



1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Stewards of the Mystery

To the world, the Roman Trireme was a marvel of engineering—a majestic warship with a lion-headed bow and purple sails that commanded the Mediterranean Sea. But its outward beauty masked a deeper reality. Beneath the gleaming deck, in the humid, cedar-scented shadows of the hull, sat the **hyperetas**. These were the under-rowers—men who never saw the horizon or heard the cheers from the shore. Their status in the eyes of men: zero! They labored in an unseen rhythm, their eyes fixed not on the destination, but on the oar-master whose mallet provided the only beat that mattered.

This is the jarring imagery Paul used to reset the Corinthian's perspective. While the church touted which leader was the most impressive captain to follow, Paul pointed them to the underbelly of the ship. He and the apostles were not celebrity captains to be ranked; they were the hidden engine of the Master's vessel. As **stewards of the Mystery**, they held the keys to a cosmic treasury that the immature Corinthians—distracted by the “uniforms” on deck—could not yet grasp. Paul invited them to stop looking at these servants as trophy captains, but

instead consider the faithfulness of these men as those laboring in the shadows, rowing in time with the heartbeat of the Cross.

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1)

Since the Corinthians were so prone to “grading” their teachers, Paul offered them the only metric that mattered: **“Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ...”** The focus here is on the shift from personality to position. In the hold of the Trireme, the identity of the under-rower is swallowed up by his function. He is an *unseen* man, and that is precisely how Paul wished to be judged. If the church is a vessel moving through the world, Paul is not the one standing on the **pro**w (the foremost part of the ship’s bow) seeking the limelight; he is in the shadows, pulling his weight in subjection to the Master’s beat.

But Paul’s role is dual-natured. While he was a lowly servant, he was also a **“steward** of the mysteries of God.” This word—also closely tied to **servant^a**—moves us from the hull of the ship to the locked storeroom of an estate. The “mysteries” are the deep, structural truths of the Cross—treasures that have been crated and stored for the heirs of faith.

As a steward (*oikonomos*), Paul did not own these riches, but he was given the authority to distribute them. He stood at the door, with keys in hand, ready to dispense the “solid food” of God’s wisdom and power.

Moreover it is required in stewards that one

Additionally, the apostles—as faithful stewards—dare not deviate one iota. Just as the under-rower (*hyperetas*) faithfully kept to the beat of

***be found faithful.
(2)***

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. (3-4)

the **keleustes**^b, so too did the apostles keep to the ‘message of the cross.’ Continuing this parallel: just as the under-rower could not see the water or the direction of the ship, faithful stewards of the gospel stick to their assigned task, trusting the Master’s course even when they cannot see the final result of the seeds they have planted and watered.

There is a particular weight to the air when you feel the eyes of others upon you—a suffocating pressure to “fit in” or to adjust your stroke to match the expectations of the crowd on the dock. We often live our lives in a theater of human opinion, constantly bracing for the gavel of public approval or rejection.

The Apostle Paul, however, had developed a “holy deafness” to the noise of the Corinthian gallery. To Paul, the opinions of a “human court” (literally, a “human day” of judgment) were like a distant, insignificant murmur compared to the command of his Captain. He knew that even if the entire world stood on the shoreline and cheered his name—or hissed in derision—it would not change the reality of his standing.

Paul lived for a singular audience of One: the only One who could make him justified before the judgment seat of God. Thus, he looked past the pointing fingers of his critics and the deceptive mirrors of his own ego, fixing his eyes on the only One with the authority to audit his soul.

“But He who judges me is the Lord.”

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.
(5)

Paul concludes with a paradoxical stroke: he uses his apostolic authority to command the Corinthians to *stop* judging. His directive, “**Judge nothing before the time,**” is a spiritual cease-and-desist order to a church that has become a courtroom of opinions.

Imagine the ship in the pre-dawn hours. In the shadows of the hull, it is impossible to see the true strength of a man's pull. The Corinthians were peering into the gloom, trying to decide which “under-rower”—Paul, Apollos, or Cephas—deserved the most applause. But Paul reminds them they are judging in the dark. The return of Christ is the rising sun that will penetrate the hull. As the only One who justifies the ungodly, He alone is qualified to audit the soul. He will “**bring to light the hidden things,**” revealing the “**counsels of the heart.**” He knows who rows out of love for the Captain and who rows merely to be seen by the passengers.

If we abandon the critic's chair for the rower's bench, we shift our focus from fleeting human approval to the only verdict that lasts. When the voyage ends and the Light finally hits the station of every faithful *hyperetas*, “**each one's praise will come from God.**”

^a **Hyperetas** was also translated as “officer”, under the authority of another.

^b The *keleustes* was the “rowing master” or “strokesman.” His title comes from the Greek word *keleuo*, meaning “to command” or “to exhort.”