

## Good housekeeping: 1 Corinthians 4.1-8

*Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries.*

*Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy (or: faithful).*



When the children were small, we used to enjoy going to the Halle Christmas concerts in the old Free Trade Hall. The conductors and the orchestra were brilliant at getting the children involved and holding their attention. We watched in fascination as this young girl was invited up into the percussion section and given a huge triangle and taught how to go Ping! at the crucial moment in the *Sleigh Ride*. They tried it out and all went well, so the conductor said, Now let's do it for real. The music built to a climax — all eyes were on the triangle — but no Ping! She was too busy looking around and waving to her Mum, so she missed her cue. The orchestra (and the audience) dissolved in giggles, and the *Sleigh Ride* ground to an ignominious halt.

Only one note — but it was vital! And maybe that's a good way to think about the true significance of leadership. Leadership is one of God's gifts to his church. It's not the only one — it's not even necessarily the most important one — but it is a job that needs doing, a note that needs to be played. Otherwise everything grinds to a halt. In fact the orchestra is (I think) a very helpful analogy for the complexities of leadership. The “leader” of the orchestra is (usually) the principal violin, not the conductor. The conductor doesn't own the orchestra, or employ them — they are a body of independent musicians, working together in a partnership symbolized by the handshake at the end of the concert. And both are dedicated to working together in the service of the music, pooling all their gifts and resources — even if it's only one note on a triangle — to bring to life the music that the Composer has created.

So being a leader is nothing to boast about! But it's nothing to be ashamed of either. The conductor is no more important than the percussion player — but also no *less* important. And if she (or he) doesn't do their job, doesn't play the note that's been assigned to her, something will be missing: the Composer's creative

intent will not be fully realized. (There was a wonderful reality TV programme some years ago where celebrities had to learn how to be a conductor in 6 weeks, trying out their skills on some long-suffering orchestra. Most of them were incredibly humble about their own lack of skill in comparison with the professional musicians they were working with. But that didn't absolve them from giving a lead — if they didn't do their job, the whole thing fell apart.)

This is what Paul means by *faithfulness*: doing your job in the service of the whole, playing your one note in the living partnership that seeks to realize the Composer's creative intention. The analogy he uses is the "steward" (the butler or the housekeeper) in a big household — think *Downton Abbey* or *Gosford Park*. In any household, somebody has to do the housekeeping — keeping track of the needs of the household, managing its resources, organizing who does what. It isn't about ownership or throwing your weight around — but you do have a real authority, and your role is a vital one, making sure the household fulfils the purpose for which it was created. It's all about good housekeeping — faithfully supplying the household's needs so everyone can do their job, nurturing, encouraging, resourcing the work of God's Kingdom.

Building up trust is incredibly important for establishing a good working relationship between leaders and led — a real partnership — in a church (or a family) or any other joint endeavour. That's why Paul spends such a long time getting this established in his first four chapters. "Celebrity culture" (what Paul calls being "puffed up") means turning the leader into a crowd-pleaser ("I'm for Paul!" — "I'm for Apollos!"). And that's bad both for leaders and for those they lead. The church is not founded on its leaders but on Christ. But that means a faithful leader is answerable first and foremost to the Lord of the Church — the Composer of the music, if you like. And so is each and every member of the household.

I like Matthew Henry's comment on the parable of the faithful and wise steward at Matthew 24.45ff:

He is *faithful*; stewards must be so, [1 Co. 4:2](#) . He that is *trusted*, must be trusty; and the greater the trust is, the more is expected from them. It is a great good thing that is committed to *ministers* ([2 Tim. 1:14](#) ); and they must be faithful, as Moses was, [Heb. 3:2](#) . Christ counts those ministers, and those only, that are *faithful*, [1 Tim. 1:12](#) . A faithful minister of Jesus Christ is one that sincerely designs his master's honour, not his own; delivers *the whole counsel of God*, not his own fancies and conceits; follows Christ's institutions and adheres to them; regards the meanest, reproveth the greatest, and doth not respect persons.

God bless,  
Loveday

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