

Subject: Sermon Recap - Designed to Please One Master: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Dear Church Family,

We hope this message finds you well. This was an impactful sermon from many perspectives including biblical freedom, servant-hood, stewardship, the mysteries of God, and living godliness. To access related discipleship material go [\[HERE\]](#).

Summary: The sermon explored what it means to live as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Drawing from 1 Corinthians 4:1-5, we were challenged to examine the standards by which we measure ourselves and others - not through the lens of man-wisdom, personal preferences, or the approval of people, but through the lens of God's wisdom and truth. True biblical freedom, we were reminded, is not the freedom to do whatever we want, but the freedom to finally become who God created us to be. That freedom is found not in being our own master, nor in the influence of the world or the enemy, but in belonging to the right Master - Jesus Christ.

Takeaways:

1. Being a servant of Christ is about heart posture, not merely task completion. The standard Paul sets is one of faithful belonging to Christ alone - rowing to the cadence of one Ship Master, seeking His approval above all others, and resisting the pull of man-centered recognition and self-promotion.
2. As stewards of the mysteries of God, we carry a high calling. The gospel, the indwelling of Christ, the nature of the church, and the life of godliness are not ours to hoard but to faithfully manage and share. We are each confronted with the question of whether we are surrendering to God's will and making progress in His plan for our lives and our church family.
3. God's judgment is the only judgment that ultimately matters. While the opinions and criticisms of others can wound deeply, Paul's reminder that God alone examines the heart with perfect knowledge is both a great comfort to those in Christ and a sobering warning to those who have not yet surrendered to Him. We are called to examine ourselves through God's word rather than react out of insecurity or a desire for man's approval.

As you move through the days ahead, we encourage you to sit with the question of whose approval you are most living for. May the grace of God free you from the weight of man's judgment and anchor you more deeply in the one voice that matters - the voice of the Master who knows you fully and loves you completely.

In His Service, Pastor Jim

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Designed to Please One Master

I. Introduction: Biblical Freedom

II. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2: Servants & Stewards

- Being a servant of Christ means....
- Being a steward of Christ means...
- The no-longer mysteries of God are...
- Living godliness means...

Additional Scripture References: Gen 11; Phil 2:9-11; Ro 12:1; Phil 2:7; Mt 20:25-28; Ro 6:16-22; 1 Cor 7:22-23, 2:10, 15:51-52;

III. 1 Corinthians 4:3-5: Living His Standards

Additional Scripture References: Col 1:16-17

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1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Designed to Please One Master

I. **Introduction:** Biblical Freedom is Heavenly Treasure

1. Biblical freedom doesn't refresh you. It resurrects you.

It is the freedom to be who God created us to be, rather than who the world tells us we should be.

It is the freedom to do what God has called us to do, rather than live for the approval of people.

It is the freedom to say NO to sin, rather than be mastered by it.

Biblical freedom is the freedom to walk in truth, rather than be controlled by fear, guilt, shame, or the opinions of others.

It is the freedom to live in and follow Christ without wearing a mask - to be honest about who we are, where we are, and where God is taking us.

It is the freedom to rest in God's grace rather than constantly trying to prove our worth.

And ultimately, it is the freedom to build our lives on the unchanging One who gives us the riches of eternal life with Himself - Jesus Christ.

Biblical freedom isn't the freedom to pursue the world's lie that I can do whatever I want. Rather, it's the freedom to finally become who God created me to be and live the life He created me to live.

Freedom isn't found in being our own master nor in another person or Satan.

Freedom is found in belonging to the right Master – Jesus Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

II. 1 Corinthians 4:1-2: Servants & Stewards

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1. While it can be difficult to pick up Paul's tone, we know that his was not an academic exercise of teaching and preaching information. **He was testifying of the Lord.** He had an impassioned heart burdened to have others experience the hope, freedom, and love of being restored in relationship with Christ. **Divisiveness had already crept into the Corinthian church over man-preferences for various gospel teachers and Paul was continuing to correct their self-deception of accepting man-wisdom over God's-wisdom.**
2. In our opening two verses, Paul is setting out the standard of using a biblical lens by which Christ followers can know that Paul and his team, along with the other Godly teachers and preachers are on Team Jesus.
 - A. Last week I drew from **Genesis 11** in noting some modern day Towers of Babel; **you know the towers that build up man's name and fame.** I note this because from the opening chapters of Genesis to our day, we see man's lust for power, control, sensuality, and other sin-born priorities deceiving us into thinking we are lords of our lives.

In contrast, many bible passages remind us that it is not we, nor Satan, nor the world that is Lord. **Philippians 2:9-11, NLT says it this way:**

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⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philippians 2:9–11, NLT

3. With Paul easily moving between plural and singular pronouns, we see the standards apply to both the group and the individual. **The standards being we are (1) servants of Christ and (2) stewards of**

the mysteries of God. I note the 'being' as this is about heart posture and not simply about doing tasks and filling roles as Paul emphasizes ones faithfulness in v2.

4. With this in mind, let's take some time to explore some of the many other things Scripture says about servants and stewards.

A. Paul's choice of the word (*hypēretēs*) for "servant" speaks volumes. This term is thought to refer to the guys under the deck on a large Roman warship that are stroking the oars. Under complete subjection, they followed the cadence and commands of ship master...while not the lowest people in the social hierarchy of Rome, they were certainly close to the bottom.

The picture being painted is that servant-Paul's ship Master is Jesus – the only one he wants to please.

B. Paul added to this picture of God's servant in Romans 12:1 and again in pointing to Jesus as our ultimate role model in Philippians 2:7

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. – Romans 12:1

But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

- Philippians 2:7

C. From Matthew 20 (turn), we know some of the disciples had ambitions of being the greatest of Jesus' followers. In Matthew 20:25-28, they, and we, are taught a life transforming message:

²⁵ But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you,

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let him be your servant.²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”
- Matthew 20:25–28

The shorthand is if they (and we) want to be great, we are to be servants of Christ **who, in turn, tells us to serve one another, serve our neighbors, serve our enemies, and serve the least among us...**all with accountability to Him as stewards.

Because we are already knee deep in what it means to be a servant, let's jump into the deep end of the living water as we plumb more of the depths of servanthood.

D. While we already touched on this in our introduction, I want to remind us that it is in our being servants of Christ that we experience spiritual liberation. **As Romans 6:16-22 and 1 Cor 7:22-23 say, each person is either a slave to sin (leading to death) or slave to obedience to Christ (leading to righteousness and life).**

Other Scriptures revealing much of what it means to be a servant of Christ, include:

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A servant of Christ	Scriptures
Belongs to Christ alone	1 Cor 3:23, 6:19-20; 7:22-23
Submits to Christ	Rom 6:16-18; Gal 2:20
Obeys Christ	John 14:15; Luke 6:46; Ja 1:22
Represents Christ	2 Cor 5:20
Is a Trusted Steward	1 Cor 4:1-2; 9:16-17
Serves Christ's People	Gal 5:13; Phil 2:3-8
Uses His/Her Gifts for Others	1 Cor 12:4-7; 1 Pet 4:10-11
Does NOT Seek Man's Approval	1 Cor 4:3-5; Gal 1:10
Expects Suffering	2 Cor 4:7-12; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 2:3

Depends on God's Grace	1 Cor 15:10; Col 1:29
Seeks God's Glory	1 Cor 10:31; 1 Pet 4:11
Seeks to Be Found Faithful	1 Cor 4:2
Follows Christ's Example	Mark 10:45; Phil 2:5-8
Looks Forward to Christ's Reward	Mt 25:21; 2 Tim 4:7-8

i. In great contrast, the world says "be a celebrity, take what you want – get what you can, you rule, serve yourself, seek comfortability, depend on your own wisdom and strength, be impressive that others may idolize and affirm you, and other similar sentiments.

ii. Paul further offers the sense that a servant doesn't own the work, set the terms, seek his/her own glory, and doesn't answer to the crowd. **He/she is not self-serving and ego maximizing, but is faithful in belonging and serving the Master alone.**

5. Paul also brings forward the stewardship standard of being a Christ follower.

A. The word used here for 'steward' (oikonomos), means to FAITHFULLY manage, administrate, or oversee the affairs of household...in context today, the household of God – **meaning the dwelling place of God, which we have seen here in our study of 1 Corinthians includes the individual saints and church as both mysteries AND stewards of the mysteries of God.**

B. We also know from **1 Corinthians 2:10** that these mysteries are NOT so mysterious as they are readily knowable by the Christ follower for they have been and are revealed by the Spirit of God. **The foundation of the mysteries IS Christ Himself - and His gospel, including His resurrection as we read in 1 Cor 15:51-52 and Paul's letters to the Thessalonians.** In these and other Scriptures, we are led into the deeper things of God that we may come into the fulness of being a child/disciple and,

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together, the bride of Christ. Some of the other mysteries of God that the believer and the church are to steward, include:

Mysteries of God (partial list)	Scriptures
God's will.	Eph 1:9-10
His unchanging eternal wisdom	1 Cor 2:7-10
The church	Eph 3:4-6
The indwelling of Christ	Col 1:26-27
Marriage. Because the mystery being revealed through marriage is pointing beyond human marriage to the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church	Eph 5:31-32
Lawlessness. While defeated, God has given authority to Satan in this world that He, God, may be brought glory as God prevails and brings evil to account	2 Thes 2:7-8
Israel. Revealing God's faithfulness in His redemptive plan for His chosen people...and His eternal trustworthiness for all His children.	Ro 11:25-27
Godliness. This verse speaks of Godliness as relates to God. Godliness of mankind still relates to God for He is its source, yet the Bible reveals much about our living Godliness...	1 Ti 3:16

C. Let's take a few minutes to frame out this last mystery of God - GODLINESS. [For some time, we have been following the biblical command in purposing to foster a discipleship ecosystem or, some might say biblical community.](#) The three distinct, yet interwoven, elements of this ecosystem/community are [Who is God?](#) Who does He say I am? and [Living godliness...](#)for that is God's plan for us.

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Living Godliness (partial list)	Scriptures
Godliness can be trained	1 Ti 4:7-8
Brings contentment	1 Ti 6:6
Is to be an intentional pursuit	1 Ti 6:11; 2 Pe 1:5

Draws a clear contrast of pursuing life in the flesh...it is a gift from God and not our efforts	Tit 2:11-12; 2 Pet 1:3; 2 Pet 3:11
Godliness brings forth God's power in and through us living out sound doctrine	1 Ti 2:2; Titus 1:1
Godliness is the expression of the Gospel come alive in mankind	1 Ti 3:16
Is personal, but not private. God uses authentic Christian community to expose what needs to change, encourage what needs to grow, restore what has fallen, and model and impart Christlikeness	Eph 4:11-16; Heb 10:24-25; Col 3:16; Gal 6:1-2; Tit 2:1-8; 1 Pet 4:8-11

D. Christian, God gives us the privilege and responsibility to steward that which has real value...people, you/me, His children, and His church...all for His glory. *In this, we are confronted with whether we are sharing the mysteries of God that He may be brought glory by our obedience and by others coming to know Him as Lord.*

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III. 1 Corinthians 4:3-5: Living His Standards

1. With his "But with me...", Paul is drawing a sharp contrast with the Corinthians. *While they look to and embrace man-wisdom, Paul looks to God's wisdom as THE standard by which we are to examine ourselves, one another, and the world in which we live.* The word for 'judge', *anakrinō*, means after careful study, we see others with the lens of Christ...their character, motivations, and intentions. *It is NOT seeing them as we or others want to see them, but as Christ does.* It is NOT the final judgment of salvation.
2. While I understand and agree with Paul's sentiment, "*it is a very small thing,*" I have often found it a great challenge not to be swayed by the judgment of others. *God has used this struggle to reveal Himself to me and stretch me deeply*—especially in my relationships with family, close friends, and perhaps most painfully, within the church family. *Perhaps you have found this principle difficult to live out as well.*

A. I have experienced some gaping wounds from the judgments of others, but I have also had to recognize how often those wounds were nurtured by my own insecurities and desire for man's approval. Rather than examining myself in light of God's Word, I have sometimes responded with defensiveness, withdrawal, avoidance, anguish, and other unhealthy responses. Yet even in these struggles, I am grateful for God's faithfulness. He has stayed with me, used the hard things to expose my heart, and patiently taught me to find my identity and approval in Him.

B. Many—perhaps most—who serve in ministry know the sting of others' judgment all too well. If that is you, may God give you thick skin without giving you a hard heart—that is, strength to withstand the sting while keeping your heart soft and supple in the Master's hands.

Why thick skin and soft hear...because the reality is: to be used by God is to risk being hurt. To faithfully steward what He has entrusted to us is to risk being misunderstood. To walk in biblical love is to make ourselves vulnerable.

But know that God does not waste the hurt. He uses even the wounds inflicted by others to get our attention, expose what is in our own hearts, deepen our dependence upon Him, and make us more like Christ.

3. Paul closes out with the reality that in Christ, man's hearts are known and made known. No matter their cleverness, hidden-and-darkened hearts will be revealed by God's righteousness.

This reality is both encouragement and warning - encouragement to those who have given their lives to Christ, reminding them that God is faithful and that nothing is hidden from Him; and warning to those who choose something other than Christ, reminding them that God's righteous judgment is certain.

[Prayer]

5-Day Devotional

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Designed to Please One Master

Day 1: The Freedom of Belonging to the Right Master

Reading: 1 Cor 4:1-2; Ro 6:16-22

Devotional: Every person serves something. The question is never whether you have a master, but which master holds your allegiance. Paul's use of the word *hypēretēs* paints a vivid picture of a rower beneath the deck of a great warship, moving in complete submission to the commands of the one above. This is not a picture of degradation. It is a picture of liberation. When Christ is your Master, you are finally free to become who God created you to be. You are no longer driven by the shifting winds of sin, fear, or the approval of others. You belong to the One who bought you. Rest in that belonging today and ask yourself honestly: whose cadence am I rowing to?

Write down one area of your life where you sense you are still rowing to a master other than Christ. Bring it before God in honest prayer and surrender it to His authority.

Day 2: Faithful Stewards of What God Has Entrusted

Reading: 1 Cor 4:1-2; 1 Pe 4:10-11; Eph 3:4-6

Devotional: A steward does not own what he manages. He oversees it on behalf of another. Paul makes clear that the mysteries of God, the gospel, the church, the indwelling of Christ, and the revealed wisdom of God are not trophies to be displayed for personal glory. They are sacred trusts to be handled with faithfulness. The standard God sets is not brilliance, charisma, or popularity. It is faithfulness. This is deeply freeing and deeply sobering at the same time. You do not need to be impressive. You need to be faithful. The people around you, the community you are part of, and the gifts God has placed in your hands are not yours. They are His. Handle them accordingly.

Identify one specific gift, relationship, or responsibility God has placed in your care. Ask Him to show you one concrete way to steward it more faithfully this week.

Day 3: Released from the Verdict of the Crowd

Reading: 1 Cor 4:3-4; Gal 1:10; Ro 12:1

Devotional: Paul's declaration that the judgment of others is a very small thing is one of the most liberating statements in all of Scripture, and one of the most difficult to live out. The sting of another person's judgment can reach places in the soul that few other wounds can. Yet Paul does not say the judgment of others is painless. He says it is small in comparison to the only verdict that ultimately matters. Living for the approval of people is an exhausting and endless pursuit. The crowd's standards shift constantly.

God's standard does not. When you anchor your identity and your sense of calling to what God says about you rather than what others think of you, you are finally free to serve without a mask and lead without fear.

Reflect on one relationship or situation where the fear of judgment has caused you to hold back or respond in an unhealthy way. Bring that wound before God and ask Him to replace the need for man's approval with a settled confidence in His.

Day 4: The Hidden Heart and the Certain Light

Reading: 1 Cor 4:5; Hebr 4:12-13; Ps 139:23-24

Devotional: Nothing stays hidden forever. Paul closes this passage with a word that functions simultaneously as comfort and warning. For those who have surrendered their lives to Christ, the promise that God sees every faithful act done in obscurity and every motive rooted in love is a profound encouragement. Your quiet obedience is not invisible. Your unseen sacrifice is not forgotten. But for those whose hearts remain darkened by pride, self-deception, or deliberate sin, this same truth is a sobering warning. God's light will reach every shadowed corner. The wisest response to this reality is not to perform better for the crowd, but to invite God's honest examination into the hidden places of your own heart today.

Pray through Psalm 139:23-24 slowly and personally. Ask God to reveal any hidden motive, unconfessed sin, or area of self-deception that needs to be brought into His light.

Day 5: Servants of One, Godly Before All

Reading: 1 Cor 4:1-5; Phil 2:5-11; 1 Tim 4:7-8

Devotional: Godliness is not a private achievement. It is the gospel made visible in a human life. Paul's portrait of the faithful servant and steward is ultimately a portrait of someone who has been so formed by Christ that their life becomes a living testimony of His lordship. This is not accomplished through sheer willpower or religious performance. It is the fruit of belonging to the right Master, stewarding His mysteries with faithfulness, releasing the need for human approval, and welcoming God's honest examination of the heart. Biblical freedom, as described in this sermon, does not simply refresh you. It resurrects you. It restores the image of God in you and sends you into the world as a servant of One, walking in godliness before all.

Review the table of servant characteristics drawn from Scripture in this week's teaching. Choose one characteristic where you sense the greatest need for growth. Commit to one intentional step this week that moves you toward that growth, and share it with a trusted member of your Christian community for accountability.

Small Group Study Guide

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Designed to Please One Master

Opening Prayer: Pray that the Lord would open your eyes to see and understand His word as you discuss the sermon.

Key Takeaways: Query the group for takeaways first...you may stay with one or more of those.

1. Biblical freedom is not the absence of a master -- it is belonging to the right one. True freedom is not found in self-rule or in living for the approval of others. It is found in belonging to Jesus Christ, who frees us to become who God created us to be.
2. Servants of Christ answer to one audience. Paul's use of the word for servant (*hypēretēs*) paints the picture of a rower under the deck of a Roman warship -- fully subject to the commands of the shipmaster. For the believer, that master is Christ alone. His approval is the only approval that ultimately matters.
3. Stewards manage what belongs to someone else. We do not own the gospel, the church, or the people God has placed in our lives. We are managers of His mysteries, entrusted with great responsibility and held to a standard of faithfulness -- not impressiveness.
4. God's standard, not man's judgment, is the lens for self-examination. Paul's ability to say that man's judgment of him is a small thing was not arrogance -- it was the fruit of being anchored to God's word as the measure of his life and ministry.
5. Hidden hearts will be made known. God's righteous judgment is both an encouragement to the faithful and a warning to those who resist Him. Nothing is hidden from Him.

Discussion Questions: Did the Holy Spirit prompt any questions with you? Start with those.

1. When you hear the word "freedom," what is your first instinct? How does the biblical definition of freedom presented in this sermon challenge or confirm what you already believed?
2. The sermon describes freedom as the ability to live without a mask -- to be honest about who you are, where you are, and where God is taking you. How

easy or difficult is that kind of honesty for you, and what tends to get in the way of it?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-2. Paul identifies two standards for those who serve Christ: being a servant and being a faithful steward. In your own words, what is the difference between simply filling a role and having the heart posture Paul is describing?
4. The sermon draws a sharp contrast between what the world says (be a celebrity, serve yourself, seek comfort, be impressive) and what Paul models (be faithful, belong to the Master, serve others). Where do you see that contrast playing out most clearly in your own life right now?
5. Stewards manage what belongs to someone else. The sermon lists several mysteries of God that believers are entrusted to steward -- including the gospel, the church, godliness, and God's will. Which of those feels most weighty or challenging to you personally, and why?
6. Paul says in verse 3 that it is a very small thing to be judged by man or even by himself. The pastor was honest that living this out has been one of his greatest personal challenges. Why do you think the desire for man's approval is so deeply rooted in us, and what does the gospel say about that desire?
7. Verse 5 reminds us that God will bring hidden things to light and that He alone judges the motives of the heart. How does that reality function as both an encouragement and a warning in your own life?
8. The sermon includes a table of characteristics of a servant of Christ -- including things like submitting to Christ, not seeking man's approval, expecting suffering, and depending on God's grace. Which of those characteristics do you find most natural? Which feels most foreign or convicting?
9. The pastor shared that he has responded to others' judgment with defensiveness, fleeing, ignoring, and anguish rather than examining himself in light of God's word. Can you relate to any of those responses? What would it look like to respond differently?

The sermon describes godliness as personal but not private, noting that authentic Christian community is how God exposes what needs to change, encourages what needs to grow, restores what has fallen, and models Christlikeness. How well is your current community doing that for you, and how well are you doing that for others?

Practical Applications: Query the group for applications first...you may explore one or more of those.

1. **Audit your audience.** For one week, pay attention to the moments when you make a decision -- big or small -- and ask yourself honestly: whose approval am I seeking right now? Journal what you notice. Bring your observations back to the group.
2. **Examine your stewardship.** Identify one specific thing God has entrusted to you -- a relationship, a gift, a responsibility, a piece of knowledge about Him -- and ask yourself whether you are managing it faithfully. Write down one concrete step you can take this week to steward it more intentionally.
3. **Practice releasing man's judgment.** If there is a situation in your life where someone's opinion of you has taken up more space than God's word, bring it before Him in prayer this week. Ask Him to replace the weight of that judgment with the anchor of His truth about who you are in Christ.
4. **Invest in godliness intentionally.** The sermon notes that godliness can be trained and is meant to be pursued. Identify one area of your life where you sense God calling you to grow in godliness, and share it with one person in your group for the purpose of accountability and encouragement.
5. **Sit with the warning and the encouragement of verse 5.** Spend time this week meditating on 1 Corinthians 4:5. Let the promise that God will bring hidden things to light function first as a personal examination -- is there anything in your own heart that needs to be brought into the open before Him? Then let it function as an encouragement -- God sees your faithfulness, even when others do not.

Closing: The sermon closes with this reminder: whether to life or to death, all are held to account, and only in Christ is there freedom, purpose, and meaning. As a group, take a moment to sit with that reality. Close your time together in prayer, asking God to make you servants who answer to one Master and stewards who are found faithful when He returns.

Discussion Questions

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Designed to Please One Master

1. The sermon describes biblical freedom not as the ability to do whatever we want, but as the freedom to become who God created us to be -- in what areas of your life do you find it most difficult to embrace this kind of freedom, and what is holding you back?
2. Paul uses the image of a rower under the deck of a Roman warship to describe what it means to be a servant of Christ, completely subject to the ship's master -- how does this image challenge or reshape the way you think about your relationship with Jesus?
3. The sermon draws a sharp contrast between the world's call to be a celebrity who seeks affirmation and Paul's standard of being a faithful servant who does not seek man's approval -- where do you most feel the pull of seeking human approval, and how does it affect your walk with Christ?
4. Paul identifies faithfulness, not impressiveness or giftedness, as the core requirement of a steward of God's mysteries -- how does this standard of faithfulness convict or encourage you in the roles and responsibilities God has given you?
5. The sermon lists several mysteries of God that believers and the church are called to steward, including the indwelling of Christ and God's redemptive plan for Israel -- which of these mysteries do you feel least equipped to steward, and what might growth in that area look like for you?
6. The pastor shares personally that he has struggled with responding to others' judgment through defensiveness, fleeing, and anguish rather than examining himself through the lens of God's word -- can you identify a time when someone's judgment of you revealed more about your own insecurities than about their criticism, and what did God use that experience to teach you?
7. The sermon teaches that godliness is personal but not private, and that authentic Christian community is essential for exposing what needs to change, encouraging what needs to grow, and restoring what has fallen -- how intentionally are you pursuing that kind of community, and what is one barrier preventing you from going deeper in it?
8. Paul's declaration in 1 Corinthians 4:3-5 that the judgment of human courts is a very small thing stands in stark contrast to how much weight most people give to others'

opinions -- what would it practically look like in your daily life to genuinely live as though God's evaluation of you matters far more than anyone else's?

9. The sermon closes with the sobering reminder that hidden and darkened hearts will ultimately be revealed by God's righteousness, serving as both encouragement to the faithful and warning to those who have not surrendered to Christ -- how does the certainty of God's righteous judgment shape the way you live and the way you share the gospel with others?
10. Godliness is described in the sermon as something that can be trained, pursued intentionally, and that brings contentment -- what is one specific, concrete step you could take this week to more intentionally train yourself toward godliness, and who in your life could hold you accountable to it?

Dinner Conversation Starters

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Designed to Please One Master

1. Who Are We Trying to Please?

Paul says we are servants of Christ, not servants of people's approval.

Question: Where do you feel tempted to care too much about what others think? How can we remember that Jesus is the Master we are called to please?

2. Freedom in Belonging to Jesus

The sermon reminded us that biblical freedom is not doing whatever we want, but becoming who God created us to be. Question: What is one way following Jesus actually brings freedom instead of restriction?

3. Faithful Stewards

Paul describes believers as stewards of the mysteries of God, meaning we are entrusted with God's truth, His gospel, and His people.

Question: What has God entrusted to our family that we should care for faithfully?

4. Serving Like Christ

Jesus said true greatness comes through serving, not being served.

Question: Who is someone we can serve this week as a family, and what is one practical way we can do it?

5. God Sees the Heart

Paul teaches that God knows our motives and will bring hidden things to light.

Question: Why is it comforting to know that God sees our hearts? Why can it also be a warning?

Family Conversation Guide for Children & Early Teens

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Designed to Please One Master

AGES 5-7: SIMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Choose Kindness Even When Others Don't**: We are servants of Jesus, so we follow Him even when friends are not making good choices.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What would Jesus want us to do if someone is being left out?
 - b. Is it always easy to be kind when other kids are not?
 - c. What could you say or do to help someone feel included?
2. **Tell the Truth Without Wearing a Mask**: Biblical freedom means we can be honest before God and others instead of pretending.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Why do we sometimes want to hide when we do something wrong?
 - b. How does knowing Jesus loves us help us tell the truth?
 - c. What should we do when we make a mistake?
3. **Use Screens in a Way That Pleases Jesus**: Jesus is our Master, even when we are watching shows, playing games, or using a tablet.

Discussion Questions:

- a. If Jesus was sitting beside us, would we feel good watching or playing this?
- b. What should we do if something on a screen makes us feel confused, scared, or tempted to act badly?
- c. How can we use our screen time in a way that honors God?

AGES 8-12: BUILDING UNDERSTANDING APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Don't Let the Group Decide Your Character**: Paul teaches that we should not live for people's approval, but for Christ.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Why is it hard to disagree with your friends?
 - b. What are some ways people your age try to "fit in"?
 - c. What could it look like to please Jesus instead of the crowd?
2. **Be a Faithful Steward of Your Words**: God entrusts us with responsibility, including how we speak about and to others.

Discussion Questions:

- a. How can our words either serve others or hurt others?
 - b. What should you do if friends are gossiping or making fun of someone?
 - c. Before you say or send something, what question could you ask yourself?
3. **Practice Digital Discernment:** We belong to Jesus, so our online choices should reflect Him.

Discussion Questions:

- a. What kinds of online content pull your heart away from Jesus?
- b. Have you ever seen something online that made you feel guilty, jealous, angry, or left out?
- c. How can our family help each other make wise digital choices without hiding or pretending?

AGES 11-15: DEEPENING THE CONNECTION APPLICATION POINTS

1. **Let Jesus Define Your Identity:** Biblical freedom is being who God created you to be, not who the world pressures you to become.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Where do people your age feel the most pressure to “be enough”?
 - b. How does belonging to Jesus change the way you think about popularity, appearance, success, or failure?
 - c. What is one area where you are tempted to wear a mask instead of being honest?
2. **Choose Faithfulness Over Approval:** Paul says it is a small thing to be judged by others because Christ is the true Judge.

Discussion Questions:

- a. When is it hardest for you to care more about Jesus’ opinion than your friends’ opinions?
 - b. What kind of criticism or rejection do you fear most?
 - c. How can we respond with humility instead of defensiveness when others judge us?
3. **Guard Your Heart in Digital Spaces:** God sees what is hidden, including our motives, private habits, and online behavior.

Discussion Questions:

- a. Why do digital spaces make it easier to hide parts of ourselves?

- b. What online habits help you follow Jesus, and what habits pull you away from Him?
- c. If God already sees and loves you, how can that help you be honest instead of secretive?

Tips for Parents

- Be patient and listen: Give your child time to think and respond.
- Relate to everyday life: Use real-life examples and stories familiar to your child to make abstract concepts more tangible.
- Encourage questions: Let your son or daughter know it's okay to ask questions, even if things don't make sense right away.
- Share personal insights: Tell a personal story about a time you experienced these themes, adapting as needed for age appropriateness.

Family Conversation Guide for Gen Z

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Designed to Please One Master

1. Live for Christ's Approval, Not the Group's Approval

Bible References: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Galatians 1:10; Proverbs 29:25

Application: You are not called to shape your identity around what your friends, classmates, team, or social circle thinks of you. You are a servant of Christ first. Biblical freedom means you do not have to perform for acceptance or compromise your convictions to stay liked.

Scenario: Your friend group starts making fun of someone who is not present. Everyone is laughing, and you feel pressure to join in so you do not seem awkward or “too serious.” Instead of chasing approval, you choose to stay silent, redirect the conversation, or say, “I don’t think we need to talk about them like that.”

Discussion: Where do you feel the most pressure to please people instead of Christ—friend groups, school, work, family, dating, or online?

2. Be Faithful When No One Is Watching

Bible References: 1 Corinthians 4:2; Colossians 3:23-24; Matthew 25:21

Application: God values faithfulness more than popularity, platform, or attention. You do not have to be seen by people to be significant to God. Your faithfulness in small, hidden places matters.

Scenario: You serve at church, help with younger students, clean up after an event, or encourage someone privately, but nobody notices or thanks you. Instead of getting bitter, you remember that Christ is your Master and He sees what others miss.

Discussion: What is one area where you are tempted to quit being faithful because no one seems to notice?

3. Steward Your Influence Online

Bible References: 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; 1 Peter 4:10-11; Matthew 5:16

Application: Your digital presence is not separate from your discipleship. Your posts, comments, shares, likes, and private messages are part of your witness. You are called to steward your influence for God's glory, not self-promotion.

Scenario: You are about to post something because you know it will get attention, stir drama, or make people envy your life. Before posting, you ask: "Does this honor Christ? Does this help others? Am I posting for God's glory or for validation?"

Discussion: How can your social media reflect Christ without becoming fake, performative, or self-righteous?

4. Refuse to Wear a Mask

Bible References: Psalm 139:23-24; James 5:16; 1 John 1:7

Application: Biblical freedom means you do not have to pretend you are fine, perfect, or spiritually stronger than you are. Godly community is a place where honesty leads to healing, accountability, and growth.

Scenario: At youth group, small group, or with Christian friends, everyone gives surface-level answers. You are struggling with anxiety, lust, bitterness, doubt, or loneliness, but you are afraid people will judge you. Instead of hiding, you choose one trusted believer and honestly share what is going on.

Discussion: What makes it hard for Gen Z to be honest in Christian community?

These points aim to empower Gen Z to live out their faith genuinely and courageously in various aspects of their daily lives, reflecting Biblical integrity, compassion, and steadfastness.