felt neglected. Without flinching; he came back with a pitcher of cocoa, no extra charge.

He told me, "For you, I will do this." We must have given him 20 bucks that day for a tip. He was the best servant I ever had!

In the same way, Christian leaders are to be servants to God and their congregation. We are to go out of our way to help you know or grow in Christ. It is not about me; it is about you. That is what servant leadership is all about. We are to serve the people we lead because of our love for Christ.

Paul also referred to his leadership style as that of a steward. Like a trustee who manages an estate; Christian leaders are not entitled to any privileges. In other words, God doesn't owe us anything. We owe God. He has revealed the gospel that saves. Like a trustee, we are responsible to share that gospel and help Christians grow in faith. That's the first Christian leadership principle. We are to be servants and stewards to God's grace. This is quite a different mindset when our culture thinks of leadership. But that was Paul's point. We are to think differently.

Here is the second ingredient of Christian leadership.

## **2. Christian leaders are accountable to God; not people.**

As an elder; a pastor; a worship leader; a youth worker; etc; you have to learn how to be thick skinned. One thing I have noticed is that everyone has an opinion. You should preach more out of the Bible. You should visit the hospitals; You should invite this guest to speak. You should shorten your messages. You should do this program. Here's the worst one: This is how Reverend "Before You Came" used to do it! Statistics show that a person out of seminary will stay in his pastorate for less than two years. Either he will quit or he will be ran out of town like a kid being chased by the school bully.

Now it is okay to take suggestions. But a pastor will lose his identity and his God-given calling, if he does what everyone else wants him to do for the sake of peace. The hardest thing for a pastor is to gently confront sin; the second hardest is to say "no" to people. If you want to please people you will never say no. If you want to be considered a "good guy" you will never confront someone that is sinning. But in the end, you are not accountable to Sally who wants to hear more music from the organ. You are not accountable to Fornicating Frank who appreciate you for not "judging him." You are accountable to God. That's the thrust of what Paul is saying. It is a very small thing if you or a civil court judges me. It is even insignificant what I think of myself. In the end, God discloses the purposes of our heart. Each leader, each Christian will have to face God.

Now, let's read more characteristics of a Christian Leader.

**6 I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. 7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?**

## **3. Christian Leaders do not go beyond Scripture and be are appreciative of His grace**

Paul tells the Corinthian they are not supposed to go beyond what is written. He uses Apollos and himself as an example. That's because Scripture; not religious leaders are the Ultimate Authority when it comes theological and moral issues. This was a key verse when it came to the Protestant Reformation. Protestants hold solely to Scripture as their Ultimate Authority. There is nothing above it; nothing on par with it. The Bible tells us how life began and how it will end. In the middle is the journey. It is complete!

A couple weeks ago, I had a family from our neighborhood over for dinner. They are Mormons. As we were talking, I asked if there were some issues regarding my faith that they needed clarified. As we were talking, the husband, who teaches Mormon Doctrine, was unusually silent. Then he finally spoke. "For the last 45 minutes I have been stuck on polytheism and the Bible being closed from further revelation." That was a revelation to him. I explained to him that in the Christian church, we cannot go beyond what is written. He agreed that his understanding about multiple gods and

Joseph Smith's revelation evolved from extra biblical sources. In his case, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine of the Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price.

We simply cannot go beyond what is written as Christian leaders. In many ways the Bible is a safety net that is complete with theological and moral boundaries. If you want to know about God; you stay within the Bible. If you want to know how to live morally, you stay within the biblical parameters. Culture will always challenge you to be progressive in your thinking. However, God sees some "progressive thinking" as folly.

Christian leaders must also credit God for the grace He has bestowed on them. This was an issue in the Corinthian church and is also one in our culture. We like to toot our own horns. We like to think we are better than others. Paul says everything you received: Your good looks, your financial portfolio, your high IQ, your athletic ability; your personality to attract friendships is a demonstration of the grace that God has given to you. We can't live our lives thinking we are great because of our own efforts. Christian leaders will always point to God whether things are going good or really bad. Now the theme of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians revolves around the wisdom of the culture. Some in the church felt like they were wise and astute. Consequently, in this next section you will see some biblical sarcasm.

**Already you have all you want! Not! Already you have become rich! Not! Without us you have become kings!** Definitely not! **And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!** Here Paul is being facetious. **9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, Not! like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.** So Paul mocks the Corinthian church and he uses an image familiar to the people. When Rome would conquer a nation, they would take the foreign king, put him in a cage with wheels, and parade them through the streets of Rome. This was known as a procession. In most cases, the conquered king would either be killed or forced to be a gladiator. In mockery Paul says the Corinthians were the ruling kings, and the apostles were the men sentenced to death by God. He goes even further: Not only were they a spectacle to men; but they were also a spectacle to the entire heavenly realms where angels reside. You can feel the cynicism. **10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ.** Really not! **We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.** In this next section Paul switches from sarcasm to straight talk

**11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, 12 and we labor, working with our own hands.** Physical labor was not esteemed in the Greek Culture. Those types of labor were reserved for slaves and aliens. **When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 13 when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.** Okay here is the point in all of this.

#### 4. Christian Leaders Must Not think Highly of Themselves

Being an apostle meant no food, no Italian Silk suits, and no penthouses. It meant responding to people in a godly way when they tried to destroy you. Paul saw his ministry as being scum to the world. Quite simply, Paul did not think highly of himself. He was a team player and recognized he was an underdog to his culture.

In 2001, the Pittsburgh Steelers were favored to win the super bowl. They had finished the regular season with a 13-3 record. In the first round of the playoffs they defeated the super bowl champs, the Baltimore Ravens soundly. Then they started doing silly things. They made a video because they thought highly of themselves. They bought into the hype. In the AFC championship game they played the New England Patriots. The Patriots had no superstars. They advanced to the next round because of a bad call. The Steelers had the home crowd. They had the terrible towels waving. But in the midst of all this, they lost the game. The New England Patriots made the super bowl. Interestingly, when the Patriots were introduced for the big game; instead of introducing each player; the Patriots ran on to the field as a team. Since that day, New England went on to win 3 of the next six super bowls.

Not surprisingly, New England is the favorite to win the super bowl this year. But their coaching staff, remembering the Steelers of 2001; have warned the players not to believe the hype. Last week the team was wearing tee-shirts that read in the front, "I eat" and in the back "humble pie." It is their way to remind themselves that they are not to think too highly of themselves.

A Christian leader is not someone who is esteemed by the culture. One of the quickest ways I end a conversation is when I mention I am a pastor. All of a sudden I am not interesting anymore. Christian leaders are not valued by our culture. Christian leaders are not paid very much money for their service. Many have to supplement their income. Bottom line, Christian leaders are not to think too highly of themselves. Instead they are to think highly of others. That means to treat them with kindness when you are persecuted. That means to pray for your enemies. Jesus is an example of someone the Jewish world saw as the scum of the earth. Yet he willingly came to earth not to be served; but to serve. Not to be treated with royalty but to die a sick death on the cross. And instead of getting angry he utters to His father, "Forgive them Father, for they do not know what they are doing."

**14 I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 16 I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 17 That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. 18 Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. 21 What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?**

## **5. Christian Leaders need Strong Godly role models in their Life**

Paul tells the Corinthians to be imitators of him. He sends Timothy, his traveling companion, to instruct the church to follow Paul's ways. It's important to note that the New Testament was not complete yet. So instead of saying "read your Bible," Paul said read my letter and be imitators of me. Now Corinth was a young church, probably around three years old. You had people teaching confusing doctrine. You had people involved in immorality. The reverence and respect for Christ that was necessary was lost.

There is nothing more important for a young Christian to find someone that they can learn from. This is called discipleship. When I initially became a Christian, God introduced me to a friend named Brian. Brian didn't just say he was a Christian; he lived the Christian life. He shared his struggles. He shared his devotional life. The most important thing was being able to see how he interacted with people. Brian would talk to anyone and he would genuinely listen. It is not surprising he later went on to become a marriage and family counselor. When I had questions about my faith I went to Brian. When I went through a bad relationship I went to Brian. He and I would often go to Dairy Queen and we would be the last ones to leave. The workers there would start turning on their vacuums as our cue to leave. With him and I talking there were many workers who came home late from their shift.

I cannot underestimate the importance of having really good role models in your life. A Christian leader will place himself or herself around such men and women. It is never too late to go to someone and say, "will you disciple me?" Friends, we should always be growing in maturity as Christians. You really can't do this on your own. You need godly people. That is one of the reasons we are having this discipleship accountability group. We are trying to gather people who want to grow in their faith and have them to accountable to each other.

So, that is the thrust of Paul's message when it comes to Christian leadership. Christian leaders regard themselves as servants and stewards. Christian leaders recognize they are accountable to God not man. Christian leaders recognize the importance of Scripture in their life and thank God for the grace He has given them. Christian leaders do not think too highly of themselves, and finally, Christian leaders need to have godly role models in their life. In the end, my friends, this is how we grow into the men and women God wants us to become. Jesus was born of a virgin. He lived a sinless life so he could be a perfect sacrifice for you to God. He was nailed to the cross and suffered horrible agony. He died for you as a substitutionary atonement. Finally, God raised him from the dead, which verified to all his sacrificed was accepted. If you believe that in your heart and accept Jesus as your Savior and Lord, you are saved. It is that simple. Christ did the work so you wouldn't have to. That is why I stand here every Sunday morning. That is why I choose not to make more money. It is my way of showing my appreciation for Jesus; we have a lot to be thankful for.