

2 Corinthians 4:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

Analysis

For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord (ou gar heautous kēryssomen alla Iēsoun Christon kyrion, οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον)—Paul's message centers on Christ's lordship, not apostolic personalities. Kēryssō (κηρύσσω, 'to proclaim, herald') conveys authoritative public announcement of royal decrees. Paul is herald, not hero.

And ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake (heautous de doulous hymōn dia Iēsoun, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν)—the only self-reference is as douloi (δοῦλοι, 'slaves, bondservants'). Paul inverts worldly leadership: apostles are slaves to their congregations because of (dia, διὰ) Jesus. Christ's lordship produces servant leadership (cf. Mark 10:42-45). This demolishes personality cults and celebrity Christianity.

Historical Context

Corinth's culture elevated celebrity teachers—followers identified with Apollos, Paul, or Peter (1 Cor 1:12). Sophists cultivated personal followings and charged premium fees. Paul's insistence on slave status for apostles and Christ-centered preaching was radically countercultural, rejecting the patronage system that defined Greco-Roman social relations.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How do modern church structures and celebrity pastors contradict Paul's model of servant leadership?
2. In what subtle ways might you 'preach yourself' rather than Christ—seeking validation, building platform, cultivating following?
3. What would it look like to be genuinely enslaved to others' spiritual good 'for Jesus' sake' in your relationships?

Interlinear Text

οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν
not **For** **ourselves** **we preach** **but** **Christ** **Jesus**
G3756 G1063 G1438 G2784 G235 G5547 G2424

κύριον ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν
the Lord **ourselves** **and** **servants** **your** **for** **Jesus**
G2962 G1438 G1161 G1401 G5216 G1223 G2424

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 1:24 (Parallel theme): Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

1 Corinthians 1:23 (References Christ): But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

Galatians 5:13 (Parallel theme): For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Philippians 2:11 (References Jesus): And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2 Peter 2:3 (Parallel theme): And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

Titus 1:11 (Parallel theme): Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

2 Timothy 2:10 (References Jesus): Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Philippians 1:15 (References Christ): Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: