

THREE IDEAS FOR ENCOURAGING CHURCH LEADERS

I Corinthians 4:1-5, 9-20

June 13, 2010

Personally you can approach these opening verses from both directions - as a servant and as a leader. You may bear the brunt of someone's criticism since you teach other adults. Likewise, there may come a point when you don't agree with a decision your minister of education or pastor makes. What will you do in those situations? Understand your ultimate judge is the Lord, who knows your motives and sees the intents of your heart. If a class member brings criticism to you, it could be time to approach God and ask Him to expose any sin or wrong attitudes. Once you're able to walk away from that assessment with a clear conscience it will be easier to continue ministering in the presence of someone who disagrees with you. There may come a point at which you will have to part ways with a disagreeable class member. But it may also be that God has placed that person in your class to help you mature. The trials God sends, in which we are to rejoice, can come in the form of a critic.

If you can't help but see a bit of sarcasm in Paul's words in verses 9 through 13, don't feel bad. Go back and read verses 7 and 8 - you'll see even more of it! Paul used hyperbole to contrast the Corinthians' proud attitude with the experiences he and the other apostles endured in their ministry. It's easy to throw rocks at an itinerant minister when you're safe in the confines of your own church family. So beginning in verse 11 Paul found ways to bring his readers and himself down to one common denominator. As co-laborers for Christ's kingdom our individual rank or social status should not define us. The attitudes we should adopt as part of the Lord's church mark us as believers. This is one reason why regular fellowship with other Christians is so vital. The more time we spend with each other the more we will understand our differing life experiences and the less we will judge each other for not measuring up to our own preconceptions.

Sometimes a teacher will chafe under the leadership of a person who oversees the Sunday School or Adult Education ministry. We become settled in our ways and don't appreciate when a leader wants to make a change or suggests we could do something better. Remember that God placed every person who has authority in their position. Perfection is not a prerequisite for leadership. Earlier we mentioned that critics can act as the trials God sends our way. Leaders can serve in those roles for us, as well, when their decisions frustrate or derail us. There's nothing wrong with speaking up when you disagree, but you may want to decide before hand what are the hills on which you're willing to die. What are your absolute, non-negotiables when it comes to teaching Sunday School? Where are some areas you're willing to compromise for the sake of unity?

I. REMEMBER WHO WE ARE. I Cor. 4:1

What Is a Minister? Somewhere between the call of God and the heart ward of the local hospital there exists a specialist in everything, variously called a "minister," a "preacher," a "pastor," a "clergyman." He is a hero to his wife, a stranger to his children, a fine boy to his mother, an "easy touch" to down-and-outers, a name on the mailing list of hundreds of agencies and organizations, an example to his flock. To some people he's a fuddy-duddy, to some he's a stuffed shirt, to some he's a character who has never lived it up, to some he's "Reverend," to some he's a guy who has nothing else to do but get ready for a twenty-minute sermon once a week. To some he's the person in whose presence you must not cuss, drink, or smoke. To others he is a dear friend, a "johnny-on-the spot" when death's angel hovers near; he's the one whose ministry continues when the medics have done all that they can do; he's the man who can mend marriages, but who can't find time to fix his wife's toaster; he's the nice man at church who pats the babies' heads, even though he's not running for a political office. He's the one who marries young lovers, prays with the sick, and buries the dead. He's a financial expert, a public orator, janitor, errand boy, typist, file clerk, writer, public relations expert, poor golfer, professional tea-sipper and punch-drinker, journalist, reformer, evangelist, pastor, business executive, counselor, prophet, bookworm, diplomat, human being, sinner, very poor golfer, bass, tenor, planner, teetotaler, and a terrible golfer! Ministers are found everywhere—preaching in church on Sunday, listening in meetings, teaching a class, looking at a clock, not looking at a clock, giving invocations, giving benedictions, waiting in maternity wards, sympathizing beside caskets, standing behind pulpits, pleading causes, serving on committees, reading the Bible, playing football with the kids on the vacant lot near the church, watching someone take a final breath, driving expectant mothers to the hospital, sitting behind a desk, lying underneath a car, standing on the roof of buildings under construction, meditating, dreaming, at home at dinner time, not at home at dinner time, standing before women's groups, delivering addresses, meeting in conventions, diagnosing the world's sickness and prescribing the cure—God. —*Russell Blowers* See: John 21:15-17

Working with Christ A matchless honor, all unsought, High privilege, surpassing thought That Thou shouldest call us, Lord, to be Linked in fellowship with Thee! To carry out Thy wondrous plan To bear Thy messages to man "In trust," with Christ's own word of grace, To every soul of human race. —*Copied* See: Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 6:1

II. REMEMBER WHAT IS EXPECTED OF US. I Cor. 4:2-5

Churches The church is not made up of people who are better than the rest, but of people who want to become better than they are. See: 1 Corinthians 3:21-23; Galatians 6:9; 2 Peter 1:5

Self-Examination

Christian Living A week filled with selfishness and a Sunday full of religious exercises will make a good Pharisee but a poor Christian. —*Clifton Christian* See: Matthew 7:5; Luke 12:1; Philippians 2:15

Where Do You Stand? of all church members 10 percent never pray. of all church members 20 percent never read the Bible. of all church members 30 percent never go to church. of all church members 40 percent never contribute. of all church members 50 percent never participate in church work. of all church members 60 percent never give to missions. of all church members 75 percent never serve in the church by visitation. of all church members 85 percent never go to prayer meetings. of all church members 95 percent never have won a soul to Christ. —*Copied* See: Acts 11:23; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 10:23

Church Attendance off Duty Until Fall I forgot my Lord in the summertime Just the time I was needed most; I was not away, but on each Lord's Day I just failed to be at my post. I forgot my church in the summertime As I lazily lay in bed, While the faithful few had my work to do; And I was spiritually dead. I forgot my offering in the summertime When He needed it most of all; While my cash was spent, I was pleasure bent, Just off duty from God until fall. If my Lord should come in the summertime, When from duty to God I'm free, Wonder what I'll do when my life is through If by chance He should forget me? —*Copied from The Lamar Messenger* See: Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:8

III. REMEMBER WHAT WE HAVE GOING FOR US. I Cor. 4:9-20

If you want to launch big ships, go where there is deep water. See: Matthew 9:37; Luke 5:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:12

Christians

What Kind Are You? A lot of Christians are like wheelbarrows: they are no good unless pushed. Some are like canoes: they need to be paddled. Some are like kittens: they are more contented when petted. Some are like footballs: you don't know which way they will bounce next. Some are like balloons: they are full of air and ready to blow up. Some are like trailers: they have to be pulled. Some are like neon lights: they keep going on and off. Others let the Holy Spirit lead them. Some are like good watches: they are open faced, pure gold, quietly busy, and full of good works. For this kind of Christian we gratefully thank God! Which kind are you? See: Proverbs 27:8; Hosea 6:4; James 1:6

What Makes You Special?

An American tourist in Paris who purchased an inexpensive amber necklace in a trinket shop was shocked when he had to pay quite a high duty on it to clear customs in New York. This aroused his curiosity, so he had it appraised. After looking at the object under a powerful magnifying glass, the jeweler said, "I'll give you \$25,000 for it." Greatly surprised, the man decided to have another expert examine it. When he did, he was offered \$10,000 more!

"What do you see that's so valuable about this old necklace," asked the astonished man.

"Look through this glass," replied the jeweler. There before his eyes was an inscription: "From Napoleon Bonaparte to Josephine." The value of the necklace came from its identification with a famous person.

As Christians, we are in union with one who is far more important than any human being. It is from this union that the Christian finds his true identity and worth.

So in an age when man is searching for his past and discovering his potentials, the Christian can rejoice that his true worth comes from God and his identity is found in Jesus Christ.