

Peddlers, Pedestals, & Preachers

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2 Corinthians 2:17 (NKJV) “For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.”

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 (NKJV) “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. ³ 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. ⁴ For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. ⁵ 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.”

The kingdom mentality has been severely damaged as churches and ministries have begun adopting the world’s marketing methods to compete for the crowds. Churches and ministries can spend a lot of time and money developing the hottest sales pitch to sell themselves to the world. The same goes for its ministers. It is assumed that to be successful, we must convince people that we are better than anyone else. No wonder ministers find it difficult to work together when they feel it might help the “competition”! How did ministers in the New Testament present themselves and their ministries? How did they want to be received?

Paul addresses this issue with the Corinthian believers. The church at Corinth was a regular stop for traveling ministers. Many of these had become master marketers who peddled the word of God for personal gain (2 Corinthians 2:17). We can almost hear the peddler’s voice crying out today: “Step right up! Get your latest revelation from heaven specially delivered by angels! You won’t get this revelation anywhere else folks! It is an exclusive word for our listeners! Need direction? Get your free personal prophecy when you sign up to be one of our monthly Partners in Prophecy! Grab a seat for the latest signs, wonders, and miracles show! Friends, we’ve got the finest anointing services on the market with oil shipped directly from Jerusalem! Give your “Greater Anointing” pledge today and receive a double portion anointing! Do you have money problems? Good news! Buy our “Debt Cancellation Token” to keep in your pocket and you will never be broke again! Are you in debt and short on cash? Don’t worry! We take credit cards! Please act today to help us take our message and ministry to the ends of the world!” I want to ask you, can you imagine Jesus, Paul, or the other apostles using these peddler tactics to spread the Gospel? Of course not! Yet it seems that Christians today flock to the peddler’s cry!

Paul warned against peddling the word of God and putting ministers on pedestals. Both are wrong and they undermine God’s work in the church. Paul declared, “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” Let me be clear—we are instructed to recognize those who labor among us (1 Thessalonians 5:12). Ministers who faithfully labor among God’s flock deserve to be received and respected as God’s servants. However, there is a big difference between laboring with responsibility among God’s flock and peddling the Gospel for personal gain.

Paul was emphatic that true ministers are God’s servants. The Greek word for “servant” describes an “under-rower” on a ship. Servants of God are not owners or masters of the Church. Servants are bought and owned by the Master. Servants are the Lord’s attendants or assistants in His work. Servants have no unique rank or position. They receive orders and immediately carry them out without question. Servants dare not deviate from the slightest command to please themselves or others. Servants dare not presume to improve on those orders. Servants are “under-oarsmen”—the gallery slaves who row at the bottom of a ship. As such they are the faceless and

unsung force who receive their orders and move the ship forward under the command of Christ, the Owner and Helmsman of the Church. They move the church forward by keeping people focused on Christ rather than themselves.

Paul was also emphatic that true ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God. The mysteries of God are the once hidden realities of the Gospel. As such, these mysteries are not cheap trinkets to be peddled off to the highest bidder but treasures to be guarded and carefully entrusted to others.

The Greek word for “steward” refers to a manager of a household—a superintendent to whom the head of a house has entrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures, and the duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant and even to the children not yet of age. Unlike servants, stewards have a unique responsibility and position. Stewards are entrusted with valuable property, and as such, they naturally rank higher than a regular servant, though both are considered slaves. Stewards receive orders and carry them out in due process and then returns to give an account. Stewards do not own but manages what belongs to his master. Stewards are given liberty to wisely manage their master’s affairs. Stewards invest what they have been entrusted into the lives of faithful men (2 Tim 2:2). Faithful stewards receive wages and increased favor with the Master. Joseph was such a steward in Potiphar’s house (Gen 39:2-19).

Jesus likened the kingdom of God to a nobleman who went into a far country and delivered his household into the hands of stewards (Matt 24:45-51; Lu 12:41-48; 16:1-13; 19:12-27). Stewards are required to be faithful and will give account of what has been entrusted into their care. Stewards are not accountable to the members of the household. They are accountable to the master. Therefore members of the household are not to judge God’s servants before the master returns. At that time the master who gave the orders will evaluate, judge, and reward each steward according to his labor.

Don’t pay the peddler and don’t put ministers on a pedestal. Recognize Jesus as Lord over the church. Listen to Paul’s instruction. Consider God’s ministers as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.