

ARM Prison Outreach International

"Ministers' Minute" Volume V Number 1

AN ACCURATE VIEW OF PREACHERS

This "Ministers' Minute" is the 1st email of 2006 in a series of what now totals 61 messages that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message was originally preached by Alan LaRue. It came highly recommended from one of our contributors. It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach.

May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

AN ACCURATE VIEW OF PREACHERS

I Corinthians 4:1-7

A man sitting in a pew heaved a sigh and died in church during the sermon. An usher called the ambulance. The medics arrived, and carried the man out, while the preacher continued to preach. One of the medics was overheard to say, "You know, we picked up 6 people before we got to the right one."

Before the days of wireless mikes a preacher was wire for sound with a lapel mike, and as he preached, he moved briskly about the platform, jerking the mike cord as he went. Then he moved to one side, getting wound up in the cord and nearly tripping. After several circles and jerks, a little girl in the third pew whispered to her mom, "If he gets loose, will he hurt us?"

The focus of our text is teachers and preachers in the body of Christ. The context: Paul has been dealing with the problem of misperception. The Corinthian believers tended to either allow their spiritual leaders virtually no influence, or they gave them too much authority. The church was dividing into faction around teachers. Paul wants to present an accurate view of preachers and teachers.

A minister is anyone, who by virtue of a gift of the Spirit, was a preacher or teacher of the Word of God. There is a sense in which we are all ministers of Christ. Paul is dealing with the special sense here – of those who have the gift of teaching or preaching.

How are we to look at people who fill this role in the body of Christ?

I. THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY – who are they? VS 1

A. Obedient slaves.

1. What does it mean to be a servant of Christ?

- **This is the only place where this specific word is used by Paul. It's Greek *huperetes*, lit. "under-rower."**
- **It originally referred to the galley slaves. They were the lowest, most menial and despised slaves in the empire.**

In the movie Ben Hur, remember his stint as an under-rower, chained to benches, under the command of the captain of the ship who told them when to row, when to stop, when to speed up or slow down. The slaves did nothing without receiving a command from the captain. No galley slave was ever exalted above any other galley slave. They had a common rank, and it was the lowest one.

2. **The word gradually came to mean anyone who was under the authority of another person.**
3. **Paul says that he and other teachers are galley slaves of Jesus Christ.**
4. **That's what all of us are who are in leadership as teachers or preachers. In everything we're subject to Christ and to his revealed word.**
5. **All of us row together in following the leadership of our Captain. It's important that the under-rowers in a sense be "on the same page" of the word of God.**

B. Faithful stewards.

1. **The word "steward", *oykonomos*, from which we get our word economics, is a common word and everyone in Corinth would know what it meant.**

In a Greek household the steward was a slave who administered all the affairs of the family. He directed the staff, was in charge of all material resources of the household. In effect, he ran the household for his master, a position of great responsibility.

2. **The supreme quality required in a steward is fidelity to his trust, integrity, honesty.**
3. **We are stewards, entrusted with a valuable commodity, the mysteries of God. 2:7**

4. **This mysterious, hidden wisdom isn't understood by the natural man apart from Jesus. It can be known only through divine revelation.**
5. **A teacher or preacher in the household of faith is to dispense God's revealed word.**
 - **He told Timothy, "All Scripture is...profitable.." II Tim 3:16. "Profitable" means the Bible is practically applicable. It answers all the questions that plague us.**
 - **That's why the Scriptures are at the heart of what we do at FCC. Apart from God's word we have nothing to say.**

c. There is one master.

1. **The steward's task is to make the person over them look successful. The task of the teacher is simple: Feed the word of God to his people and do it accurately.**
2. **We are servants of Christ, with our eyes fixed on him.**
3. **We are not to be servants of the Board, individual members of the Board, or the elders. Ministers aren't even servants of the congregation. They are to serve the Lord and say what He tells them to say. It is my responsibility to say and do what he says and tells me to do.**

II. The issue of task – be trustworthy. vs 2

What is required of teachers and preachers?

- **As stewards we're not to exercise our own authority or initiative, but we're to be trustworthy, or faithful, in our responsibility of dispensing the resources of our master.**

- **Servanthood and stewardship are inseparable from faithfulness. Faithfulness in teaching the word includes the hard work of study.**

III. The issue of evaluation – who is successful? vs 3-5

A. What is the problem?

1. **Who is going to decide if the steward has been faithful?**
2. **The Corinthians struggled with evaluating Paul, Apollos, or Cephas.**

B. There are many unqualified to evaluate.

1. Fellow believers are unqualified.

- **Paul knew there were some who didn't like him. They thought he was a terrible teacher and didn't like his style. They even challenged his motives.**
- **Stuart Briscoe identified 3 kinds of pressure or evaluation teachers of the word deal with.**

- a. Adulation – it swells your head. People who mean to encourage but they say nice things all the time. You can be ruined by too much adulation.
- b. Manipulation – people try to coerce you into lining up with their agenda.
 - 1) Every congregation has a power structure – people who seek to control and influence the teaching and preaching.
 - 2) Sometimes by personality, sometimes through a display of wealth.

3) Sometimes by perseverance in persisting and hounding you until you heed what they say. I've know of those who have quit the ministry because they have run up against the power structure.

c. Antagonism or open hostility and opposition.

- In response to "friendly fire" we must remember who commissioned us to teach.

- a. **We are ultimately servants of Jesus Christ. In a real sense, we don't work for the church, we work for the Lord. Col 3:23 "Do your work heartily, as unto the Lord."**

2. **The non-Christian public. "human court" lit – "by man's day."**

- The view of the culture toward those who preach the word isn't very positive. We note the attitude displayed toward ministers in the movies or TV.

- But sometimes the church begins to make an impact and everybody begins to patronize it. Get some recognition, name in the paper. This is a deadly, dangerous thing in a church.

3. **Self - vs 3 "I don't even examine myself."**

- Paul isn't saying, don't examine self. He tells us, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith or not."

- What he means is that he doesn't take any final notice of that kind of judgment. It is incomplete. He understands we tend to overestimate or underestimate our effectiveness.

- We are blinded to our own faults and failures and at times unaware of our spiritual successes in ministry.

- Vs 4 He doesn't know of any sin or deficiency in his life, but he knows he could be wrong in assessing his own heart, even as an apostle.

c. **One is qualified to judge and evaluate. Vs4b-5**

1. What matters to Paul is how the Lord Jesus Christ evaluates him.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. II Timothy 2:15 NASV

2. He says the only evaluation that counts is the Lord's – "The Lord is judging me." This is present tense; it is something that is going on all the time.

- **Jesus Christ alone is the judge of the true spiritual value of that ministry. He is the only one who has the right to judge.**
- **He is the only one who completely understands why ministry is being done.**

3. Too many have a very different attitude than Paul. They are so worried about what people think, they forget about what God thinks.

D. Human judgment is premature.

1. Another reason we're not to evaluate the teaching ministry of others or even our own is that any judgment we make now is premature, "before the time."

- **All we can see in each other is our external behavior. But the Lord knows our hearts, our motives, our inward intentions.**

2. Paul says, "Wait until Jesus comes back. At the second coming we will all stand before the judgment seat." 3:13

3. Paul isn't saying we are never to judge the actions of people who do wrong.

- **In the next chapter Paul is going to name names and expose a specific sin of immorality, and say it's got to stop because it's wrong.**

- **But in this passage his appeal is for us to acknowledge our limitation in reading hearts, to stop judging motives.**

4. His advice to the congregation is, “don’t pronounce judgment before the Lord comes who will bring to light the things now hidden.”

- That doesn’t necessarily mean evil things, it means the motives that no one knows.
- **The Lord will disclose the purposes of the heart.**
- 5. **Paul warns us against judging motives. They’ll only be disclosed when the Lord returns.**

IV. Three heart attitudes are needed, 6-7

Three attitudes will bring greater freedom before the Lord and one another.

A. Submit to God’s Word. Vs 6a

1. **We have to be willing to be submissive to the authority of the Bible. “What is written” – (of course here he referred to the OT).**
2. **Paul says he’s using himself and Apollos as illustrations, because the Corinthians can all remember how these men conducted themselves. He addresses them as brothers here: “We’re in this together.”**

B. Avoid arrogant competition. Vs 6b

1. **The second call is to be honest about our own competitiveness in relationships.**
2. **“Arrogant” – Puffed up. The Corinthian problem was pride and arrogance, resulting in rivalry among them over loyalty to**

their favorite teachers.

c. Appreciate God's gifts. Vs 7

A young preacher had preached a revival and God blessed it. His messages had a great impact on the people. He enjoyed the obvious appearances of success. On the way home he said to his wife, "I wonder how many great preachers there are in the world?" She replied, "One less than you think!"

- 1. The antidote to pride is the recognition that all we have and all we are is a gift of God.**
- 2. Paul's question is, "Why would you ever regard yourself as superior to anybody? What a foolish perspective! And what do we have that we haven't received as a gift from our generous heavenly Father?"**

Conclusion:

The one who examines us is the Lord. One of the Corinthian's problems was a tendency to be super critical of one another. Someday we will all face the final exam.

We are called to be grateful for the teachers who see themselves as servants and stewards who are faithful to follow Christ in their teaching and leadership.

- We can be thankful that we don't have to judge anymore.
- We can be thankful that Jesus does it, so we can resign from that position.
- We can be thankful for the models of godly men.
- We can be thankful that we can confess and repent of the sin of pride and be forgiven.
- We can be thankful that everything we are, everything we have, is a gift from our heavenly Father.

We are called to be servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Close by reading the text from "the message."

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In 2005, an ABA Bible course has been mailed from ARM to a prisoner EVERY 10.7 minutes!**