

A right view of the ministry is the cure for the kind of factions and strife that existed in the church at Corinth. There are three things here that need to be said about ministers. Calvin makes three points on this passage:

1. They are stewards of the mysteries of God. As we saw in chapter two, the things that God has prepared for those that love him have been revealed. Ministers are stewards of that which has been revealed—they are not to make things up—they are responsible to teach the things that have been revealed. The minister serves the church, but he serves the church as the minister of Christ.
2. They must be faithful. It is a wicked thing if the things belonging to the master are perverted and corrupted for the benefit of the steward. Ministers must seek to do the Master good, not to do themselves good. It is wickedness for a steward to use his office to enrich himself and defraud the heirs.
3. They will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ, Himself. How foolish it was for the Corinthians to be judges over the ministers of Christ. Who are you to judge another man’s servant? You have no authority to judge another man’s servant?

But let us look at the words that Paul wrote:

Vs. 1,2. Faithfulness is the most important quality of a minister of Christ. A man is not to be evaluated by his sense of humor, his eloquence, his personality, his human qualities. His job is to be faithful in the ministry of the word of God, the doctrine of the apostles. This follows from what Paul has said in the previous three chapters—all things are ours in Jesus Christ. The false teachers in Corinth were prosperous, well thought of, praised on all sides, and they looked down on Paul and the other faithful teachers of Christ.

A steward was a slave in charge of provisions. He dispensed them at the proper time and place to those entitled to them. It is this work of a steward that is in view here. A minister is a dispenser of the provisions that Christ has provided for His people. They are not to be given to strangers; they are not to be mixed with poisonous ideas or corrupted for the benefit of the minister.

Vs. 3. Paul condemns their unrighteous judgment and comparison of minister with minister. Paul understood who his Master is. The opinion of every Tom, Dick, and Harry was irrelevant to him, and it ought to be to every faithful servant of Jesus Christ. There is only one master that you and I have to give account to, and that is Jesus Christ. You and I will appear before Him, and we will be judged by Him.

In that day you and I will be judged according to the words of Jesus Christ and the Apostles, for the church is built on the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.

I need to say something about responsibility here. This is a day in which people scoff at responsibility and glorify the most irresponsible among us. In fact, one of the most popular music group coming out of the sixties is called the “Rolling Stones,” from the common proverb, “A Rolling Stone Gathers No Moss.” The fact that they collected a very great amount of moss seems to be lost on the suckers that paid their money to be corrupted by them and others like them. To be “Easy on the mind” was better than to be married and to take responsibility. Women themselves were corrupted, and refused to take responsibility for marriage and rearing families and home, opting for abortion and careers.

“I am responsible for myself” is the idea that devastated our society. The devil is very clever, but to insist that you are responsible to yourself is to insist that you are responsible to no one, that there is no God, and that God has not established His rule and authority in the world.

The facts are these: You do not belong to yourself, and you have responsibility before God to live according to His institutions and His authority. Your basic responsibilities are these:

1. To use your body as a gift from God—not as an instrument of pleasure or self-will. We are to yield our members as instruments of righteousness to God, according to Paul in Romans 7. Your body is not your own, and you will have to give an account to God, for you are responsible to Him for the use of your body. Whether you eat or drink, you are to do all to the glory of God. Your labor is a sacrifice of praise to God. Sexuality is under the law of God, and adultery, fornication, and homosexuality are forbidden. You are not your own, you belong to Jesus Christ. This is the foundation of everything else. The Bible tells us to give our hearts to the Lord, but He also commands us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. Sexuality is to be expressed in marriage, and before marriage a person is to live with marriage in view, for the glory of God. These are biblical principles, and we have strayed very far from them in our society. Instead of holy matrimony and having children in the holiness of marriage, and rearing them for the glory of God, sex is free, children are aborted or left with the state or family members to take care of.
2. You have a responsibility to work in an occupation to provide for your needs and for the needs of your family. This work ethic is also mocked in the modern age, but it all goes together. If people do not take financial responsibility for their lives, then they cannot do anything else that God calls them to do. God holds the man responsible to do the following:
 - a. Provide for the shelter, the food, the clothing, the physical needs of the family.
 - b. Provide for the education of the family in the things of Christ. God will hold him responsible in the last day for the education of family members in the things of Christ.
 - c. Provide for worship: This means that churches are to be supported and the ministry supported. You have a responsibility before God to provide the means so that true worship may be established.
 - d. Provide for good civil government: The state is to be provided with the things needed to provide law and order, and to protect the state from invasion. If the state does not secure our liberties, then we will not be able to do the other things that God has called us to do.

Responsibility means to respond to the duty that God has given to us—not to ignore His call, but to hear and obey. To the voice of God, you and I either respond in a sinful way, or in a believing and trusting way. But the voice of God cannot be ignored.

Paul is saying here that ministers have a responsibility to be true—not true to themselves, not true to their denomination only, but true to God and to the doctrine that God has revealed to the apostles and prophets.

Vs. 4. How different is this confession of Paul to the modern consciousness. “My conscience is clear,” is supposed to end all. One politician said just the other day, “I am certain that I have no memory of any wrong doing.” Paul said that he is not justified because his conscience is clear. You will not be judged by your conscience in the last day, but by God Himself. You are not responsible to your conscience, but to God. This is the reason that you must know what God has said. Paul is not responsible to commend himself, but the reward is from the Lord.

Vs. 5: Judge nothing before the time. Paul keeps the goal firmly in sight: It is God who will hand out the commendations and the prizes. The word “praise” means loud praise and applause. It is the reward of having competed in the race and winning. Everyone is a winner in the work of Christ. “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord.”

- a. What is in sight here is not the salvation of the soul for that is of grace alone, but the evaluation of the work that God has given ministers of the Gospel. Do not be unrighteous in comparing church with church and ministry with ministry. God will judge the ministry. Paul did not evaluate his

own ministry, as if he were responsible to himself—his work was to be evaluated by God Himself.

- b. God will judge the hidden counsels of the heart—not only what was done, but why it was done. Who knows why men do the things that they do? God will sort all these things out—those who have been faithful stewards of the mysteries of God will be rewarded. “Everyman” does not mean “Everyman” without restrictions, but is restricted to the class of people that the apostle is speaking of: and he is speaking of faithful stewards of the Gospel.

Vs. 6. Paul is applying the present figure of speech to himself and Apollos—that is, to himself and the other teachers and apostles of the Lord. As I said before, it is possible to make too much, and it is possible to make too little of the ministers of the Gospel. The right estimation of them is that they are stewards, responsible for the provisions that God has made for His people, and responsible to feed the flock in due season.

None of this would matter if God had not placed authority in men. If everyman is a law unto himself and doesn't need to be taught by other men appointed by God, then none of this is relevant. But the apostle knew that ultimately all such evil judgments proceeded from pride and self-will.

Paul is not condemning a right evaluation of men. The Ephesians were commended by Christ because they tried those who said they were apostles and found them to be liars. We are to evaluate and test men, but what is condemned is the evaluation by a wrong measure—a measure that proceeds from the pride and indulgence of the flesh. Evaluate us as ministers of Christ, he says, and don't be puffed up. Their pride caused them to be hostile to each other.