

## PREFACE

In v9 of Chapter Three, Paul writes, “We are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.” Now, as we begin Chapter Four, we move from field and building to house.

Perhaps one of the most misunderstood jobs in this world is that of the pastor of a church. First, it is not really a “job,” but a calling. A true pastor is called by Christ, as much as Saul of Tarsus was called by Christ Jesus. A true pastor takes this role because not to would be an act of disobedience to his Lord. But it is, nonetheless, a peculiar calling:

- the pastor is hired by the church, but does not, ultimately, answer to it;
- he serves the church—but only if it is served in his service to Christ;
- the church pays his salary, but its members are to answer to *him* (Hebrews 13:17);
- the church can “fire” the pastor, but it cannot remove his calling.

Some pastors—far too many—let their position turn them in a wrong direction:

- their authority over the body goes to their head and they become a dictator;
- they forget—or worse, deny—the authority of Christ over them;
- instead of preaching God’s word, they preach themselves, seeking glory for themselves rather than Christ Jesus.

God’s word is very often the best commentary for itself. It is filled to overflowing with real-life illustrations of its counsel and precepts for the follower of Christ. And our passage today—1 Corinthians 4:1-2—is illustrated perfectly by the life of Joseph, son of Jacob. Let’s begin by reading the first paragraph of Chapter Four.

**Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5.**

## w1-2

The statement in v1 centers on two words: “servants” and “stewards,” and the statement in v2 adds a third: “trustworthy” or “faithful.” These descriptive terms are applied to Paul and the other leaders, past and present, of the Corinthian church. The opening phrase, “Let a man regard us in this manner...,” points not to what he will be writing in this chapter, but backward to what he wrote in the previous.

**Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-6.**

And from the passage in our previous session, where Paul traces ownership of all thing from Father God to the church:

**Read 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.**

And so Paul begins Chapter Four by stating that everyone should think of these leaders in the way previously described, first as “servants.”

**Sidebar:** Remember, neither Paul nor the Holy Spirit had anything to do with where the chapter break falls—and this one is poorly located. Verse numbers and chapter breaks were added later simply to help organize Scripture for our use. The words are inspired; the breaks are not.

*servants*

*hyperetes* (hoop-ay-ray'-tace) = from <G5259> (hupo) and a derivative of *eresso* (to row); **an under-oarsman, i.e. (general) subordinate** (assistant, sexton, constable) :- an underling, minister, officer, servant.

Literally this word means (and originally referred to) an under- (*hypo*) oarsman or rower (*eretes*) which would refer to a lowly galley slave at the very bottom of the pecking order. But over time the word typically came to refer to a person with his own responsibilities who takes orders from a superior. Hence, most of the instances of this word in the NT are translated “officer,” as in John 7:32.

The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees sent **officers** to seize Him.

A military officer has responsibilities of his own, over the men or women in his charge, but he ultimately follows the orders that come down to him from a *superior* officer. There is one more distinction between this and the other common word for servant: *duolos*. A *hyperetes* is a free man, and in some cases might receive a reward or payment for his services—just as Paul earlier described the future rewards awaiting the leaders of the church

Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. (1 Corinthians 3:8)

Don't miss the clarifying prepositional phrase, “of Christ.” It is true that pastors, ministers, elders and teachers serve those in the flock—but only in so much as they serve their Lord. It is when the pastor begins serving the flock *instead* of serving Christ that things start to go south.

We can draw illustration for each of these three qualities from just one chapter in the life of Joseph—Genesis 39—his life of service in the household of Potiphar, captain of the pharaoh's bodyguard in Egypt. Joseph was a servant, a slave: he had been purchased by the Egyptian from the Ishmaelites (or Midianites) who had bought him from his brothers.

**Read Genesis 39:3-4.**

(keep a finger here; we will be back)

So Joseph became an *hyperetes*, a servant with responsibilities as the overseer of the captain's household and household staff, but he still took orders from his master, Potiphar. Just so, in the church the pastor and leaders have charge over the flock—but they take their orders not from the flock, but from the Head of the church ([Ephesians 5:23](#)): Christ Jesus.

### *stewards*

Paul goes on to say that not only are he and his colleagues servants, but they are also “stewards”—and once again we have a clarifying prepositional phrase: stewards of what? “stewards of the mysteries of God.”

*oikonomos* (oy-kon-om'-os) = from <G3624> (oikos) and the base of <G3551> (nomos); **a house-distributor (i.e. manager), or overseer**, i.e. an employee in that capacity; by extension a fiscal agent (treasurer); figurative a preacher (of the gospel) :- chamberlain, governor, steward; “used for the chief household slave, who must give account to the master” (Garland).

Based on the definition for the word, one might have expected Paul to write that he and his fellows were stewards of the body, or stewards of the house of God. That would certainly be in-line with the illustration of Joseph.

### **Read Genesis 39:5-6a.**

Instead of steward of the house, Paul writes, “stewards of the mysteries of God.” Now, it is true that the *beneficiaries* of this stewardship are the members of the house of God, but, just as with “servants,” these stewards answer not to the flock, but to the Head of the house, the Great Shepherd.

*Mysterion*, as used in the NT, refers to something previously hidden, but now revealed in Christ; in this context Paul would be referring to the gospel, which was the mysterious indeed, “Christ crucified.” To put this in context for us today, the “mysteries of God” would be the fullness of God's word, *including* the gospel. The pastor of the church is to be a “house-distributor” of God's word—understanding it, knowing it, speaking it, teaching it, preaching it and, not least, *living* it.

The rather pointed lesson to the Corinthians is that these leaders they have been lauding, following, boasting about—“I am of Paul,” “I of Apollos,” “I of Cephas”—should not be placed on pedestals, but “be perceived as household servants of God” (Garland).

### *trustworthy, faithful*

*pistos* = from <G3982> (peitho); object trustworthy; subject trustful :- believe (-ing, -r), faithful (-ly), sure, true; **by being faithful to his master and the master's possessions the good steward proved himself worthy of trust.**

The ancient steward found himself in a unique situation. As David Guzik points out, "In relation to the master of the house, the steward was a slave, but in relation to the other slaves, the steward was a master." By the very nature of the job, the master had to have a trustworthy steward.

*Adam Clarke:* The steward... was the master's deputy in regulating the concerns of the family, providing food for the household, seeing it served out at proper times and seasons, and in proper quantities. He received all the cash, expended what was necessary for the support of the family, and kept exact accounts, for which he was obliged at certain times to lay before the master.

And Joseph was certainly a faithful, trustworthy steward of Potiphar's household—even in a situation in which a lesser man would have compromised his master's trust.

### **Read Genesis 39:6b-9.**

Don't miss that unexpected twist at the end of v9, for it ties in perfectly with our text in 1 Corinthians. Joseph has expounded at length about his obligations to an earthly master who has placed his trust in him, but in the final analysis, if he did something to destroy that trust—and sleeping with the master's wife would certainly do the job—*he would be sinning not against Potiphar, but God.*

King David said the same thing after he slept with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah killed. Did he sin against them? No,

For I know my transgressions,  
And my sin is ever before me.  
**Against You, You only, I have sinned**  
**And done what is evil in Your sight,**  
So that You are justified when You speak  
And blameless when You judge. (Psalm 51:3-4; emphasis added)

In human terms, the pastor and other leaders of a church must be faithful to its members, reliably ministering to them. But really that is only the temporal, visible evidence of their faithfulness to their Master. They can *appear* to be trustworthy to the flock, but if they are not first faithful to their Lord, it is all of the flesh.

In this passage the church leaders are portrayed as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Their first responsibility, before anything else, is to the Master and His word.