

Faithful Steward

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:1-13

The theme of this passage is being a faithful steward. Who is God's steward? Every Christian! You and I are stewards of God. As stewards, the most important thing God requires of us is faithfulness. (v.2)

God values and uses faithful people. God can give us gifts and abilities, but he cannot give us faithfulness. Faithfulness is something you have to cultivate yourself. A faithful steward not only needs to do his job well, but also needs to have a good life and character. This passage tells us that to be a faithful steward, we need to have three qualities of life.

1. Take criticisms lightly

Paul said in v.3, I regard it as a very small matter if I am judged by you or by any human being; I do not even judge myself. If we regard criticism as a big deal, when others criticize you, you will fight back, which will lead to disputes. There is another type of person who swallows their anger when being criticized. Although they may not fight back, they are completely knocked down by the criticisms and no longer have the strength to continue serving. The most difficult part for those who serve the Lord is criticism, which is the touchstone of being a faithful steward.

The fact is that no one who serves the Lord can escape criticism. Some criticism is out of malice, misunderstanding, subjectivity, or disappointment in you. No matter what, as long as we live in this world, we will inevitably be criticized and judged by others. This was true for Paul, for us, and even for Jesus. (See Matthew 11:18-19)

Why could Paul regard criticism as a minor issue? The answer is in v.4-5. Paul firmly believed that God was the final judge. Criticism hurts us because we trust ourselves more than God, so we rush to defend ourselves and fear what others will think of us. If you firmly believe that only God can see the whole picture, only God can understand the truth and the motives behind people, on the day of judgment God will surely vindicate you. This way, you can remain calm when facing criticism!

2. Regard all merits as grace

The Corinthian church was often at odds because of fleshly comparisons. In a small church, people are closer to each other, and are more likely to compare with each other and feel dissatisfied with each other. But it is difficult to express the dissatisfaction, so everyone hides these emotions in their hearts and does not have the courage to deal with them, and as a result, they become a source of worry for each other.

Where is the way out? The way out is in v.7. We must recognize that all advantages and benefits are received from God. In this way, we will look at others and ourselves in a moderate way. When you see that others are better than you, you will not feel inferior, because their advantages are just given in grace. When you see that you are better than others, you will not be complacent, because your advantages are also received in grace.

3. Feel good in the face of adversity and persecution

In v.9, Paul said, we have become a play to the world and to angels. In this play, we are not playing the starry actors, but are seen as foolish by the world. If you are truly loyal to your Lord and your faith, sooner or later you will find that there will be people who laugh at you, tease you, and persecute you. This is the price of faithful stewardship.

When faced with adversity and pressure, many people either seek revenge or give up. But faithful stewards still diffuse the aroma of Christ in that kind of situations. Paul said, when we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we give kind advice. (v.12-13) This kind of life is true freedom.

If someone is nice to you, you treat him nicely. If someone is not nice to you, you treat him meanly. Is this not being manipulated by people's attitudes? Our freedom would then be lost! My being nice to you is not controlled by you; it is decided by me because I am faithful to my Lord. I will do whatever my Lord tells me to do and will not be controlled by your attitude towards me. This is faithfulness.

Faithfulness means feeling good all the time, not only in normal times, but also in times of adversity and difficulty.

Discussion questions:

1. Rate yourself on a scale from zero to ten for each of the above qualities of life. Report the ratings for the three qualities. Using these three criteria to measure yourself, are you a faithful steward?
2. Which quality score is the smallest and needs to be improved the most? How does this weakest link affect your ability to be a faithful steward? How to grow in this weakest link?