

Real Church Leaders: 1 Corinthians 4v1-21

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[0 : 00] I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court. Indeed, I do not even judge myself. My consciousness is clear, but that does not make me innocent.

It is the Lord who judges me. 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 motive of men's hearts. At that time, each will receive his praise from God. Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, Do not go beyond what is written.

Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. For what makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Already you have all you want. Already you have become rich. You have become kings, and that without us. How I wish that you really had become kings, so that we might be kings with you.

[1 : 10] For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.

We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are so strong. You are honored. We are dishonored. To this very hour, we go hungry and thirsty.

We are in rags. We are brutally treated. We are homeless. We work hard with our own hands.

When we are cursed, we bless. When we are persecuted, we endure it.

When we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment, we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you as my dear children.

Even though you have 10,000 guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For in Christ Jesus, I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you to imitate me.

[2 : 14] For this reason, I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing. And then I will find out, not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come with you a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit? Thank you, Sam.

Well, please keep your Bibles open there, and let's follow along as we hear God's word. We're going to pray first, so let's do that now. Our Father God, we come before you, and we humble ourselves before you.

For you are the God who rules over all. You are the King of kings, the Lord of lords. It is with your word that you spoke this universe into existence.

[3 : 44] It is by your word you sustain all things. It is by your word you bring about life, and spiritual life.

And so we ask that the power of the Holy Spirit would be speaking through your word this morning, changing hearts, transforming lives, causing us to be a church that follows you and leads in the way you would have us to lead.

So we ask for your help. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. A legend.

A warrior. Paul O'Connell is not just a great player. He has all the qualities of a great leader. As one teammate shared, nothing he ever said felt unattainable.

He made us feel we could beat anyone. An inspirational leader and a motivating captain. Leaders are vital, aren't they?

[5 : 10] They're vital if we're to win in sports. Succeed in business. Defeat our enemies. So what kind of leader should we choose for the church?

If you've been reading the notices carefully, you will know that that's something we're seeking to do in this church. We're wanting to appoint an additional elder or elders to help lead the church here in Carrigoline.

So what should we be looking for when we are appointing a new leader? Well, it's been very clear as we've been going through 1 Corinthians what the church in Corinth wanted.

Their leaders had to be popular with people. Successful in ministry. Well educated. They had to be impressive in knowledge and eloquent in speech.

It was all about people and their status. Now these things may be helpful but they are not the essential qualities of a church leader.

[6 : 22] Go back to chapter 3 verse 3. You see, they were looking at leadership from a worldly point of view.

So he says in chapter 3 verse 1 Brothers and sisters I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly mere infants in Christ.

They were behaving like babies. Verse 3 You are still worldly for since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

Are you not just following the wisdom of the world? For when one says oh I follow Paul and another I follow Apollos are you not mere men?

You see, it was all about people and their status what they did and what they could do. And he reminds us that no, that is not what we should look for.

[7 : 23] So what are the qualities we should look for when we are choosing a leader? Well we are going to look at this in three ways. Three things that are said about church leaders.

The first one is this leaders live gospel faithful lives. And there's three things I want to say under this.

First leaders are entrusted with the gospel. Look at chapter 4 verse 1 1 and 2 So then men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.

So what are these secret things that have been entrusted to leaders? What are the secret things? Well he's already told us what they are.

If you go back to chapter 2 verse 1 and 2 so chapter 2 he reminds them that when Paul first arrived in Corinth he said I didn't come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaim to you the testimony about God for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except so this was the only thing I wanted to teach you was that Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[8 : 53] Go down to verse 7 he says we speak of God's secret wisdom a wisdom that has been hidden but look at verse 10 God has revealed it to us by his spirit so God had made known the gospel he had declared to the apostles to Paul and his spirit had enabled them to understand and see the good news about Jesus Christ and what the death of Christ on the cross meant that is what has been entrusted to the leaders of the church now if something has been entrusted to you that means you're to care for it you're to look after it you're to preserve it you're to keep it and guard it it is something special something very precious because the message of Jesus Christ and him crucified is

God's power to save people it's the means by which people are changed and transformed so it is precious it is special and it must be preserved it's been entrusted to you so they have been entrusted with the gospel faithful and second they must be proven faithful with the gospel verse 2 chapter 4 now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful yes they are to protect the gospel they're to make sure that it doesn't get changed or altered or diluted in any shape or form they are to be faithful well how can we be faithful how can we make sure we do that well look down at verse 6 now brothers he says I have applied these things to myself and apostles and Apollos as those who are leaders for your benefit so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying do not go beyond what is written in other words he's teaching the church you're not to go beyond anything that we have written like this first letter or anything that we have taught you remember

Paul is an apostle and he's referring to the other apostles so do not go beyond what has been written everything that they teach must be tested against the things that Paul has already written and spoken about which means for us today leaders must have a very clear grasp and understanding of what God's word has to say this is our apostolic authority it is the word of God this is the standard by which we must test everything and we mustn't go beyond the cover if you like of holy scripture look at the rest of verse six then you will not take pride in one man over against another you see we're not interested in how popular or how successful or how educated a leader is we're not wanting to gather around leaders with big personalities we want to gather around God's word and his son the Lord Jesus Christ and so what we need are leaders who are able to explain the truth of God and be able to apply the truth of God to people's lives and lead people according to what God has to say they must prove faithful according to God's word as one writer has put it God's word is his supernatural power for accomplishing his supernatural work this is no ordinary book it is his supernatural power to accomplish his supernatural work preaching the content and intent of God's word is what unleashes the power of God on the people of God if we want to know the power of God at work in our lives then we are to hear the word of God being taught and explained so we are entrusted with the gospel we must prove faithful and third leaders are to be accountable to God go back to verse three he says

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court indeed I do not even judge myself you see the church were making all kinds of judgments about Paul what kind of leader he was his message what they thought and he's stepping back from all of that he says I don't mind I don't care if you judge me or what little committee you set up to judge me leaders are not there to please people they are there to please God look what he says at the end of verse four it is the Lord who judges me you see people might look for popular leaders but God looks for faithful leaders faithful leaders who are true to his gospel who are there to please God and not people and the danger is is what happens is people begin to teach what other people want to hear so you know

[14:53] Johnny you shouldn't really be teaching so much about Jesus' death on the cross it's a little bit outdated and irrelevant and people don't really want to hear that message anymore we need to we need to move on and the danger is that we can begin to fit our message to what people want to hear but leaders are not accountable to the judgments of people they are accountable to God verse five therefore judge nothing before the appointed time wait till the Lord comes he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and he will expose the motives of men's hearts now of course that doesn't mean leaders are to ignore the judgments of people we know from scripture that we are accountable to the church body but it is vital that every judgment made is first tested against God's word as we saw back in verse six to make sure that it is not going beyond the bounds of what is written because it is God to whom we are ultimately accountable you see when we stand before God as judge he's not going to ask the leaders how popular with you were you did the church like you did the community in which you lived did they did they think you were great we're not going to be asked how successful we were how many churches we planted or how many people came to faith how educated how many letters we have after our name God will want to know were we faithful to the gospel did we teach it and explain it to people did we guard it and keep it so real leaders true leaders must live gospel faithful lives second church leaders live cross shaped lives I wonder how you would feel if you were considered a fool or called scum maybe you've had that said to you I don't know but it's certainly not very nice is it well that it seems is the quality God looks for in leaders have a look at verse 10 look what he says we are fools for Christ or down we're down at the end of verse 13 he says the scum of the earth you see the wisdom of the world looks for a different kind of leader back in verse 8 he says already you have all you want already you have become rich you have become kings and that without us you see the kind of leaders they are looking for are powerful and wealthy and influential like the kings and the rulers of this world look at the rest of verse 8 how I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you now Paul is getting very sarcastic and ironic here with them it's like oh we seem to have got it wrong please teach us how we should be real leaders so that we don't have to suffer and we don't have to serve teach us what it is to be a worldly leader no true leaders not only preach the cross they must also follow the example of the cross so he tells us two things that first leaders are fools for Christ look at verse 9 for for it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession like men condemned to die in the arena in days past when a king returned to his city after a great big victory a great big battle there would be this great celebration and at the front of the

procession would be the king and his chariot and all the streets would be lined with the cheering people celebrating this great king and his marvellous victory and at the back of the procession would be the captured enemies shuffling along in their chains waiting for their execution or as it says here in verse 9 like men condemned to die in the arena well this he says is what a church leader is like to the eyes of the world like men condemned to die in the arena we have been made a spectacle to the whole universe to angels as well as to men you see when people look at the cross of Christ they think it's stupid it's not a victory that man dying on the cross it's a failure they hear the message of Christ and they regard it as foolish so it's not surprising then that those who preach the cross and those who live by the cross are also considered fools verse 10 we are fools for Christ but you you're so wise in Christ we are weak oh but you're so strong aren't you you are honoured we are dishonoured you see the wisdom of the world says it's the powerful the clever the influential people that count these are the kinds of leaders we need for our churches no the leaders that count are those who follow the example of Christ Christ was thought of as a fool as he hung on the cross he was considered weak come down from the cross if you can save yourself look at the state of him as the crowds laughed and mocked he was dishonoured real leaders must be prepared to follow the way of the cross but not only are we to be fools leaders are to be the scum of the earth you see for many leadership is kind of prestige it's power it's a title it's position but not the leader [22 : 05] God looks for look at how Paul describes his life verse 11 to this very hour we go hungry and thirsty we are in rags we are brutally treated we are homeless we work hard with our own hands when we are cursed we bless when we are persecuted we endure it when we are slandered we answer kindly there is nothing advantageous in the world's eyes about being a church leader no privileges no special treatment no particular rights it's a life of service and sacrifice it's where people misunderstand you where people ignore you and mistreat you just as Christ lived with rejection just as Christ died in humiliation so the church leader must be prepared to follow in that same path look at the end of verse 13 up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth the refuse of the world the stuff that is thrown into your bin the stuff that is scraped into the compost this is what church leaders are in the eyes of the world they have nothing to say they have nothing to give just think about the last time you heard an evangelical minister

Christian on the radio or on television being invited onto the late late show to give their opinion or on some talk show when was the last time you hear it don't hear it very often if at all why because well the message that they have to share is it's like filth it's like dirt it's like scum we don't need it we don't need to hear that it's useless so real leaders not only preach the cross they must be prepared to follow the example of the cross third church leaders are to live Christ like lives look at verse 14 he says I'm not writing this to shame you but to warn you as my dear children he's caring for them he loves them so much don't look for the qualities that the world looks for don't be looking out for big personalities and impressive speakers those who are highly educated he's saying this for their own good look at the end of verse 15 he says for in

Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel I care for you like a father cares for his own child I want to make sure that your church and your people are protected and cared for and loved so choose your leaders well do what is right and he goes on to explain what that is first leaders must live by example verse 16 therefore I urge you to imitate me what a thing to say follow my example don't just listen to what I say live as I live watch my life and do the kinds of things that I do verse 17 for this reason

I am sending to you Timothy my son whom I love who is faithful in the Lord he will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus you see leaders are not only to preach Christ they are to live like Christ their lives must back up the message listen he says to what Timothy has to say he'll tell you how I live the kind of life I live towards other people he will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church leaders live what they preach they are to be a walking example of the message they declare not only talk about Jesus but live like Jesus of course it doesn't mean perfection and I stand here and I speak as a leader of the church it's not perfection rather there is this continual growing in

Christ likeness there is a continuing grasping and understanding of God's word that is continually being applied so that it is not only seen in life but can actually be followed and go yes that is the way we should live church leaders are to live Christ like lives and live by example and second leaders must discipline gently verse 18 some of you have become arrogant as if I were not coming to you all that Paul character glad he's not here anymore we can do things our way now let's show

him how to lead let's show him how to really do church and how to win the crowd we know what to do but leadership in the church is too serious a matter to ignore because the quality of a leader will determine the quality of the church verse 19 but

[28 : 43] I will come to you very soon if the Lord is willing and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking but what power they have for the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power you see it's not about popularity it's not about people who can give impressive talks it's all about God's power at work through his people go back to chapter 2 verse 4 he reminds us he says my message and my preaching they were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the spirit power so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom but on God's power power those who lead by the standards of the world must be dealt with because it will ruin the church the wisdom of the world will wreck the church we need those who will follow the wisdom of

God and rest in God's power chapter 4 verse 21 what do you prefer shall I come to you with a whip or in love and with a gentle spirit of course I'm very sure he doesn't mean that he's literally going to arrive with a whip and start lashing it about and beating them out no he's saying that he will have to discipline them by correcting their behaviour that's something we'll see should happen in the whole of the church in chapter 5 he will have to correct their behaviour first of all by removing them from their position of leadership but his desire is that they will hear what he is saying that they will read his letter and they will see what they are doing and that they will change their ways before he gets to them and they will repent and put things right so that

Paul can come in love and in a gentle spirit he's giving them opportunity and leaders in the same way are to love the church so much that they will discipline to protect to protect the church and to care for the church and let me say this very very clearly to us as a church family you are to watch your leaders you are to watch me you are to watch Ralph listen to what we say watch our lives and if there is anything that should cause us not to be well something should be said because the quality of the leader will determine the quality of the church isn't this how Christ has ultimately treated us he has come to us with grace and love he's come with a gentle spirit longing that we would all repent and turn to him and find forgiveness and find life in him but the day is coming when the

Lord Jesus will return as judge and he will punish all those who have rejected him so Christ's desire is that we change before he comes again and that I think is what Paul is saying here change before I come so these are the qualities we are to look for in those who lead the church the quality of a leader will determine the quality of the church and so we need to pray and ask for God's wisdom that we would follow the wisdom of God rather than get caught up with the wisdom of the world and choose leaders who are faithful to the gospel those those who model a cross shaped life and those who we can listen to and learn from but also follow their example pray for your leaders and pray for us as we seek to choose leaders let's do that right now as we pray our father god we humbly come before you and recognize that this is your church you are the leader and we are your people and we want to follow you and we want to serve you so father would you please give to each one of us the grace that we may follow in your ways thanking you for the leaders that you put in place in the life of every local church we pray that we would care well that we would love well that we would teach that we would be faithful and we ask father god that you would give to us as a church family wisdom discernment to see to hear those who would lead rightly father we ask for your help because your church is precious you died for us you gave your life for us and we want to do what is right we want to honor you and glorify you so would you please help us fill us with your holy spirit we pray we ask this in

Jesus name amen we're going to sing and this song really takes us back to the heart of what leadership is it brings us back to Christ who is our servant king who gave his life for us and calls us to follow him and as we sing this we not only think of him as our leader but we think of him who died for us and in a moment we're going to share around the Lord's supper together as we celebrate and remember the servant who died to give his life for us so that we might have life to live his way so let's stand together as we