

**THE CHRISTIAN IN THE MIDST OF GRACE**  
**THE BLESSING OF FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN PASTORS**

**I. According to Christ's Institution**

**II. Stewards of the Mysteries of God**

**III. Preparing for the Coming of Christ**

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2020 | ADVENT

**THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT**

<i>Old Testament</i>	Isaiah 40:1-8
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 111
<i>New Testament</i>	1 Corinthians 4:1-5
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 11:2-10

**COMMUNION**

**GRANTS PASS & MEDFORD**

Divine Service, Rite Two, ELH p. 60  
The Entrance Hymn or Introit – ELH 101 The King Shall Come  
Chief Hymn – ELH 102 Comfort, Comfort Ye My People  
Distribution Hymn – ELH 312 Bread of the World  
Closing Hymn – ELH 87 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Faith & Our Savior Lutheran Churches  
Medford & Grants Pass, Oregon  
Edward L. Bryant, Pastor

1 Corinthians 4:1–5 (ESV)

**4 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. <sup>3</sup> But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup> For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.**

Dear fellow redeemed: Our gospel lesson mentions that people went out into the wilderness to get a glimpse of John. There they subjected him to their criticism as well as their curiosity. Paul warns us in this epistle of the tendency to subject the office of the ministry to human standards – the standards of the unbelieving world

That would be terrible for you!

Who but Christ knows what you will face on the last day? Who but Christ knows the agony of soul that you might face on your death-day? Who but Christ is the perfect revelation of God for what you really need for eternal life? Faithful Pastors prepare their people for the return of Christ.

According to human standards John, and Christ’s pastors, are supposed to be reeds blowing in the wind, bowing to the latest sociological trends. According to human standards they are to wear fine clothes and tell us how to get ahead in the world – something like a cross between Oprah, a life coach, and a savvy financial advisor.

But in this word Christ has given words of warning and comfort that faithful pastors bring to people like you and me, so that we are ready to greet our Savior joyfully as He comes to us. Such is ...

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE MIDST OF GRACE (having)  
THE BLESSING OF FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN PASTORS

- I. According to Christ’s Institution
- II. Stewards of the Mysteries of God
- III. Preparing for the Coming of Christ

I. According to Christ’s Institution

Just prior to this point in his letter to the Corinthians, a congregation troubled by divisions and constantly critical people, Paul had disputed and challenged the Corinthians’ idea that they had things all figured out. ***“Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God....”(1 Corinthians 3:18–19, ESV)***

This led to a discussion of the pastor’s office. Proud people need to understand that the office has been instituted by Christ. **4 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.** This is significant in several ways.

First, they are servants of Christ, and not of people. I can’t remember how many times people have asked me to confirm their “great new idea” or approve their condemnation (or sanction for that matter) of others’ actions. My reply: “I don’t get to say what you want me to say.”

Second, they are, under their Master, in charge of the mysteries of God. This is the gospel in word and sacrament. Like a “whodunit,” where you don’t know who did it until the author reveals it, in a far more significant way the gospel reveals the salvation that nobody knows naturally, but can only be known through the gospel. There is only one right answer as to how we have been saved.

Third, all human views of the ministry, ideas that reflect human reason and no Scripture are just wrong. The pastor isn’t a social worker, a life coach, a moral policeman, a therapist, or a religious philosopher. He isn’t a CEO, a marketer, or an actor. He is Christ’s servant to you.<sup>1</sup>

## **II. Stewards of the Mysteries of God**

For “steward” or “manager” Paul uses the word οἰκονόμος, which referred to a slave who superintended the master’s affairs. Jesus uses the term in a picture of those who feed the church until His return, “***And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, [steward] whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time?”*** (Luke 12:42, ESV)

Of all the things needed of stewards, the most important is that they are faithful, as Paul writes here in our text, <sup>2</sup> **Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.**

And if they are faithful, Paul says we should leave the evaluation (judgment) of the stewards to the Lord: <sup>3</sup> **But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.** <sup>4</sup> **For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.**

This may sound like, “Don’t you dare question me!” But that isn’t the case. First, Paul, as an apostle, was preserved from error. He had told the Corinthians earlier, “***And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.***” (1 Corinthians 2:13, ESV)

[Second] Those words taught by the spirit of God are normative, so our pastors are bound to the confession of those words, such as we see in the Apostles’, Athanasian, and Nicene Creeds, and in the Catechism, the Augsburg Confession, and the other confessions of the church.

[Third] The point is that pastors are not hired and fired, and a pastor is not judged by anybody, including himself, according to what pleases people, but according to God’s word. Both pastor and people need to abide by this word of God through Paul: “***Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.***” (Acts 20:28, NKJV) Placed in the church by the Holy Spirit, the burden of faithfulness is plenty heavy, without trying to appease people’s opinions.

People also need to see the pastor as holding a sacred trust, and not just as a hired man. Yet there are those who resent his spiritual oversight, and when he must speak the truth in love, they criticize him for being so insistent upon the word and are more ready to tell him what to teach than to listen to what he teaches.

To people like that, Paul says, . <sup>3</sup> **But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself.** <sup>4</sup> **For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.** It is a sad and tragic thing to reject in pride the counsel of a faithful pastor, as Hebrews says, “***Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as***

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. “Moral Therapeutic Deism”

***those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*** (Hebrews 13:17, ESV)

After all, it is the Lord of the Church himself who has the final say: ***Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.***

### **III. Preparing for the Coming of Christ**

This is so important to understand. Who are we, after all, to judge someone else's servant, as Paul put it, ***“Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”*** (Romans 14:4, ESV)

I think of the man who has a genuine and valid call to a congregation. “The Holy Spirit has made him overseer.” But on the ranking of pastors, some people might give him a C or C-. Nothing higher.

The important thing is to warn sinners that our sin really damns us, and to let Christ Himself come through His word to comfort the crushed and repentant with the assurance of forgiveness and reconciliation. If the pastor has done that, elegantly or not, he has done well.

Now this is a pretty convicting text for you and for me. I cannot help but think of all my shortcomings in bringing Christ's words of warning sharply enough and clearly enough and His words of comfort and forgiveness sweetly enough and concretely enough.

And you in the flock should consider if there have been times when, rather than listen to the pastor and how Christ's words apply to you, you sat in judgment of the pastor and his message.

Perhaps this is why God sent men instead of angels to speak the words of reconciliation, for together we kneel and confess our sins, and together we take comfort in the words of comfort and forgiveness. And together we say, along with that faithful pastor, Paul Gerhardt,

Guilt no longer can distress me;  
Son of god, Thou my load  
Bearest to release me.  
Stain in me Thou findest never;  
I am clean, All my sin  
Is removed forever.

Dearest Lord, Thee will I cherish,  
Though my breath Fail in death,  
Yet I shall not perish,  
But with thee abide forever  
There on high, In that joy  
Which can vanish never.

AMEN.