

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

"Best regards"

"So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 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 till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."

When you look back on your life, what's the most difficult thing you ever had to do?

I'm not asking you to call or write and tell me about it or to tell anyone for that matter.

For your own benefit, I ask you to reflect a moment on your most stressful challenge.

During my decades of listening to people, folks have shared test like the following:

- Many said that trying to live up to the expectations of others was a tough one.

During a crisis in his life, a skilled surgeon told me he really wanted to become a concert pianist. He went to medical school and became a surgeon only to make his mother happy.

His experience led to another difficult task.

- Forgiving those who've offended them extremely vexed many.
- **Others dealt with long-term chronic pain.** Some of my most serious early ministerial conversations were with a 40 year old man suffering a terminal medical condition; he kept trying to figure out a cause that explained why he had to die and leave his wife and young daughter.
 - Some felt the frustration in trying to keep all the commandments.

In junior and senior high, one of my most arduous tests was enduring long, tedious sermons.



During my senior year and first year of college, my most difficult task was convincing a girl named Norma to go out with me again.

This could have been me.

I also remember my terror when trying to officiate at my first funeral.

**Ever wonder about Jesus' toughest life-task?
Of all his assignments, what was the hardest?**

Some think that his superior intelligence and abilities made it easy for Jesus

They assume that the accolades, crowds, and cheering on days such as Palm Sunday made Jesus suffering all worthwhile

That day he certainly got a hero's welcome.

Yet Jesus also knew what would happen later.

Imagine that your state officials decide to honor you and publicly proclaim your worthiness.

Many of you may have received great honors.

You travel to the capital.

As you enter the city, crowds cheer you.

People ask for your autograph.

Young people run up wanting to embrace you.

Pretty nice, heh?

Let's add one more detail to our mix.

You can foresee the future.

Within days, the people hugging you now will demand that the governor execute you.

Would you still enjoy your acclaim?

Consider what the gospel of Luke says in 9:51:

"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He moved steadily on toward Jerusalem with an iron will." (Living Bible) Jesus knew what was coming.

Would you enjoy your parade?

With all this being true, I don't think Palm Sunday was Jesus' toughest.

In fact, **Luke 9:41 says that Jesus wept over the city as he foresaw its future pain and destruction.**

Jesus faced many vexing moments.

To continue the question, "What was Jesus most difficult task?" Would you guess Gethsemane?

Or Satan's early temptations?

On the cross when it seemed that the Father's face turned away?

Consider this text from **Philippians 2:5-8**

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a

man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Think of living where pain and death do not exist and where millions of angels serve you.

You look down on the universe you created.

You fashioned and named billions of stars.

More numerous than the grains of sand on earth's oceans and millions of miles distant from one another, the stars flame brightly.



You planned for many of those stars to spin off satellites or planets.

Near one of the smaller stars, whirls a tiny planet where you created life.

Using dirt from that planet, you made varieties plants and animals, and creatures called people.

You put those people in charge of the planet, and tell them to love and respect one another.

Yet most of them act selfishly.

Some of short-lived creatures become proud, arrogant, and spiteful.

Though mere dirt, many pretend they are gods.

Some people even resent you.

Lack of concern for others becomes pandemic

Yet, you take pity on them, love them and decide to help them.

Do most of us choose to help ungrateful people quickly and without hesitation?

Jesus' decision to leave secure splendor in order to live as one of us relates to our text:

Note the word servant in both our 1 Corinthians text and in this Philippians passage.

Christ, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

"So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."

In order to help mostly unappreciative people, Jesus came to this tiny planet, took on our form and subjected himself to our limitations.

Jesus served.

A few people welcomed him.

Some ignored and doubted Jesus.

Many hated him.

They took the life of the Son of God, who made them and came to help them.

Jesus served even his killers.

When Paul wrote Philippians, he wasn't simply trying to make a theological stmt.

He didn't argue or pontificate on God's precise nature as Athanasius did or the writers of the Nicene Creed or any other creed.

Paul pointed to Jesus as our behavior model.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil 2:3 NIV).

That's hard to do, isn't it?

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..." Be a servant and serve others.

Forgive those who offend and hurt us.

Love all people whom God created, whether we agree with their politics or religion, or share their language, color, or social status.

An unverified story about French King Louis XIV (1638-1715) tells of him ordering a coach to take him



somewhere. The driver of the horse powered conveyance arrived at the very last moment.



"I almost had to wait," the king commented.

From what I read about Louis XIV, he served hardly anyone but himself.

Some attribute the French phrase *L'état c'est moi* (I am the state) to the king.

Compare him to King Jesus, who "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant."

A French novelist told a story about a very prosperous woman he called The Woman of the Pharisees.

This wealthy woman committed herself to the poor people in her village—in a way.

She regularly visited them all, always leaving a gift—along with a suggestion that with a little more ambition and a little more thrift they could improve their situation.

This woman never left a poor family's house without making them feel worse for her being there.

She served a cause, but she didn't serve people as Jesus served.

Preachers often point to the stubbornness and pigheadedness of the religious establishment, who refused to accept Jesus as God's Christ.

He performed miracles and demonstrated God's power numerous ways.

As Peter explained: "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."¹

When he presented so much evidence, why didn't the experts accept Jesus?

If Jesus presented the right credentials, why did religious elites reject him?



At our home Lord's Table service last Sunday, Norma and I read from Isaiah 52:13 all the way through chapter 53.

That passage begins:

"See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted."

Despite this clear passage, not many folks looked for a servant then and few now value serving.

In Acts 3, Peter told what God declared through Jesus' resurrection: "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has

glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead."

As God promised in the *Old Testament*, he sent Jesus, as a servant.

Religious elites disowned His servant and killed the author (creator) of life, but God raised him.

During Jesus' ministry, it seems the Apostles James and John wanted to be chief apostles:

"When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said,

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, **whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"²

¹ Acts 2:22 NIV

² Matthew 20:24-28

Eleven times the *Book of Revelation* refers to God's people as servants.

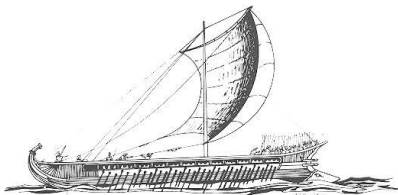
Before he met Jesus, the Apostle Paul attended school in Jerusalem training to be a fancy-robed elite to whom people would defer and pay respect.

He was quickly realizing his privilege ambitions.

Once Jesus changed him, Paul quit those aspirations to serve and become all things to all people.

In his letters, Paul used four different Greek terms to describe his new servant status in modeling Jesus.

- One was a bond-servant as in Titus 1:1.
- The second is sometimes in other contexts translated as deacon or minister, which originally referred to a table waiter (see 1 Corinthians 3:5).
- A third term appears in today's text "men ought to regard us as servants of Christ."



A few years ago, some scholars thought this term referred to an under rower as on ancient Greek and Roman ships called galleys.

The word more likely described someone who took orders from another.

That' how Jesus acted when he came as God's servant: "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

He came here to do the Father's will.

As in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to God: "Not my will, but yours be done."

Many Christian leaders speak instead today of "empowering" certain folks they regard as mistreated by society.

I find no biblical justification for trying to empower ourselves or anyone else.

Jesus expects us to serve; not to seek any kind of worldly power or to encourage others to seek it.

So then people "ought to regard us as servants of Christ."

As servants of God, we tell the Good news of Jesus' resurrection and that God wants everyone saved.

Praise God for His mercy and love in Christ!

How do your regard yourself?

Bob Blair
PO Box 176
Cleghorn, IA 51014

www.robertblairbooks.com