

Title: Trusted Leadership  
Text: 1 Corinthians 4.1-7  
Theme: Guarding what has been entrusted to you  
Series: 1 Corinthians #16  
Prop Stmt.

This fall, we are going to try our hand at a community event that I think has wonderful potential to minister to accomplish many God-honoring things. On Labor Day, Monday, September 5, 2005, we are hosting our very first, family fun walk and run. The proceeds from this event are going to be given to the Lighthouse Outreach Center. The Lighthouse Outreach Center provides food, clothing, assistance and the gospel to needy people in and or passing through this city. Lighthouse is one of the ministries that our church financially supports. But this is an opportunity to meet some of the people who work in that ministry, encourage them and at the same time, we are able to host a run that we hope will attract many people in this community. The city officials are extremely supportive of this and we think that it will be great event.

This is the time of year, when many runners start to lace up the shoes again and hit the streets. Based upon several of Paul's comments, it really appears that he watched some of the races that took place, particularly here in Corinth, where the Isthmian games were held. These athletic competitions were huge and took 2<sup>nd</sup> place only to the Olympic Games. Running provided Paul with a number of illustrations of the Christian life that he wove into his writings. We are going to "run" into some of them as we work through this book. This text presents a tremendous balance of what leadership is in the church. Now listen carefully because these principles are powerful for life in the church, in your family and in many cases in your world too.

Leadership in the church is critical. And because it is critical, it is critical that we understand how that leadership is supposed to function. Take for example a race. At a race you basically have two groups of people. You have the runners and the watchers. The runners are the exhausted men and women who are in desperate need of a rest, and the watchers are men and women who are in desperate need of exercise. But think of that picture for a minute because it illustrates the two main pictures of leadership that many people have. Some people see leaders as the one who are the runners. You run, I'll watch. Some of you have served on school boards, parent groups, school groups, or in positions of leadership in your ABF, or in the Sunday School. There are plenty of people who are happy to watch you run as long as you don't ask them to run with you. You run, I'll watch. You do it all. From the perspective of the followers, they expect the runners to do all the work. It is easy for the one who is not in charge to expect those who are in charge to do everything. On the other hand, it is easy for those who are in charge to think that their job is to tell everybody else what to do. Therefore, while some think that leadership is doing all of the running, others (particularly some leaders) think that leadership is doing all of the yelling while everyone else does all of the running.

So, what if we operated according to the first picture? What if leadership did all of the running, and everyone else did all of the sitting and watching? We would have not only

an exhausted leadership; we would have a disunified and immature church. On the other hand, if I said to you that my job is only to do the yelling, and that you are to do the running, then you can see the huge problems with that. In other words, I do not actually have to live this I only have to preach it. Neither one of those is an accurate picture of Christian leadership.

In some marathons, the organizers arrange to have pacesetters. These men and women will run at a particular pace. If you want to run the marathon in 4 hours, you find the pacesetter with the sign that says, 4 hours and you run with that group. The pacesetter does not run for you, he runs with you and keeps you on pace. That, my brothers and sisters is leadership. Leaders run with you, that is, they live, grow, mature, and walk alongside of you, but they set the pace by the integrity, character, example and consistency of their lives. Leaders do not lead because they are given the title of leader. Leaders lead even without the title. This is why you find that the NT way of identifying leaders in the church is to see those who are already setting the pace for others by their own lives. One of the extraordinary things about church leadership in the NT is that there really is nothing extraordinary about it. Look at the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 for the office of elder, which is the highest position in the NT church. There is no higher office. And what do you find? Is it the smartest, the most advanced, the wealthiest, the most intellectually renowned, the most educated, the most sophisticated? No, leadership in the church is based more on character than anything else. Does the guy love his wife and do his children obey and respect him? Does he live a life characterized by self-control? Do the people in his life, outside of the church respect him as one who pays his bills on time, and is honest in his business dealings? There is nothing about being a major player in the community, or a big name in politics. But we are so tempted to adopt the world's ideas in this area. For example, what if a Senator or Judge or State Representative was a member of our church? What if a member of the Tigers or Pistons attended here? Would it not be tempting to say to our friends, "Hey, guess who is coming to our church?" But what sort of thinking would drive that? The heart of that, is not simply, my church is better than your church, the real heart of that, is I am better than you, which reveals that, if we think that, we have a long way to go in understanding true Christian leadership.

Now, I have intentionally spent a long time on the introduction and once again, in that sense the porch may be bigger than the house, but it is so important for you to grasp this. Not only so that our leaders hold to this standard, but so that you can understand what you are becoming. In this opening verse of chapter 4, Paul uses his own life as to address this matter. Now think with me, some of the people in Corinth were elevating Paul beyond what they should. And he is saying, here is how you are supposed to look at me. Here is how you are supposed to look at leaders. Leaders are servants and leaders are stewards. But, in both cases, their ultimate allegiance is to their Lord. Let's look at the first part of the first verse.

## 1. **Christian Leadership involves Serving.** (4.1a)

Leaders are servants. While we are bond slaves to Christ, this word has more of the idea of one who is subordinate, bound to obedience, but who loves to do the will of his leader and labors as a free person and serves willfully. This servant is important because of his relationship to his leader. The point is, leaders in the church are servants who function under the oversight of the One, True Leader. Leadership in the church is not pompous prunes who pontificate pious platitudes to peons in the pews. This is the model. The church is not divided up between elitists and common folk, and yet the church cannot function without leadership who set the pace. But, how are they supposed to set the pace? They do so by seeking to meet the spiritual needs of the people around them, and not seeking to use people in order to satisfy their own selfishness.

How can I help you? This is what we are all supposed to be doing. Leadership cannot do it all by themselves, they set the pace and you join them. Jesus made that very clear the night he washed the disciple's feet. (Basin, Pitcher, towel – courtyard explain)

But this idea of a leader being a servant is not the main thrust of this text. Paul mentions it, but then develops another aspect of it.

## 2. **Christian Leadership involves Guarding.** (4.1b-4)

The NIV translates the word that means steward with the words, "as those entrusted" because steward can mean boat steward, or airline steward, which does not seem to be much different than servant. But the idea is really that of a household manager or even an estate manager. The household manager runs the house, but does not own the house. We have some people in the church who have the oversight of a budget in their department in the government. They have to administer that budget and make certain that the goals and objectives that they have been given are met, and that the process is in line. If they do not, they would probably be fired. When a person becomes a leader in the church, he is entrusted with a sacred charge. That charge or that trust, or as the NIV puts it, "the secret things of God" is the trust that has been given to the leaders.

### A. **Guard the trust.**

What is in the trust? Let's say that your parents die and leave you with the task of guarding your younger brother's half of their estate, until he reaches the age when you can turn it over to him. So, for the next 10 years, you have to guard what is not yours, but what you nevertheless have oversight of, to make certain that nothing happens to that half of the estate. If you neglect to watch over it, or if you use it for your own personal gain, you will be held accountable. That is what a leader is charged with doing in the church. He has to watch over what has been entrusted into his care. It is not his to do with as he pleases. But what has been entrusted into his care? What is the trust? What are the secret things of God? Based on what we studied in 2.7, the "secret things" refers to the gospel. The gospel itself is not secret or mysterious, but the gospel was hidden for generations and with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this gospel

became known. So, the leaders in the church have to guard the integrity and the purity of the gospel. How do they do this?

**B. Guard the trust through faithfulness. (4.2)**

This is a huge statement brothers and sisters. It is not required that the steward be successful, popular, debonair, trendy, or sophisticated. The steward's job is not to do the bidding of the rest of the household employees; he has to do the bidding of His master. He has to guard the estate or the trust under the terms that he has been charged and he has to be faithful to that charge. Therefore, church leaders have to be careful guardians of the gospel. The church does not run all by itself. The church requires faithful leaders who are alert at their post.

**C. Guard the trust through faithfulness to God. (4.3-4)**

When you read these verses, it all makes sense doesn't it? Here is the church pitting one leader against the other. The warning here is two-fold, not only should people not pit the leaders in the church against each other and instead should see them as servants and stewards, but neither should the leaders lead according to the fear of man. The leader who makes it his goal to hang onto his position at all costs, will be tempted to compromise the integrity of the gospel for the sake of his own comfort, and will contribute toward the damning of the next generation.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the most thorough and consistent theologian/pastors that has ever stepped into a pulpit in this country. His life, doctrine and preaching in Massachusetts were instrumental in the great awakening that God used in the early days of this country to bring thousands of people to faith in Christ. But many years, later, his own church turned against him, and he lost his ministry in that church. You can trace in many ways the same type of line in the life and ministry of Charles Spurgeon, who pastored the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. Both of these men were very popular in their early days, but when society shifted, and the religious landscape shifted, these men did not shift with it and when they died, their ministerial influence at the time of their death was a fraction of what it had been earlier in their lives. At the time of their death, there were other men who were scratching the itching ears. Today, we know nothing of those other men, but the works and writings of these two men stand as pillars in history. These men are historical heroes in hall of fame of the church, not because they went out at the top of their game, but because they were faithful to guarding the trust that had been given to them and did not change, even when those around them did.

When you are going through times like that, it is so easy to second-guess yourself. When the people to whom you are ministering are saying unkind things or praising another while they criticize you, it is very tempting to take it personal, to crawl into a shell, pull down the hatches and hide. Paul makes it clear, that his ultimate allegiance is not to the people, but to the Lord. Brothers and sisters, this is the type of leadership we have to have. We have to have people whose ultimate goal is to please God and not win the popularity contest. That is not an excuse for the leader to be harsh, or mean – not at all,

because that does not please God. It just means that he cannot lead by polls or only preach on what is trendy.

These two verses present such a wonderful and important truth. On the one hand, leaders cannot live as people-pleasers, but on the other hand, they have to realize that their own conscience may not be a perfect gauge either. “I don’t follow people, I only follow the Lord” can be good, but it can also be a cover-up for doing your own thing. So, in v.4 Paul says that as far as he can tell, his conscience is clear, but that God will be the final judge, not his conscience. The humility in this man is so attractive. He is clear, forthright, and at the same time, very, very transparent.

### 3. **Christian Leadership involves relaxed followers.** (4.5-7)

Every house has a neighborhood. Every verse has a context. This verse, like Matthew 7.1, which is now more popular than John 3.16 is not a call to park your brains and be tolerant, accepting, and inclusive of everything. Please, remember the two typical extremes within the church. 1) Group #1 – People who tend to be hyper-critical because they are ultimately trying to elevate themselves. They do this by finding fault with everyone (including leaders) who do not measure up to their self-centered, petty standards. To these people, the texts are clear; STOP your mean-spirited, self-centered judgmentalism. 2) Group #2 – People who are so totally lacking in discernment they are willing to accept any theology or embrace any teacher because he seems like a nice guy. To these people the texts are clear, that you have to inspect the fruit, measure their teaching by Scripture and judge righteous judgment. This balance is not easy and demands constant vigilance.

At this point in Corinth, it is group #1 that is a little more in view. These people were holding leaders to standards of their own making. They were demanding in the wrong areas, which as we will see, lead them to be blinded about truly legitimate and serious issues which were affecting the church. Just as it is disastrous when people are judgmental when they need to be patient, it is disastrous when people are patient when they need to make clear decisions and stick with them. So, Paul is saying, stop judging who is the best leader in the church, God is will make that known. Besides, what are you looking at anyway? Not all who start well finish strong, and some who start a little slower, finish strong.

#### A. **Trust God to handle the Judgment.** (4.5)

God will expose the hearts and motives; you do not have to do that. If you elevate one leader over another, you will give that one leader allegiance that only God is due, and you will also miss out on what God wants you to learn from the others.

#### B. **Learn from your leaders.** (4.6-7)

These verses summarize all that Paul has been saying in this section. I have applied “these things” and I take the “these things” to be these truths about leadership in the

church. He has applied them to himself and Apollos, which may be a way of making the point without alienating some of the people who were actually leaders in causing a problem. The point is, he is saying to “look at us!” Apollos and I aren’t fighting about who is the best, who draws the biggest crowds, who sells the most books or DVD’s. So, why should you?

“Do not go beyond what is written” was probably a popular saying in those days that essentially means, stay within the parameters that God has established. Follow your leaders, don’t worship them. Follow them, don’t tear them down. Run with them and thank God for their differences. No one leader possesses all of the gifts, and no one leader is on top of his game every day. Verse 7 is comprised of 3 questions.

Who makes you different? Is it you? No, the answer is God!  
What do you have that you did not receive? Nothing!  
So, why boast? There is no logical answer.

MTV started up when I was a youth pastor many years ago, and for a while I watched its impact upon the culture. The content of the videos are glaringly shallow. There is no real distinction between good and evil, but there is a distinction between those who have and those who do not. The MTV genre tries to market satisfaction through the empty lives of the performers whose basic message is, I want love, or sex or freedom or money or revenge. But the heart of it is, I want, therefore, I deserve. The viewer is enticed to live in this fantasy world only by vicariously living through the life of the performer. The video is designed to program the viewer to think that if the performer gets what he or she wants, then so will you.

It appears that MTV would have done well in the church at Corinth. Instead of following Christ, they set up idols of the performers and tried to live out their quest for power and pride through them. The desires of the church cannot be same as the desires of the world. We thirst for the glory of God, not for our own advancement. Bruce Ware said, “God stands supreme and above all as the one who exists in his fullness, independent of all. And our finite existence bears testimony, not to any human capacity to be anything in itself, much less to some supposed ability to add anything to God, but only to God’s gracious will in creating out of nothing all that is and in granting to all his creation each and every quality it possesses.” God has gifted different people and different leaders in different ways. But it is from God, by God and for God. That, brothers and sisters is the heart of church.