

The Ministers Of Christ.

Text: 1 Cor 4:1-5

Suggested Hymns:

12, 13, 244, 848, 243

1) How They Are To Be Regarded

2) What Is Required Of Them

3) Who Is Their Judge

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, ¹ *Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.* ² *Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.* ³ *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.* ⁴ *For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.*

⁵ *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

In our text the Apostle speaks of the ministers of Christ. The ministerial office is a divine institution. It is God's will and ordinance that the Christians upon this earth should band together, form Christian congregations, and have capable men — to whom they extend the ministerial call — preach the Gospel publicly and administer the holy Sacraments to them.

Did not Paul say to the elders, who were the preachers at Ephesus, as written in Acts 20:28, ²⁸ *Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood?*

If the Holy Spirit has made the ministers overseers to feed the Church of God, must not their office be a divine institution? And does not Paul say in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20, ¹⁹ *that ... God ... has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* ²⁰ *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God*

were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God?

Hence, if God has committed the ministry to His servants, and if they are His ambassadors, must not the ministerial office be a divine institution?

Those religious groups, therefore, in the Christian Church which despise the ministerial office, and refuse to call a minister, or to have a called servant of the Word preach to them and administer the Sacraments, are at fault and have the plain words of Scripture standing against them.

They say that they do not believe in a salaried ministry; but how can they say this in the face of such plain statements as 1 Timothy 5:18, "***The laborer is worthy of his wages,***" or 1 Corinthians 9:14, ¹⁴ ***Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel?***

Since, then, the ministerial office is a divine institution, both the members of a Christian congregation and the called ministers of Christ are under certain obligations to the Lord God.

The ministers of Christ are responsible to their divine Master for all their official acts, and the members should highly value and respect the office which the Lord has instituted in His love to sinful man and for the salvation of their souls.

Let us consider *The Ministers Of Christ*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

I. The Ministers Of Christ How They Are To Be Regarded.

Our text begins, ¹ ***Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.*** How, then, are the ministers to be regarded?

In the first place, as ministers, they are the servants of Christ. The word which is translated "ministers" in the English version has a significant meaning. Literally it means the oarsmen of Christ. In olden times some of the largest ships were propelled by oarsmen, two men handling one long and heavy oar, and sometimes as many as three rows of men sitting on decks one above the other to attain the quickest possible speed.

The captain, or shipmaster, directed these oarsmen, and they had to dip their oars and row according to his command. This is to give us an idea how the

ministers of Christ are to be regarded, not as the servants of men, but as the servants of Christ.

Christ is the Master whose orders they are obliged to obey. In Christ's service they stand. Christ should be honoured in the office which they hold. True it is that a minister is employed by his congregation, and that the Christian congregation possesses that peculiar church power which is called "the office of the keys," and entrusts the office to a certain man who is thereby made their pastor.

But the office itself is of such a character that Christ must be respected therein. Did not Christ say to His Apostles in Luke 10:16, ***16 He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.***?"

Do you honour your pastor for Christ's sake whose servant he is? Do you bear in mind that the called ministers of Christ deal with you by His divine command? Do you respect the office in the minister, and treat him accordingly? Remember what the Apostle says in 1 Timothy 5:17, ***17 Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.***

Furthermore, the ministers of Christ are to be regarded as the stewards of the mysteries of God. What are the mysteries of God? They are the Word of God and the holy Sacraments. These are the things of which the ministers are stewards. Can any one deny that the proper function of the ministry is to dispense the Word of God and the holy Sacraments?

Has not the minister charge of these two things, of the Word of God, which he must preach publicly and apply privately to the individuals under his care, according to their particular necessities, and of the holy Sacraments.

Of Holy Baptism, which he must administer to all nations, as Christ ordered, to infants as well as to grown persons; and of the Lord's Supper, which under the bread and wine he must administer to those Christians who have examined themselves?

Are not the ministers stewards, then, of these mysteries of God, not proprietors who can do as they please, or deal out these mysteries according to

the wishes of the people, but stewards who are responsible to their Master for the use which they make of the things which He has entrusted to them?

Do you regard your pastor, then, as a steward of the mysteries of God? Do you come regularly to hear him preach to you the divine Word? Do you frequently partake of the Lord's Supper?

Does it look as if, in your pastor, you see a steward of the mysteries of God if for months you do not come to church to hear his voice, and if you let him run after you and urge you to go to the holy Sacrament?

Is it not rather an insult to your pastor, to act as if you did not care for his sermons and personal admonitions and, worse than that, is the neglect of God's Word and Sacrament not an open contempt of the mysteries of God?

O may the Lord grant His grace to those who do not respect the ministerial office as they should. May they heed the Word of God which says in Hebrews 13:17, *¹⁷ Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*

2. The Ministers Of Christ What Is Required Of Them.

But as the ministers are stewards, what is required of them? This is the second point for our consideration.

The Apostle says ² *Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.* In one of His parables our Lord speaks of a steward who wasted his master's goods, and calls him an unjust steward for that reason. Faithfulness in the discharge of his duty is required in a steward, and nothing more.

With many of the children of this world faithfulness is about the last thing they look for in a preacher. They get angry at him if he is faithful. Let him lift up his voice and openly warn against the sins that are in vogue, and he will surely get howled down.

Or let him refuse to officiate at certain occasions when his conscience will not permit him to do so, and what sneers the world has for the preacher!

But Christians also look for something altogether different than faithfulness in their ministers at times. When the requirements of a minister are taken into

consideration, what do the people look for? What is the first thing they ask? Is it not the question, Is he a good speaker? Is not eloquence generally looked upon as the first accomplishment of a successful preacher?

But what will the pastor's eloquence benefit you if he is not faithful, if he does not in plain words point out to you the way that leads to eternal life? Is it not much better for you to be shown into heaven in plain, simple words than to be led to hell by smooth talk?

Others look for special gifts and talents and accomplishments in the minister. They want him to be attractive, of a fine outward appearance, of an amiable disposition, of winning manners, and a leader in conversation.

Or they want him to be aggressive, to make himself prominent, to be proficient in devising new schemes and new measures to draw the people. Or they want him to be lenient and tolerant, pleasing and accommodating to all, not severe in his judgement of others who do not coincide with his views, not too strict.

But what does the Apostle say? He says ² *Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.* Faithfulness is required in the minister, and nothing more. Faithfulness, in the first place, to God, to his Master, who has entrusted to him the stewardship. He himself should be a true believer, thoroughly convinced of the Gospel truth.

True it is that the efficacy of God's Word and the Sacraments does not depend on the minister's personal faith. Even if in his heart the minister be an unbeliever, the Word of God which he proclaims will accomplish what God pleases¹ where it has been sent, and the Sacraments which he administers according to Christ's institution will be effective and convey forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation.

But an unbelieving minister is an unfaithful servant who will be taken to account when his stewardship is taken from him, and will have to answer for his damnable hypocrisy. Furthermore, faithfulness as to the mysteries of God which are entrusted to him is required of the minister.

He should proclaim the Word of God in its truth and purity, and administer the holy Sacraments in conformity with Christ's institution. As soon as a minister deviates from the Word of God, from the clear words of the Bible, as

soon as he preaches things as divine truths which have no foundation in the Holy Scriptures, he forfeits his trust and is no longer a faithful pastor.

He must rightly divide the Word of Truth, as the Apostle says. He must proclaim the Law and show that all, even the best of people, are damnable sinners, and set forth the Gospel to show that in Christ Jesus who died for our sins there is salvation for all.

And, lastly, faithfulness to the flock which God has entrusted to his care is required of the minister. He should serve them to the best of his ability, do for them all he can that they might reach the goal of eternal life, visit them in their illness, comfort them when they are in distress, warn them when they are beginning to go astray, and, in general, attend to their spiritual needs.

This is what the people should expect of their pastor, that he be faithful in the discharge of his duty.

3. The Ministers Of Christ Who Is Their Judge.

But who is to judge here? Who is to pass the verdict upon the minister, and declare whether he has been faithful or not, in the discharge of his duty? Let us briefly consider this question, *Who is the minister's judge?*

The first answer is, Not the people. The Apostle says, ³ *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court* and at the end of our Epistle he warns the Corinthians and says ⁵ *Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.*

People are often very quick to criticise a minister when in the sermon he says something that does not suit them, or when he does a thing which they did not expect of him. A minister may say and do things which some people approve and others condemn.

Now the Apostle is not saying that Christians must not express their opinion as to the minister's sermons and as to his life. In this same Epistle to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 10:15 he says, ¹⁵ *I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say.*

However, your praise or your criticism does not settle the question as to my faithfulness. You may praise me, and yet I may not have been faithful, and you may criticise me though I have been faithful. You are not the judges.

Neither is the minister his own judge. Paul says *In fact, I do not even judge myself.* ⁴ *For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord.* In other words the Apostle is telling us, *I am not conscious of any wilful neglect of duty, but that is no perfect guarantee that I have done all that I should do.*

And the more a minister lives up to his task, he might say with St. Paul: *I know nothing by myself, the more he will feel how little he is justified thereby, the more he will feel as though he had not been as faithful as he should be.* What a consolation for us, then, that we are not our own judges!

The minister's judge is God alone, as the Apostle says, *He who judges me is the Lord.* The final verdict rests with God. But where would a faithful minister be if God would deal with him according to His stern justice!

We must all say with the Psalmist, in Psalm 143:2, ² *Do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no one living is righteous.* Even the most faithful pastor is but a poor sinner and must constantly cry to the Lord, *If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.*²

Yes, there is forgiveness with the Lord, forgiveness in the bleeding wounds of our Saviour Jesus, forgiveness which is apprehended by a true faith in our blessed Mediator and Redeemer, forgiveness for us all, for the members and for the pastor.

Let us seek this forgiveness, and appropriate it to ourselves by a sincere enduring faith, and we shall escape the judgement which we have deserved for our sins, and be welcomed in heaven, where the Lord shall say to us: *“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.”*³ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Isa 55:11

² Psalm 130:3-4

³ Matthew 25:21