

Student Guide: Understanding the Ministry

Based on 1 Corinthians 4

Introduction

When we think of ministry, we might imagine many things: power, influence, or status. But in 1 Corinthians 4, Paul reminds the church how they should view their spiritual leaders and their roles.

The Corinthian church had started to divide. Some preferred Paul, others Apollos, still others Peter, or even Christ Himself. Paul corrects their perspective and teaches how pastors fit into the body of Christ.

Reflection Questions

1. When you think of ministry, what images or ideas come to mind
 2. How does thinking of leaders as servants rather than CEOs change the way you view them
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I. The Ministry Are Servants and Stewards

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 4:1

"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Servants of Christ

- The word servant here (hypēretēs) means under-rower. They worked hard, faithfully, but were under the captain's command.
- Pastors serve the church. They do not run it like a CEO.

Application

Support, pray for, and cooperate with your leaders instead of expecting them to do everything alone.

Stewards of the Mysteries of God

- A steward (oikonomos) manages someone else's resources. Pastors manage God's work. They do not own it.
- Faithfulness, not perfection, is the goal.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important for pastors to be faithful rather than perfect
 2. How can we, as church members, support the stewardship of our leaders
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II. The Ministry Serves the Church, But the Church Is Not Their Master

Key Verses: 1 Corinthians 4:3-4, 5

- Pastors serve, but the church does not judge them. God is the ultimate judge.
- Paul uses a legal term for judgment, a preliminary examination, not the final verdict.

Application

Instead of criticizing leaders, pray for them and encourage them. We often see only part of the picture; God sees the whole.

Reflection Question

When you feel critical of a leader, what steps can you take to support them instead of judging them

III. The Ministry Is Not to Be Compared

Key Verses: 1 Corinthians 1:12-13, 4:6-7

- The Corinthians were turning their leaders into celebrities and creating factions.
- Ministry is not a competition. Celebrate God's gifts through leaders instead of comparing them.

Application

Thank God for each leader's gifts, and avoid jealousy or favoritism.

Discussion Question

How can comparison within the church harm spiritual growth? How can gratitude instead of comparison build unity

IV. The Ministry Is Necessary in Your Life

Course Correction

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 4:8-10

- Ministry helps guide believers, correct pride, and nurture spiritual growth.

- Paul uses irony to show that wealth, success, and gifts mean little without humility, repentance, and love.

Application

Ministry exists not just to teach, but to guide, correct, and mature believers in faith. A pastor's words, guidance, and example often redirect us from pride, laziness, or spiritual blindness.

An Example

Key Verse: 1 Corinthians 4:14-16

- Leaders are like fathers or mentors in the faith. They guide, correct, and model Christ-likeness.
- The goal is imitation of faithful living, not hero worship.

Application

Respect and learn from spiritual leaders while keeping your eyes on Christ as the ultimate example.

Reflection Questions

1. How have spiritual leaders in your life guided or corrected you
2. How can you imitate their faithfulness without idolizing them