



God's Church (Week 5/18: Godly leaders) Small Group Discussion Questions

Connect *How is your life building on the foundation of Jesus?*

Warm-Up

1. What does our Australian culture do with people who are 'full of themselves' or show pride?
2. What happens to the church and church culture when leaders lead to promote themselves rather than Jesus?

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

3. Paul is keen to point out in ch 3 and here, that leaders are only servants. Why then do we elevate one above another?
4. What did Mark point out are the problems with the way we often evaluate leaders?
5. What does it mean to be a 'steward' of something given to you? Who is the owner? What is required of someone entrusted with a trust?
6. What are Christian leaders entrusted with? How should this inform the way we view Christian leaders?
7. Why doesn't Paul care about the judgement of the Corinthians or even judge himself? Who is the judge? How is this freeing for us?
8. What does it mean for *us* to be faithful stewards?

Read 1 Corinthians 4:6-21

7. In what ways are the Apostles different to the Corinthians as in described in verses 8-13? What is Paul's tone in this section?
8. What is it like for you to be a Christian in our culture at this time? What are the challenges?
9. Why is Paul keen to contrast the way the Corinthian leaders are seen and the nature of what he and his apostles endure?
10. What drives Paul to write so passionately and emphatically to the Corinthians?
11. Why does Paul urge the church to imitate him? Isn't there a danger he is self-promoting?

Apply *How should we be praying for our church leaders?*

Pray *Father, thank you for your love and grace shown to us in Jesus. Forgive us for foolishly elevating some leaders over others. May our leaders in this church and diocese prove themselves faithful in what has been entrusted to them, and always point us to Jesus. Amen*



God's Church (Week 5/18: Fools for Christ)
Small Group Discussion Questions

On Your Front Line this Week

How can you practically care for someone on your frontline this week?

For Families

Download some of the family resources to use at home: stbartskids.org

Listen, Watch, and Read

- *You are So Wise* by Gerard O'Brien <https://st-thomas.org.au/podcast/you-are-so-wise/>
- *Question about Ministry* by Dick Lucas: <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/question-about-ministry>
- *Trustworthy Stewards* by Daniel Gifford: <https://stjohnsvancouver.sermons.io/sermons/trustworthy-stewards>
- *Now and Not Yet* by Ray Galea: <https://mbm.org.au/media/now-yet/> Series Resources:
Some helpful resources for this series:
 - Series Overview Published by St Bart's: <https://bit.ly/3hnX9jB>
 - Website: "First Corinthians" by the Bible Project: <https://bibleproject.com/learn/1-corinthians/>
 - Course: "1 Corinthians" as part of the Ridley Certificate (6-week online course): stbarts.com.au/ridley

For sermons and additional resources, visit stbarts.com.au

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Date: 06 June 2021
Services: Across the diocese
Series: **God's church** - 1 Corinthians
Title: Godly leaders
Passage: 1 Corinthians 4
Outline: **Godly leaders are only servants**
Godly leaders take up their cross
Godly leaders lead by example

Today we are up to Ch 4 of 1 Corinthians... but even in the 4th chapter, the Apostle Paul is still on about leadership.

It was obviously a huge issue in the Corinthian church causing much division

In chapter 1 he had appealed to them that they agree with one another – and he meant specifically on the issue of leadership – he said that there were quarrels among them about leadership... some people backing one leader and some another...

It sounds like either of our two main political parties over the last ten years or more... when people back one leader over another, there's endless division!

...only this was far more significant because it was in the **church** where everyone should be united around the Lord **Jesus** – and not around **human leaders**...

For Paul says in 1 Cor 3 (you will recall) that leaders are **only servants**.

1 Cor 3:4 *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe...*

Again from ch 3 – v7 *So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but **only God, who makes things grow.***

So **human leaders** must be seen in their rightful **place**. //

Paul isn't done however with this issue yet; there is more he wants to say...

So here's where we are headed from 1 Corinthians 4 today...

Godly leaders

- 1. are only servants**
- 2. take up their cross**
- 3. lead by example**

Let's look first then:

1. ONLY SERVANTS – vv 1-7

Paul has made that point in the previous chapter but he wants to bring it home to them in a very powerful way – so he uses a **different word here to the one he used in Ch 3....**

While *they* want to elevate their leaders and put them up on pedestals and say 'mine is better than yours'... Paul says in v1

*This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as **servants** of Christ.*

The word Paul uses? 'Galley slave...' the lowest in the rank of slaves... one right at the bottom of the ship doing the rowing.

So what are you doing Corinthians? - arguing about who is better among the galley slaves?

Well you might say – well – hang on Mark – yes they may be servants – but they've been given an important task...

Well – true – they have been given a trust... like a land owner entrusts his land to a manager...

V1 again – this *is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those **entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed***

Servants entrusted with the Good News of Jesus.

So they are not important in their own right... it is just that they've been given a **trust**...

A very **special trust**... the **gospel**!!

But their work – their **significance** – their **role** – is not centred around **THEM** – it's not about their **status** – it's not about **personality** – not about their **gifts** or **authority** – it is just that they have been entrusted with the mysteries of God – once **hidden** – but now made **known** through **Jesus Christ**.

And what is required when someone has been given a trust...? if someone is managing your **land** right now – or your business – what do you **require** of them....?

Well Paul says in this instance – v2 – *it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove **faithful***...

Faithful... not **successful**... not ground-breaking in **creativity**... not **popular**... but // **faithful**!

Now that's very interesting isn't it?

Think about how we often evaluate a church leader

We might do so on the basis of the **size** of their congregation... but what why would we do that when we were just reminded in ch 3 that it is God who gives the growth?

We might evaluate them on the basis of their **ministry gifts**... but why would we do that when we realise that it is God who gives the gifts...?

We might evaluate leaders on the basis of their **personality** – but why would we do that when it is God who makes them who they are?

The question for leaders is not **success** or **popularity** or **results** or how many **followers** they have on **social media**...

The question is – are they **faithful** to the trust they've been given... //

Can I ask you – are in leadership in any of its forms in our churches?

What is required of you in your role is that you are **faithful**.

That you're not in it for any recognition you get out of it, but for how you can contribute...

And that you're faithful – reliable... steady.... humble... consistent...

And where it involves the direct work of the gospel – that you are **faithful** to the **gospel**... that you are playing your part in **guarding** the gospel – not **adding** to it or **subtracting** from it – not **distorting** it... and not making it about **you**!

And if that is what expected from our leaders – who are we to elevate one above another; set one against another; rally behind one and denigrate another... //

And on the measure called 'faithfulness' – only **God** will judge that – not **us**!

- 5 therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes... He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

Notice **what** it is that God will expose? Not someone's **attendance figures**, or **social media following**... he will expose the // **motives** of the **heart**... //

well that makes perfect sense doesn't it? – by exposing the motives of their heart, he will expose the level of their

faithfulness!!

Leave the **evaluation** of leaders to God at the **appointed time...**

Paul says – I don't even care what you think of **me** – it is **what** God thinks of me which will **count...** so he doesn't even try to **rate** – or **score himself** on the level of **success** or **effectiveness** or **numbers...** //

Friends – this is liberating for any one in leadership – we are to be **faithful** to the trust **entrusted** to us...

And if there is **growth** – guess who **gave** it?

And if our ministry is marked by **giftedness...** guess who gave the **gifts...**?

We are just **fellow workers.... Servants – galley slaves...**

And if we realise all this... last part of v6 *Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of **one of us** over against the **other**. 7 For who makes **you** different from anyone else? (That is, who gives you the right to be the church?) What do you have that you did not receive? And if you **did** receive it, why do you boast as though you did **not**?*

Godly leaders / they're just galley slaves... and will see should see them that way!! – AND they should see themselves that way!!

and **second...** // Godly leaders

2. TAKE UP THEIR CROSS VV 8-13

Are you ready for some straight talking?

That is what Paul does in this next section.

And although you personally may not like or ever use sarcasm, Paul makes use of it here to make his point.

*V8 - Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really **had** begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!*

Now let me see if I can explain what is going on here.

The Corinthians – and especially some of their leaders – believed that they had already **arrived** – arrived in the realm of **perfection** – arrived in **maturity** – in **giftedness** – in **effectiveness...**

...there no **humility** involved for their them in leadership or in their discipleship...

If was if they were already in **heaven** – **perfected** – **restored** to the **image of God**.

Leaders were seen as **charismatic figures** – **pulling the crowds** – **entertaining** with stimulating **rhetoric...** seen as **clever** and **wise** and **insightful...**

There was a proud **triumphalism** about them... we've made it!! – we've got the goods – rally **behind** us... we'll show you – we're **wise**, we're **strong** – we are **honoured** in the **world...**

So you've got the Corinthian leaders on the one hand – **bold** and **confident** – and saying what people **want** them to **hear** –

...and you've got the **apostles** on the **other** hand...

And they weren't that **impressive** – Paul – he didn't have the gift of the gab... wasn't a **natural** out front... the apostles were regarded as **fools** / by both the **world** and many in the **church...**

Weak, dishonoured... not **successful** in worldly terms – in fact – **hungry, thirsty, homeless... dressed in rags... cursed... persecuted.. slandered... regarded as the scum of the earth – garbage of the world...**

The apostles, said Paul – look like those who a conqueror drags back from the successful conquest of a foreign land – the **prisoners** of war which he throws to the lions as entertainment. //

How do we put these two scenes together?

I have to tell you... if both these groups were standing in front of us today – our first instinct would be to back the Corinthians successful ‘we’ve made it’ group... It would look for all intents and purposes that **THEY** were the real deal... even that they had the **backing of God!** //

The Corinthian leaders were full of **pride** in who they were, in the **power** of their **rhetoric**, in the **crowds** they **pulled**... in the **success** they were seen to **have**...

And the **Apostles**...? They had taken up their **cross** and were following the Lord Jesus in **suffering** for the **gospel**...

Like the message of the cross **itself** – they were **ridiculed** and seen as **fools**...

It was Jesus who had said “if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first!!”

One group loves to be **served**

...the other loves to **serve**...

One group loves to point to **themselves**

...the other loves to point to **Christ**

One group preaches what people **WANT** to hear

...the other – what people **NEED** to hear...

One group revels in the adulation of the **crowds**

... the other in the **praise of God**

One is proud of all that they have **achieved**...

...the other – conscious of all that they have **received**!!

One group will be telling the crowd they are **loved** as they are and can **stay** as they are

...the other – that they are loved as they are – but must be transformed as they repent and believe in the gospel...
///

Friends – I don’t know if you can identify churches and leaders which are full of a triumphalist Christianity which has already arrived...

... I’m not going to name such churches... but there are many...

But the leaders you want – the leaders **you** need – are those who are not on about **themselves** // but **Christ**...

Who want no **recognition**... other than that you recognise **Christ**

Who seek no **reward** other than the words of Jesus ‘**good and faithful servant**’

...leaders who have taken up their **cross**... who would lay down their lives in **Christ’s** service and **yours**...

...who the world may consider **scum**... but who are proving themselves **faithful** to the task God has entrusted to **them**...

The leaders who despite the cost to themselves consistently point you to Jesus... // **those** are the leaders we need **today**...

Who preach Christ **crucified** without **apology**...

Who may not have great **rhetorical** skills... but simply take us Jesus and his **cross** and resurrection!

...**that** is what the world needs... that is what the **church** needs today.... /

...Godly servants are only **slaves**; godly leaders must take up their **cross** and finally and briefly, godly leaders must ...

3. LEAD BY EXAMPLE – VV 14-21

Now Paul has been tough hasn't he in that last section...

And it is fascinating to see what he does next – have a look with me...

*I am writing this not to **shame** you but to **warn** you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand **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**.*

It's not that he's too **timid** to shame them – elsewhere in this very letter he writes specifically by his own admission – to **shame** them!!

But that is not what he wants to do **here**....

...no he has said what he has said as a **warning**...

He speaks to them not as a distant **tyrant** from on **high**...

...but as a **father alongside** them ...

He considers them his spiritual children as it was through him – Acts 18 – that this church was established...

He has great **affection** for them as a father does for his children – and therefore his heart **breaks** that they have gone so far off track in their divisions around human leaders.

So he says to them – '**imitate me**'.

That's a bold thing to say isn't it.

And he can say it because he knows that he's not like **their** leaders who were on about **themselves**... he knows that he's on about **Jesus**...

So he's confident to say 'imitate me' and in fact he's going to send Timothy to them... who he describes as 'faithful'... the very attribute he had must identified as being crucial... and Timothy in his faithfulness will remind them of Paul's way of centred as it is in the Lord Jesus... so that they **may walk in it**.

What is there here for us?

- godly leaders are only **servants**... Paul will urge us elsewhere to honour them appointed by the Lord to be over us – but we're not to elevate them so that you **worship** them in any way or argue about which one is the **best**... all they **have** – is from **God himself**...

Godly leaders – are the ones who take up the cross and **follow Christ** – which will mean they not necessarily honoured by the world – indeed often **ridiculed**... but they are the ones who will lead you in the **truth**... and lead you to Jesus in all humility...

As in as far as they take you to **Jesus** – **imitate them**, even as they **imitate Christ**. //