

January 1, 2012
"HAVE I BEEN FAITHFUL?"
1 Cor. 4:1-5

1 Corinthians 4:1-5, "This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God."

I've never been one who enjoyed taking inventory – however I do know they are necessary. If we don't look on the shelf to see what we have, we can only guess at what to order. Inventory is good for our personal and spiritual lives as well.

Paul welcomes an inventory of his life. He chooses to judge himself, through in the present of God, rather than look to the judgments of man. As we start the year 2012 it is fitting to ask ourselves, "Have I been faithful during the past year?" If the answer is yes, the prospect of continuing to be faithful this year should be exciting. If the answer is no, you should resolve to be faithful this year.

Paul uses in verse 1 the word "account". Which in the Greek, is a bookkeeping term. It means to take inventory of what's happened. He is saying that he welcomes an inventory of his life and ministry. **This is a discipline that every Christian should practice regularly.** One of many excellent times for taking inventory is at the beginning of a new year like today.

What is included in the inventory?

We should begin with making sure that we are saved and living in fellowship with God. Paul says in

2 Corinthians 13:5 "Examine yourselves Test yourselves. unless indeed you are disqualified." Make sure that your sins have been forgiven. Recall the time when you asked Jesus to be your Savior and Lord. If this were your last day on earth, do you know for sure where you will spend eternity.

Next, Paul says in

1 Corinthians 11:28, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." Examine yourself to see if you are fit or worthy to partake of the Lord Supper. Do we really searched our hearts, and confessed our sin to God. Or, do we just take the juice and bread, like it was a snack before dinner. **The Lord Supper is a celebration of what**

Christ accomplished for us. It stands for everything that the cross stands for. Paul we search ourselves to see if we are fit or qualified to receive the symbols of Christ's body and blood.

The problem becomes no one is worthy to receive from Christ .. we cannot be qualified in or of ourselves. Only by Grace!

Jesus was born to die for our sin, however God requires us to confess our sin ... so in a manner of speaking ... seeking God's forgiveness and receiving forgiveness through Jesus qualifies us to partake in Holy communion.

Several Years ago in our youth group we set up a courtroom, complete with judge, jury, & lawyers. Two of the youth were even cops who when into the congregation and arrested someone who was accused of being Christian. The Church fellowship hall was transformed into a courtroom. The county judge presided over the court and the structure was that of a real court room.

Question: "If you were to be arrested for the 'crime' of being a Christian, would there enough evidence to convict you?"

Or, will the jury find you "not guilty" because your actions disqualify you as a Christians. IS Your lifestyle, your talk that of a Christ like person? Are you any different from the unbeliever?

While most people want to compare themselves to another person – that will never work. I will always disappoint you – another person will always disappoint you – so it will be easy to say, I doing as good as he is, or she is.

Here's a better way of taking inventory:

- (1) Compare yourself with Jesus, because Jesus is our model and pattern of life;**
- (2) Go through the Ten Commandments - measure your relationship with God and with your fellow men;**
- (3) Step on the scale of the Great Commission;**
- (4) Compare yourself with who you were a year ago.**

Paul goes on to mention his ministries using two common vocations during his time as illustrations.

First, he uses the word "**minister.**" I love this illustration because it refers to an under-rower. An Under-rower mans the oars of a ship in a just under the deck of the ship. They are what propel the ship forward.

Interestingly – Underrowers work the oars in the belly of the ship. They do not know where the ship is going. They simply obey the direction of the Captain.

Secondly, under-rowers must work in harmony. They must be in sync so to speak. They must develop a rhythm, If they do not work together, their efforts will be wasted. The ship will not move, as it should. The worse scenario is that it will go in circles. Never reaching its

destination.

As followers of Jesus Christ we are assigned the role of under-rowers. We are called propel the church forward, obeying the commands of General Jesus. We are under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives the orders. WE must pull together and simply follow HIS instructions. In the United Methodist Church, by ruling of Annual Conference many years ago, the term minister was re-define to include every member in the church, not pastors.

Yet it could be that many churches are stuck in the harbor, dry rotting for lack of under-rowers or ministers.

God's plan A for doing His work is His people. God has no plan B.

We are also Stewards: I Peter 4:10 says, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." To be a good steward, you and I must use the gift or gifts God has given us. He does not expect us to be what we are not designed to be or to do what we are not gifted to do. But rest assured Every Christian is gifted for ministry. We are called to use what we were gifted with.

Charles Swindoll illustrates this point with an interesting parable: "he tells about a group of animals that decided that they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of a new world. So they organized a school. They adopted a curriculum of running, climbing, swimming, and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

"The duck was excellent in swimming but he only made passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was so slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his webbed feet to be badly worn, so that he became only averaged in swimming.

"The rabbit started at the top of the class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming.

"The squirrel was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground instead of the treetop down. He developed strained muscles from overexertion, and only got a C in climbing and a D in running."

1 Peter 4:10 tells us that our ministry is "people", not "programs." An elderly preacher was rebuked by a church member, one Sunday morning before the service. "Pastor," said the man, "something must be wrong with your preaching and your work. There's been only one person added to the church in a whole year, and he's just a boy." The minister listened, his eyes moistening and his hand trembling. "I feel it all," he replied, "I've tried to do my duty."

The pastor left the church that day ready to resign – as he and his wife discussed what they might do, that boy added to the church knocked at the door. That one boy talked with the pastor about becoming a missionary and what would be required of him.

Many years later an aging missionary returned to London from Africa. His name was spoken with reverence. Nobles invited him to their homes. He had added many souls to the church of

Jesus Christ, reaching even some of Africa's most savage chiefs. This was the same man who as a boy, talked with his pastor years before.

Paul says it best, **"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."** Have you been faithful in your Prayers, Presence, Gifts, Service and Witness of and for God in your life?

"God is faithful." God loves you – and God has called you **Max Lucado puts it so beautifully,**
"If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it" (Max Lucado)

God sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen. God can live anywhere in the universe, and He chooses your heart... Because God is faithful, we must also be faithful.

President Roosevelt made this significant statement, "It is better to be faithful than famous." Another observed, **"The world crowns success; God crowns faithfulness."** We are called to be faithful in using whatever gift or gifts you have, however small or limited the gift may seem. One day after delivering a message, someone came to D.L. Moody and said, **"You made eleven grammatical mistakes in your message tonight."** Moody looked at the person and said, **"I'm sure you're right. My education is limited. I wish I could have had more, but I'm simply using the grammar I have to serve the Lord."** If have been born of God, be faithful. This is "required" of everyone in church, especially those in leadership.

Someone, told the story of a choir director who was so stressed out because at least one or more members of the choir were absent at every rehearsal for practice. Finally came the last rehearsal and he announced: "I want to personally thank the pianist for being the only person in this entire church choir to attend each and every rehearsal during the past two months." At this, the pianist rose, bowed, and said, "It was the least I could do, considering I won't be able to be at the concert tonight."

Be faithful in the use of your time. Time is limited, it's precious. So much so that our response to God to be faithful speaks volumes of our faith in God, in addition it speaks volumes as to who we believe God to be. **We call Jesus Savior and Lord . . . is He?**

God wants us to take inventory of our life, so that we can decide IF we have been faithful and then make any needed changes as we face the new year.

A few weeks ago you were given a little commitment card – did you do anything with it? Do you even know where it is? How faithful are you?