Moving forward in faith Part 1

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[0:00] Let's look at the letter to the Corinthians, there at chapter 4 from verses 1 to 5. 1 Corinthians 4, 1 to 5.

Verse 1. This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. With me, it is a very small thing. I should be judged by you or by any human court.
I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.
It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purpose of the heart.
[1:24] Then every man will receive his commendation from God. Amen. The Lord bless to us that reading. May it be to his praise and to his glory.

During the time that Daniel was on sabbatical, on Sunday evenings, I cover the first three chapters of this epistle. And on the next six Sunday mornings, we're going to consider chapters 4 and 5. The next three Sundays will be on 4, and the final three will be on 5. So let me turn your attention to what this epistle is all about. The last verse of 1 Corinthians 14 says, Let all things be done decently and in order.
And that, I take it to be the key text to this epistle. Because there were distinct problems in Corinth, and the apostle is writing with a view to sorting them out.
And in the first four chapters, the problem is division. He says in chapter 1, It has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you.
[2:52] Now this Chloe's people, it's the only time it's referred to, but it may be taken that she lived in Ephesus. She was a wealthy woman, and she had slaves.

And some of these slaves visited Corinth. They were Christians. So this is how Paul gets to know about this. It's the local gossip, the local rumor, the local estimation of the church is at stake.
So he says in verse 10, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and there be no dissensions among you, that you may be united in the same mind and in the same judgment.
Now, as you read these chapters, you come to the conclusion that there were possibly two areas which caused this division. In chapter 1, he talks about baptizing the house of Stephanas, besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other.
So the first division comes out as to who baptized whom, whether it was Paul or Peter or Apollos. But then the second division comes out over the people they liked to preach the word.
[4:19] Some like Paul. Some like Peter. Some like Apollos. So this is the cause of all of these problems.

So in chapter 4, he's wanting you to reconsider what the actual status, the evaluation, the way you deal with the servants of God.
So he says in verses 1 and 2, this is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.
Moreover, it is required of servants that they be found trustworthy. So how we are to think about the servants of God is covered by two words.
servants, servants, and stewards. The regular word that Paul uses in his epistles to describe himself as a servant of God is the word daulos, which means a slave or a servant.

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[5:33] So in Romans 1, verse 1, he says, Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. So in other words, what he's trying to do is to stress his humility in the way that these things work.

But in 1 Corinthians 4, that's not the word he's used. He's used a different word, which means attendant, helper, assistant, or servant.
And it has a meaning in the Greek language and culture of the time, which is relevant to note. Because in classical Greek, this word was applied to somebody who rode in the lowest tier of what is known as a trireme.
Now I have to confess and tell you that I wouldn't have known what a trireme was, but for the fact it turned up in a series, in part of the series of Inspector Morse.
[6:41] So a trireme is a Roman galleon with three layers of people who rode. and those that rode at the bottom were the rejects of society.

So that the meaning is underlings. And this is what he's saying about himself. It's a humble word. It's not used elsewhere by him, but it does occur at the beginning of Luke's Gospel. When Luke is talking about the sources he's used to compile his Gospel, he says, just as they were delivered to us by those who became eyewitnesses and ministers, attendants, helpers, servants of the Word. It stresses the utter humility of Paul. The second word is translated steward, and it means manager, it means the treasurer of a city or a trustee.
And there is a setting to this word as well because this steward was somebody who organized the household.
[8:07] He was in charge of all the slaves and in relation to the master he himself was a slave but an overseer in relation to his workmen.

In certain circumstances he might even have been a free man and not a slave. But what is happening here is the apostle is using this word to show that God is the master of the Christian household and the stores that are entrusted to his stewards are the mysteries of God, are the gospel of Christ, are the preaching of the Word.
So he's now saying two things. One is this is our humility in terms of our position in the kingdom of God.
The second is as far as God is concerned we are the managers of the mysteries of the kingdom of God and we require to be found faithful in that responsibility.
He is a humble servant of God. This he says is how one should regard us.
[9:34] We are not here to lord it over you. In one of the Thessalonian epistles he says we could have made demands as Christ's apostles but we became as children in your midst.

So we're here he says to lead you into the deeper things of God. And the purpose of saying all of this is to say this the way you are to regard us is this way.
We are humble servants of God. We are not exalted in what we do. We're falling at the feet of our master because if they do this if they apply it to themselves in their consideration of who the preachers are how they preach what they do what they say then it will solve all the divisions and the quarreling in their midst.
it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. It's also required of us all of us that we are to be found trustworthy.
Why is that? Because of a verse that occurs in the next Corinthian epistle chapter 5. we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive good or evil according to what he has done in the body.
[11:18] This is not a judgment in relation to your eternal salvation. It's a judgment in relation to what you have done with the talents God has given you in this life.

It's something applies not just to preachers, not just to pastors or leaders, it applies to us all. So every member has this responsibility.
In 1 Peter 4 verse 10 he says this, as each has received a gift employ it for one another as good stewards of God's very grace.
That's what we are. Everyone here this morning. But let's move on and consider something else. Verses 3 and 4.
But with me it is a very small thing I should be judged by you or any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.
[12:32] it is the Lord who judges me. Now why is he saying this? He's saying this because he's become aware of the criticism that is going on in the church relative to his ministry.

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In 2 Corinthians 10.10 for they say his letters are weighty and strong but his bodily presence is weak and his speech is of no account.
So how is it that they are making this judgment on him, this criticism of him, since he is the one who has introduced to them the Christian faith.
He went to Corinth preaching the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. We find that before this letter had been written, another letter had been written by Paul, which we'll come to in a minute.
said, and he is responding in this earlier letter to some grievous matters that have been reported to him. They're detailed in chapters 5 and 6, and in three weeks time we'll come on to that.
[14:00] But for now, here's what he says. It is actually reported that there is immorality among you and of a kind that is not found among pagans.

for a man is living with his father's wife. Now, what's he talking about? What he's talking about, the word he uses, is that of sexual immorality, meaning sexual immorality of any sort.
But in particular, it doesn't apply to fornication or adultery in this particular context. It applies to incest, which may be judged to be any kind of sexual immorality or fornication or whatever, but within a family setting.
So in this chapter five, he's told them what they have to do. I rather wrote to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of a brother, if he is guilty of immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber, not even to each eat with such a one.
But the problem is they've not acted on what he said. They've ignored his pastoral advice. And in chapter five, he says this, for though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
[15:36] On the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, there's much in that series of verses that is remote and the details are not clear. But one thing is clear.
You should have acted on what I said. Now, why didn't they? Well, no reasons are actually given, but the possibility is due to the fact that this individual may have been a different sort of class to the rest of them.
He may have been of a wealthy disposition. So, if that speculation is right, this church might have been dependent upon him for his contributions for their survival, so that would explain their non-action.
So, what they do, they are not going to criticize this individual. So, rather, they turn their attention to the apostle Paul, who has pointed all of this out to them in truth, and they criticize him.
[16:59] that is what is happening here. With me, it is a very small thing. I should be judged by you or by any human court.

Now, why does he say that? He says that because the Lord is coming, and he says in verse 5, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and disclose the purposes of the heart, then every man will receive his commendation from God.
This is why their criticism of him should cease. because one day, the Lord will come, and at his coming, he will render judgment to every man and woman on the basis of what they've done with the talents God has given them, on the basis of what they've done with the life that God has given them.
So what he is saying is that everyone has to adjust their conduct in light of this truth. Do not pronounce judgment before the time before the Lord comes.
The word time here in reality means appointed or proper time or season. And so the time in view is the coming again of the Lord.
[18:43] It's an idea he also develops in the book. On that day, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

Now what happens? Verse 5 tells us, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.
Then every man will receive his commendation from God. So Christ, the eternal light, will expose everything that is going on in secret, in the hearts, in the minds, in reality.

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Ephesians 5, 12 to 13 speaks of the same thing. It is a shame even to speak of these things that they do in secret, but when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.
So when Christ comes, all of these things that have been gone on in secret, as far as the Corinthians are concerned, will come to light.
[20:02] Therefore, he says this, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

And the Lord didn't come in Paul's day, and thus far, it has not come in our day. I just mean to say it's not going to happen, because it is.
But let me draw your attention to this. When we come round the table of the Lord, Paul adds some things to it.
He says this, for anyone who eats or drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment upon himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died prematurely.
your attitudes, our attitudes, their attitudes, will be exposed. For if we would judge ourselves truly, we would not be judged.
[21:24] When we are judged by the Lord, we are chastened, so that we may not be condemned by the world. So rather than having to wait for the second coming to happen, for this to happen, it happens now.

Peter writes in his epistle chapter 4 verse 17, the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God.
Now what's all that's about? This is all about a correcting influence that the teaching of God's word has. God's promise.
Because it invites us to examine every motive that we have in light of the Lord's coming. Does this have any practical value?
After all, all that's local and temporal in this situation in Corinth has vanished 2,000 years ago.
people. But the spiritual principles are lying in this are still relevant today.
[22:43] Because what God wants from you and from me is a church without any spot or wrinkle.
people. A church walking in the light of God.

A church aware of the holiness of God. Because if we apply all of this to our hearts, we will be different people.
people. Why should we do it? I'll tell you why. We should do it for the sake of the testimony of the gospel which spreads beyond these walls to the community outside.
And that is the seedbed of revival which we definitely need to pray for and seek.
Then every man and woman will receive his condemnation or his commendation sorry from God.
[23:58] Amen. May the Lord bless these thoughts. May they be to his praise and to his glory.
Who is on the Lord's side?

Who will serve the king? Amen.

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