

Christians Gone Wild!
1st Corinthians, week 9
Suffering Like Jesus (1 Corinthians 4:1–13)
March 5, 2006
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Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.
1 Corinthians 4:13

Do you aspire to be a leader in God's church? If so, what is your picture of leadership?

Sadly, the Corinthian church, like so many churches, was rife with misunderstanding regarding the role of Christian leadership. Similar to modern-day tendencies to elevate leadership principles from the social sciences and business and entertainment industries above Scriptural principles, the Corinthian Christians wrongly took their primary cues for leadership from the surrounding celebrity-addicted culture. The result was an epidemic of people seeking to inflate their egos by either becoming church leaders or by associating themselves with church leaders. As a good pastor, Paul uses their immaturity as an opportunity to teach four truths about Christian leaders, whose job descriptions are closer to that of a slave than a rock star.

1. Christian leaders are servants and stewards.

¹So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.

Paul describes two lowly roles of a Christian leader in the church. First, a leader is just a servant who uses their God-given gifts to benefit the church. Second, a leader is just a steward who oversees the affairs of God's household (the church) for Jesus, who is the rightful owner.

2. Christian leaders will stand before Jesus on judgment day.

²Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. ³I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

Because some Christians tend to be an arrogant and whiney bunch of nitpicks, Christian leaders must endure constant judgment, criticism, and "helpful" advice from people who boldly declare what they do not know as if it were a word from God. Or, they must endure constant praise, boot-kissing, and "support" no matter what they say or do from people who assign to them an allegiance that is only

fitting for the Lord Jesus. Either way, Christian leaders must master the art of strategic ignoring so that they do not labor for the approval of their critics, supporters, or even their own personal performance review. Instead, every Christian leader must labor for the one day when in the end they will stand before Jesus Christ and give an account for the totality of their life and ministry. If they have served well, they will receive Jesus' praise. Jesus' approval is ultimately all that really matters because leaders labor for an audience of One.

3. Christian leaders are sustained by God's Word and God's grace.

⁶Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not take pride in one man over against another. ⁷For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

Christian leadership is made possible by God's grace. This grace saves a leader, gifts a leader, empowers a leader, and provides the leader the resources needed for success. Therefore, Christian leaders should not boast of their successes because they are accomplished solely by the grace of God. Additionally, what sustains a Christian leader and enables God's grace to do its work unencumbered is unswerving obedience to the pages of Scripture through which God speaks to the Christian leader.

4. Christian leaders accept that their life often stinks.

⁸Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! ⁹For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. ¹⁰We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! ¹¹To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹²We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

The Corinthian picture of Christian leadership was far more like the fairy tale of Christian television where to be a leader means you are rich, sit on a gold throne, have a big-haired wife who looks like she lost a paintball war, and do a lot of bad worship karaoke for Jesus rather than the reality of the high cost of ministry for Jesus on the front lines. Christian ministry is about constant disruption, seasons of poverty, being hated, people declaring you a fool, long hours of hard work, attacks from demons and people working for their team, temptation to give up and sin, weakness, exhaustion, fear, and the occasional desire to stop being holy, patient, and loving like Jesus and just go Old Testament on someone.