

Sunday, March 6, 2016—I Corinthians 4:1 Stewards of the Mysteries of God

### **Introduction**

- Last week we finished our study of chapter 3 by looking at verses 21 through 23. In doing so we observed the following general progression.
- Verse 21, all things belong to the Corinthians.
  - Ephesians 1:3—all spiritual blessings
  - Colossians 2:10—complete in Christ
- Verse 22, nothing can take away what belongs to the Corinthians.
  - Romans 8:38-39
- Verse 23, the Corinthians are Christ’s and Christ is God’s. Therefore the Corinthians are possessors of everything that God the Father has given his Son.
- This morning I want to begin looking at chapter 4.

### **I Corinthians 4:1**

- **Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.**
- *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ*—the statement that Paul uses to open chapter 4 is in the imperative mood. Paul is instructing the Corinthians to account him as a minister of Christ. In other words, not accounting Paul as a minister of Christ is not an option for the Corinthians.
  - I Corinthians 3:18—“Let no man deceive himself,” was also an imperative statement.
- The Greek word translated “account” means to reckon, count, compute, calculate, or count over, according to *Strong’s Concordance*. This word appears a lot in Romans 4 through 8 and is various translated a follows:
  - Romans 4:3—counted
  - Romans 4:4—reckoned
  - Romans 4:5—counted

- Romans 4:6—imputeth
- Romans 4:9-10—reckoned
- Galatians 3:6—accounted
- Who are the “us” that Paul wants the Corinthians to account as the ministers of Christ? Judging from the context it would seem to include Paul and Apollos at a minimum and possibly Timothy as well.
  - I Corinthians 3:5—Paul and Apollos are ministers by whom the Corinthians believed.
  - I Corinthians 4:6—Apollos is mentioned again.
  - I Corinthians 4:17—Paul mention the fact the he had sent Timothy unto them.
- *and stewards of the mysteries of God*—whomever comprises the “us” is not just supposed to be accounted as ministers of Christ but also as “stewards of the mysteries of God.” In my understanding this would exclude Peter even though he is mentioned at the end of chapter 3 (see verse 22). It would however, include Apollos and Timothy.
  - Acts 18:2-3, 26—Apollos no doubt learned about the mystery from Aquila and Pricilla.
  - I & II Timothy are full of Paul’s instructions to Timothy regarding the doctrine that had been committed to his trust.
- According to *Webster’s 1828 Dictionary* a “steward” is “A man employed in great families to manage the domestic concerns, superintend the other servants, collect the rents or income, keep the accounts.”
  - Carson from *Downton Abby*
- The English word “stewards” comes from the Greek word *oikonomos* which is very similar to the word *oikonomia* which is rendered as “dispensation” or “stewardship” in the King James Bible.
- Luke 16:1—the steward (*oikonomos*) is accused of wasting his master’s goods or not managing the affairs of his master’s household properly.
- Luke 16:2—the steward (*oikonomos*) called to give account of his stewardship (*oikonomia*) to determine if he would retain the position of steward (*oikonomos*).
- Luke 16:3—the steward (*oikonomos*) is worried about his lord taking away his stewardship (*oikonomia*)

- Luke 16:4— steward (*oikonomos*) knows that he is going to lose his stewardship (*oikonomia*).
- The steward (*oikonomos*) has the responsible of properly dispensing his stewardship (*oikonomia*).
- I Corinthians 9:17—Paul explicitly tells the Corinthians that a dispensation (*oikonomia*) of the gospel had been committed unto him. What would that make Paul? The steward (*oikonomos*) of that information.
- Ephesians 3:2—Paul tells the Ephesians that the “dispensation (*oikonomia*) of grace” was given unto him. What would that make Paul? The steward (*oikonomos*) of the “dispensation (*oikonomia*) of grace.”
- Colossians 1:25—Paul teaches the Colossians the he was made a minister, according to (or in line with) the dispensation (*oikonomia*) of God that was given to him for the purpose of fulfilling the word of God. Once again, Paul was the steward (*oikonomos*) of the dispensation (*oikonomia*) of God committed to his trust.
- I Corinthians 4:1—what are these people that Paul is speaking about “stewards” of? They are dispensers and managers of the mysteries of God.
- The word translated “mysteries” is the Greek word *mystērion*. We have already encountered this word during our study of I Corinthians.
  - I Corinthians 2:7-8
- Paul views himself as a steward (*oikonomos*) that had been entrusted with the faithful management and discharge of the mysteries (*mystērion*) of God. If I could say it this way, Paul’s stewardship (*oikonomia*) i.e., the dispensation given to him had to do with being a steward (*oikonomos*) of the mysteries of God. The dispensation (*oikonomia*) committed to Paul is intimately tied to the revelation of the mystery.
- Ephesians 3:2-5—the dispensation of the grace of God committed to Paul it tied to the revelation of the mystery (*mystērion*).
- Colossians 3:25-27—the dispensation of God given to Paul is tied to the revelation of the mystery that is now being made manifest to his saints.
- Romans 16:25-26—Paul was preaching Jesus Christ in accordance with the revelation of the mystery.
- I Corinthians 4:1—Paul speaks of having been made stewards of the mysteries of God plural. There are many mysteries wrapped up in the revelation of the mystery.

- I Corinthians 15:51-52—is a parallel passages with I Thess. 4 and speaks of the catching up of the saints.
- Ephesians 5:32—the relationship between Christ and the church.
- Ephesians 6:19—the mystery of the gospel.
- Colossians 2:2—the mystery of God and of the Father and of Christ.
- II Thess. 2:7—the mystery of iniquity.
- I Timothy 3:16—the mystery of godliness.
- I Corinthians 4:1—Paul is a steward of all these mysteries. Therefore, when you consider the totality of all Paul has in mind in this verse I don't think that Peter is included in the "us" whom the Corinthians are to account as "ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."
- Ephesians 3:9—one of the goals of this assembly is to be about making all men see the fellowship of the mystery.