

Sovereign Grace Churches Mission Sunday 2018

1 Cor 4:1-21

Introduction (Introduce myself, pray, and read the text during sermon)

- A. Once a year we set aside a Sunday meeting for the purpose of informing you about Sovereign Grace Churches and we receive an offering to raise support for SGC.
 - 1. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we aim to live our lives investing for eternity. One way to do this is to invest finances in planting churches and caring for churches (SGC).
- B. What is SGC? Sovereign Grace Churches is a formal denomination but we refer to ourselves as a family of churches. This is because we value relationships (76 churches in USA).
 - 1. Denominations establish rules of procedure. All denominations agree Jesus is Lord and Head of His body, the church. But who has final authority in a church?
 - 2. Humanly speaking, there are 3 options (congregation, pastors, bishop or apostle).
 - 3. SGC places final, ultimate authority, in the pastors (elders - biblical). This means we must understand faithful Christian leadership. Character is huge (trust).
 - 4. Our statement of faith is undergoing a massive revision but the COE (one rep from each church or 2 if more than 500 members) must approve.
- C. Our BCO is organized around 7 key theological convictions (values). We believe the Bible teaches these truths and we want to be faithful to the Holy Scriptures (see SGC website).
 - 1. Reformed soteriology (God is sovereign in salvation)
 - 2. Gospel-centered expository preaching
 - 3. Continuationist pneumatology (not two New Testaments, one for then, one for now)
 - 4. Complementarian leadership in the home and church
 - 5. Elder-governed and led churches
 - 6. National and international outreach and church planting
 - 7. Interdependent churches united in fellowship, mission, and governance
- D. Our mission in SGC is to plant and build healthy churches everywhere for the glory of God.
 - 1. You are invited to participate according to the grace in your life. Perhaps you can:
 - Pray (Executive Director Mark Prater and the LT)
 - Give financial support (ministry requires funding)
 - Serve in a leadership role (we all do the chores)
 - Participate on a church plant someday
 - Serve in a place outside of the USA
 - 2. If you should happen to ask “what has SGC done for me?” I would answer (briefly):
 - Preached sound doctrine (preaching matters, visiting pastors, the cross)
 - Music that is full of solid content (we sing about Jesus)
 - Equips leaders (PC) and holds leaders accountable to standards in regions

- Serves leaders (I've never been alone, many pastors are)

E. That is SGC, so, let's go to 1 Corinthians 4. The Apostle Paul has delivered a glorious and passionate explanation of the gospel in chapters 1-3 (very important portion of Scripture).

1. In chapter 4 he turns to explain Christian leadership. These principles apply to pastors and leaders in a church (possibly all of us at some point in time).
2. We approach Christian leadership from a certain foundation. My encouragement:

- Leaders exist to serve others, not to be served. A faithful leader is not primarily concerned with being served. Jesus Christ is our model:

Mark 10:45 (ESV) "[45] For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- Leaders do not limit God (they serve when opportunity knocks, may say no).
- Leaders do not despise small beginnings (my first ministry assignment was setting up chairs on a Sunday morning).
- Leaders do ministry by grace, in the fear of the Lord, for the glory God. Leaders know that their efforts are never in vain. They are always profitable.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV) "[58] Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

3. Armed with this foundation we will now consider faithful Christian leadership as described in 1 Corinthians 4.

I. **First, leaders are servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God** (read 1 Cor. 4:1-5).

1 Corinthians 4:1-5 (ESV) "[1] This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. [2] Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. [3] But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. [4] For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. [5] Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God."

A. Paul is orienting the Corinthians to a proper view of Christian leadership. He writes for himself and the members of his apostolic team (how you should regard us).

1. They include Sosthenes in 1:1; Apollos in 3:5; Timothy in 4:17; and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaius in 16:17. Us, by extension, includes every leader.

B. How should you regard your pastors and leaders? Servants of Christ (not you first) and stewards of the mysteries of God (see verse 1).

1. Faithful leaders do not first seek to please people. Paul elsewhere:

Galatians 1:10 (ESV) "[10] For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man?

If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

- This does not mean leaders seek to upset people. It simply means that Jesus comes first. A faithful leader always keeps an eye on His Lord and Savior.

Ex: This is a little bit like the best way a husband can love his kids. You love your kids best by loving mom (secure and an example).

2. A steward of the mysteries of God refers to truths previously hidden that are now revealed by divine revelation and apostolic proclamation (the whole counsel of God).

- This is primarily the gospel (our only boast is the cross).
- It is not primarily about your favorite gift, or ministry, or passion, as wonderful as they may be.

C. Leaders are called by God to be faithful (verse 2). And what is faithful?

1. A faithful leader will feed you the Word of God and help you apply that Word in your lives (always cross-centered, always a steward of the gospel).
2. Not lording over, micro-managing, CEO (business), but faithful ministers. Binding up wounds, restoring souls, walking through adversity and suffering, equipping saints.

D. In verses 3-5, because leaders are servants of Christ, Paul points out that the Lord will judge leaders. There must be an account and God will judge leaders regarding ministry.

1. Paul will not judge himself. This does not mean we avoid confronting leaders. It does mean we are charitable toward them knowing they will give an account to God.

Ex: Have you ever heard a pastor criticized? I have (wise to avoid such talk).

2. The promise, verse 5, is that each leader will receive commendation from the Lord.

Ex: Stunning, I'd expect to have my mistakes highlighted. No, commendation. The leader lives for that day because it doesn't always come now.

E. This means wise leaders do the following. Point two:

II. **Two, leaders hold themselves to the highest standard** (read 1 Cor. 4:6-7).

1 Corinthians 4:6-7 (ESV) “[6] I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. [7] For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”

A. In verse 6, Paul tells them that essentially he isn't a hypocrite because he has applied these things to himself and Apollos (a leader in the church must have godliness and integrity).

1. This will enable Paul to encourage the Corinthians to follow his example (verse 16). A church, over time, becomes like it's leaders. Leaders matter.
2. You want pastors who are genuine and more concerned about their own flaws.

Ex: Describes your pastors (Ben, Kirk, and John). I have watched them examine their lives, I hear their affection for you. They do not place heavy burdens on you.

3. Verse 6 has a key statement regarding the limits of pastoral authority and our spirituality. "We do not go beyond what is written."

Ex: A spouse, large purchases (house or car), how many kids you have, or clothes you wear, or where you work. We aim to counsel wisdom, but you apply the counsel you are given as you see fit. You are responsible for your choices.

4. If we go beyond what is written someone will be puffed up, and the result is a loss of the unity of the Spirit that is ours in Christ. Don't treat each other this way either.

Ex: Parenting choices (vaccines, food, schedules)

B. In verse 7, Paul explains that everything is grace (the cross gives us every blessing).

1. Everything we have has been received. Therefore, there is no room to boast about ourselves. Grace is amazing (I have received every spiritual blessing in Christ).

· Surely, experiencing grace, our hearts and lips are filled with gratitude.

III. **Three, leaders are sufferers** (read 1 Cor. 4:8-13).

1 Corinthians 4:8-13 (ESV) "[8] Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! [9] For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. [10] We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. [11] To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, [12] and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; [13] when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things."

A. The Corinthian church suffered from an over-realized eschatology. What is that? Expecting to find heaven on earth now (the kingdom is here and coming). You find this at work wherever there is pressure for miracles and signs and wonders. No cross, no weakness.

1. The church in Corinth believed they were special (pride and arrogance, they thought they had arrived). Paul wishes he had arrived, he knew that meant eternity.

B. On the contrary, mature pastors are willing to be mistreated.

1. I have a friend who refers to this as "sheep bites" (leaders are human too).
2. Leaders will encounter slander, being reviled, don't make as much money as other jobs, and are willing to be the scum of the earth. They lay down their lives.

Ex: It is appropriate to thank your pastors from time to time.

3. I have two heroes when it comes to pastors who suffer.

· Jonathan Edwards was fired for mishandling two situations (sacraments and a book that

involved youth). The vote was 200-23. He pressed on and wrote his major works after being mistreated (wonderful farewell sermon).

Charles Simeon (don't read all).

"The vicar of Trinity Church, Cambridge, died suddenly. The congregation wanted the assistant curate, Mr. Hammond, as their new vicar. When the bishop awarded the position to Simeon instead, Simeon faced serious opposition. The pews sat half empty because the people boycotted him. Simeon offered to resign but his bishop would not let him. After that, he sometimes found the church locked against him. When it opened, the pew gates were locked. Simeon set up chairs at his own expense, but the trustees tossed them out. For twelve years the congregation chose other men to give the Sunday afternoon lectures. College students interrupted his services and passed evil rumors about him. He was so shunned that he wrote with amazement when a fellow of the school was not ashamed to walk with him for quarter of an hour. In spite of this opposition, Simeon persevered. He preached directly from the Word of God, and gradually won some of the congregation to his side. Thirty years, later, however, he still faced elements of revolt... Asked how he had endured his many afflictions, 71 year old Simeon replied, "My dear brother, we must not mind a little suffering for Christ's sake. When I am getting through a hedge, if my head and shoulders are safely through, I can bear the pricking of my legs. Let us rejoice in the remembrance that our holy Head has surmounted all His suffering and triumphed over death. Let us follow Him patiently; we shall soon be partakers of His victory." *Church History Institute Website*

C. Just because there is opposition does not mean a pastor is on the wrong side. Moses was resisted, Jesus was resisted, Paul was resisted, it is safe to say leaders will be resisted.

1. What is the motivation to press through the hedge? Pastors are servants of Christ and Jesus serves us as an example. Leaders suffer as Jesus suffered.
2. Leaders live with one eye on the cross. They care about what God thinks and values.

1 Peter 2:20-24 (ESV) "[20] For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. [21] For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. [22] He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. [23] When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. [24] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed."

3. Christ is all. Leaders serve Jesus by caring for His sheep, His flock. You see what the man is made of when suffering comes (as in our recent SGC experience).

IV. **Four, leaders are fathers in the faith** (1 Corinthians 4:14-21).

1 Corinthians 4:1-21 (ESV) "[14] I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. [15] For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. [16] I urge you, then, be imitators of me. [17] That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. [18] Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. [19] But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. [20] For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. [21] What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?"

A. Paul had a position, and pastors have a position, but it is possible for mature believers without a position to

invest in others to help them along to maturity (they serve as guides).

1. But they aren't a father. What does a father do? What do faithful pastors do? There are two essentials in caring for the flock of God.

B. First, pastors and leaders seek to encourage (urge) as much as possible (verses 14-17).

1. Paul, in this case, not only seeks to remind the Corinthians of doctrine but he will send Timothy to remind them of Paul's ways in Christ (everywhere in every church).

- This life is filled with love, sacrificial care, humility, courage, integrity, godliness, purity, generosity, serving, and wisdom.

2. We are all called to godliness and purity in the church.

Ex: In 1996 Robert Bork wrote a bestseller titled *Slouching toward Gomorrah*. I think if he were alive today he might use the word sprinting. We love everyone but we cannot allow sin to persist. We cannot call evil good, we prep for the final day.

C. Second, pastors and leaders rebuke and correct when necessary (verses 18-21).

1. You want a pastor who will love you enough to care when you stray (I need this).

D. Faithful fathers both encourage and rebuke.

1. Jesus is called 'everlasting father' because through the cross he provides salvation. Jesus encourages, Jesus rebukes, because He has a heart of love. He is the father of our salvation. The cross is the central act in salvation history. That is where we live.

Close

A. To review, faithful Christian pastors and leaders are: 1) servants of Christ and stewards of the gospel; 2) examples; 3) sufferers; and 4) fathers.

B. Three thoughts and I'm done.

1. One, do you aspire to be a pastor (plant?)? A leader? This is a good thing.

- Here is your path (take up your cross and there may be a desert season in store for you): "It is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confession of sin, and much heart-searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold uncomplaining embrace of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but like Paul, by counting those things that are gain as loss for Christ. This is a great price, but it must be paid by the leader who would not be merely a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, on earth, and in hell." God wants to show such people how strong He really is (2 Chron. 16:9). But not all who aspire to leadership are willing to pay such a high personal price." Oswald Sanders quoting Samuel Brengle, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 19

- Be faithful in little, God often rewards with more responsibility.

2. Two, thank God for your faithful pastors (Ben, Kirk, and John). And thank them when you see them.

3. Consider a gift to SGC to help us plant churches and care for churches. Recent:

- We are planting a church in Croatia with Mario
- We are planting a church in Salem, MASS (Witchcraft Heights)
- We are planting a church in Jamaica
- We are planting a church in Frankfort (poor area of Philly)
- We are planting a church in Sao Paulo, Brazil (our region)
- And more (consider a gift to help us spread the gospel and build churches)

Pray

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