

INTRODUCTION

The problem in Corinth is the people thought that they were so wise; they were intoxicated on their own intelligence. First Corinthians 3:18-4:5 says:

Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”; ²⁰ and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.” ²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. **4** This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. ³ I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ 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.

Paul said that worldly wisdom is foolishness to God. I'm reminded of the story of Dwight L. Moody, who was preaching one night, and a skeptic in the audience didn't care for his preaching. He sent a note by an usher up to Moody, who opened the note and saw there was only one word: fool. Moody looked at the note and said, “I've often received notes from people who wrote the message, but forgot their sign to sign their name. This is the first one I've ever received, where they signed their name and forgot to write the message.”

The Bible says that those who think that they're wise in their own eyes are actually fools. How did this problem express itself? They were dividing themselves in little groups, whether you liked Paul or Apollos etc. The traditionalists liked Paul, who had established the church. Then there were those who liked the polished Apollos, who was the young, energetic, dynamic preacher. These were sort of the yuppies probably in the church who wanted things to move ahead real fast. And then you had those that liked Cephas, Simon Peter. Now those would be the ultra-traditionalists, the Jewish legalists.

These divisions in the church were based around these preachers. The problem in the church is that they were worshiping preachers more than worshiping God.

I. THE REALITY OF CHRISTIAN JEALOUSY

There is the possibility of Christians being jealous of other Christians, dividing themselves up into little groups. I read the book by Joel Gregory, who was the pastor at First Baptist Church Dallas for about 21 months. And then he resigned. And that was the whole problem in that book...whether or not you liked Joel Gregory or WA Criswell who was there for 50 years and a great godly man. Then there was a group of people who were very supportive of Joel Gregory, and they wanted to make some real changes in the church. And because they were co-pastors in the church, it caused some terrible problems to the point where finally Joel Gregory surprised everybody by resigning from the church. Just as it was present in the church at Corinth, the same problem can exist today when people start paying more attention to the human personality than to the divine influence.

I want to give you some danger signs, because you can be misled by ministers. You can be misled by preachers. There are danger signs regarding any preacher teacher or spiritual leader.

1. Avoid anyone who demands blind allegiance

Number one, you avoid anyone who demands blind allegiance, who says, "You follow me and you follow nobody else." Beware of someone like that.

2. Avoid anyone who says that they are never wrong.

They are not infallible.

3. Avoid anybody who elevates one spiritual truth and neglects the whole counsel of God.

They only preach one doctrine of the Bible over and over again. And they neglect the whole counsel of God.

4. Avoid any spiritual leader who spends all their time attacking others.

All they do is tear other groups down. And they're critical. You avoid anyone like that.

5. Avoid any spiritual leader, any minister, any teacher who talks more about money than they do about ministry.

Have you ever seen some of these television preachers who preach maybe 10 minutes, then they'll beg for money for 15 or 20 minutes. You avoid anyone like that.

Certain preachers develop little groupies, you might call them. They like to follow them around and support them in many ways. I thank God for every preacher who preaches the true gospel of Jesus Christ. And you must be careful that you're not guilty of Christian jealousy. That was the problem in Corinth.

II. THE REASON FOR A CHRISTIAN'S JOY

1. All ministers belong the Body

There's a reason you ought to rejoice, Paul says. All ministers belong to the Body—all of the godly ministers who are faithful to preach the word. Billy Graham belongs to the Body; he doesn't belong to any one group. Chuck Swindoll belongs to the Body. So don't just give your allegiance to one preacher, and don't just give your allegiance to one group. All ministers who are true to the gospel belong to the body.

2. All things belong to the Body

Paul says, “All things are yours.” What's he talking about? As a child of God, you are an heir of all things; all things that belong to God literally belong to you. And what belongs to God? Everything! I heard about a group of people who went to Six flags Over Georgia, but they didn't understand what their ticket included. They bought their ticket and rode a ride. But they thought that their ticket was only good for that one ride. They kept looking around all day for a booth where they could buy more tickets to ride the other rides. And they never wrote another ride. They kept walking around, looking at all the rides, and watching the people have fun. When you buy a ticket to Six Flags, you get everything, right? Not just one but all the rides! That's true of a Christian. When you come into the Body of Christ, you receive everything that is a part of God. That's why it says the meek literally shall inherit the earth. And so that's the reason that we ought to rejoice and be glad.

II. THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A CHRISTIAN'S JOB

We wouldn't have problems with jealousy in the church if we could understand the role of ministry. Chapter 4, verse 1 uses two words for a Christian minister.

1. Servant

The first word he uses there is “servant” and it literally means “under rower.” Have ever watched some of these movies like *Ben Hur* where slaves are rowing in the lowest level of these old Roman ships? A big, burly Roman soldier is up at the front keeping time with a drum—boom, boom, boom, boom. There were two levels of rowers—and the lowest slaves were the under rowers. You had to graduate to become a top row rower! That's the word that Paul uses here for a servant, for a minister. You are an under rower. That means that we shouldn't be VIPs as Christians. We all ought to be servants, and we all ought to display a servant attitude.

You know, the other day our Bob Hogg went to visit one of our sweet ladies in the nursing home. She had a dish of peanuts on her bedside table. And Bob just started eating them as they talked for a long time. At the end of the visit he apologized for eating all of them. And she said, “Well, don't worry about that. My teeth aren't good anyway, so I just like to suck the chocolate off of them and put them in this

dish.” I tell you, that's one thing I like about Bob. He has such a servant's attitude! That's the thing Paul is saying here.

When every minister has a servant's attitude, there is absolutely no room for dividing up into divisions and groups in a church. One of the problems that we have in our church is the same problem many big churches have. You have some people who really support the youth ministry and others who think only the music ministry is the most important. They say, “That's where I'm going to put my money. That's where I'm going to put all my efforts.” Someone else feels the same way about missions. I could go on and on. The problem that they had in the church is a problem that exists in a lot of churches today where people are jealous for their own little area of ministry. Paul says when you have the right attitude, nobody tries to position themselves in front of any other minister or any other ministry. You take on the attitude of an under rower.

2. Steward

Verse two of chapter four talks about being given a “trust”—and the word there is “steward.” That's the second picture of a minister. A steward is someone who takes care of someone else's property. Back in the old days, a steward was an actual job in many churches. It would be like somebody who lived at the church who kept the floors clean, who kept all the doors locked, and kept the walls painted. It was his job to take care of the property. He didn't own it. He just took care of it. Sometimes when my family and I go on a vacation, we'll get somebody here in the church like a single guy or a single girl, to stay in our house. And we'll just ask them to take care of our house and to feed our birds and our cats while we're gone.

That's what a steward does. They don't own the house. They're taking care of it while we're gone. What do you think would happen if we came back after some vacation and walked in the house and there were beer cans everywhere? The furniture was turned upside down, and the windows were broken and everything was messed up. You think we would let that person housesit again? Verse 2 says God has entrusted certain things to us. We don't own anything he's given us. We only manage it. And one day we're going to have to give an accounting for what we did with what we were given. And so we ought to be a faithful steward the Lord.

IV. THE REWARD AT A CHRISTIAN'S JUDGMENT

Every Christian will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ at the bema, not the Great White Throne judgment, but the judgment seat of Christ. Corinthians teaches in another passage that the foundation is Jesus, and we're all building a superstructure of Christian service. We're either using wood, hay, and stubble that will burn up, or we're using gold and silver and precious stone. Paul is saying here that everybody is going to face judgment. I want you to notice three kinds of judgment that he talks about in chapter 4:

1. Judgment by others

As a pastor, I live in a fishbowl, and my family lives in a fishbowl. I realize that on Sunday mornings, when people go home, a lot of times they don't only have roast for lunch. They have roast preacher for lunch, or they have roast minister of music. They judge all the time, and verse three can be a tremendous help to any of us who are judged. (And we're all judged.) Paul says, "I care very little if I'm judged by you or by any human court." That ought to be our reaction to the judgment of others toward us.

He's not arrogant. He's not cocky. He's just simply realistic. He says, "I know people are going to look at me and judge me and criticize me." He doesn't say he doesn't care at all—only that he cares very little. I think what he's saying there is that you need to pay attention sometimes when people say something about you. Even in criticism, there may be a measure of truth. But I'm not going to let it determine the decisions that I make. I'm not going to go through life trying to apologize for everything I say and everything I do. Paul says he cares very little.

After Coach Bear Bryant died in Alabama, people said there would never will be another Bear Bryant at the University of Alabama. Then they hired a coach by the name of Bill Curry, who came from Georgia Tech. From the moment that Bill Curry became coach at the University of Alabama, he was scrutinized and criticized mercilessly. They threw bricks through his window. They threatened him. They criticized everything about him. Can you believe it? One of the things they criticized about him was that he always dressed so neatly. That was one of the criticisms. They said he always looked like he was off the cover of GQ magazine. I guess for somebody that only wore overalls all their life, they'd object to something like that! He didn't stay at Alabama too long. He went to the University of Kentucky where his wife and his children have received death threats. He's had to move his wife and his children out of state because of the death threats that he's received. All I'm saying is that there are some sick people out there who judge and who criticize and who take it upon themselves to evaluate people and try to do something about it. Paul said when others judge you, you should care very little about it, because if what you're doing in your own heart is right before God, you shouldn't be concerned about what anybody else says. If you are pleasing, God, it doesn't matter whom you displease. But if you're displeasing God, it doesn't matter whom you please on earth. So you've got to decide. Are you trying to please God, or are you trying to please man? You can't do both. Somebody said to me some time ago, "I don't know how in the world you can keep everybody happy in a big church like this." And I said, "I can't. I can't even keep everybody happy in my family, much less the church. There's just absolutely no way." And so you have to come to a point where you just care very little about the judgment of others.

2. Self-judgment

Paul says, "I care very little if I'm 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." Some people say, "I know myself better than anybody else knows me." You better be careful what you say. Have you ever made this statement: "If I know my heart..." Then you make a statement? We don't know our hearts. Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things, desperately wicked, who can know it? Paul says, "I don't even fall into the trap of judging myself because my conscience is clear." But he says that doesn't mean he's innocent.

"Let your conscience be your guide" is not in the Bible. Your conscience and my conscience can be wrong. That's what Paul is saying here. One of the mistakes that we make when we judge ourselves, according to 2 Corinthians 10, is to compare ourselves to others. It reminds me a boy who told his mother he was going to sell his puppy. She asked him how much he wanted to get for it. And the boy said, "I'm going to ask \$10,000 for it because it's a good puppy." She wished him luck, and he went outside. Later he came in without the puppy and said, "Well I sold the puppy." The mom asked if he had to come down on the price. He said, "No, I got \$10,000." She said, "You mean you got \$10,000 for that puppy?" He said, "Well, not really. I traded him for two \$5,000 cats."

That's the danger of judging yourself. When you judge yourself, you compare yourself to somebody else and you assign value. You say that's a \$10,000 Christian. And that's a \$5,000 Christian. I'm better than he is, but I'm not as bad as he is. That's the danger of self-judgment.

3. Judgment by God

Paul says to judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. Not only do you have to have the right one judging you, but also it has to be at the right time. Part of our sinful nature is that we jump to conclusions, and we judge things before the right time. We make evaluations when all the evidence is not in and all the truth has not been revealed. And that's why Paul says to wait on the Lord. Let him be the judge and wait on him.

Now, what is going to be the reward? We're talking about the reward at a Christian's judgment. This blesses me so much. Verse 5 says God will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. Now, what does that mean? That means that when I judge you, or you judge me, we don't know what our motives are. The only thing you can judge is my actions. And the only thing I can judge about you is your actions. But God judges the motives of your heart. He not only knows what you do. He knows why you did it.

Somebody could sing a song in church and we could deem it a beautiful song. The only thing we can judge is what we see and what we hear. But the Lord has the ability to look into that person's heart and to see they were singing so that

somebody would brag on them and think more highly of them. Or he can see if that person was really singing to bring glory and honor to God. We can hear somebody teach a Sunday school class or preach a sermon and think it was so good. But God is able to look into the heart of that preacher or that Sunday school teacher and know the motive behind the teaching. That's scary, isn't it? God judges not only our actions but also our motives.

The last part of verse five says the reward for a Christian is this: each will receive his praise from God. We talk about praising God, but the Bible says God is going to praise you, the stewards and under rowers.

CONCLUSION

It reminds me of a missionary who for many years had been serving the Lord in Africa unselfishly. And he happened to be on the same ship returning to New York City that Teddy Roosevelt was on. Teddy Roosevelt had been to Africa on a game safari and had shot a lot of wild animals. And so when they came to the harbor in New York, there was a hero's welcome. The band was playing. There were banners that said, "Welcome home." Now this old missionary didn't know that Teddy Roosevelt was even on that ship. And so when he saw the banners and heard the bands, for a moment he thought it was for him! Of course, the missionary was disappointed the moment he realized that the welcome was not for him. It was for Teddy Roosevelt. The president and his entourage left in a parade, while the old missionary walked off that ship with his only possessions in the world in two suitcases. There was a not a soul waiting there to welcome him home.

So the old missionary checked into a cheap boarding house, unpacked his suitcases, got down on his knees and talked to the Lord with such honesty that only those who've known him for a long time can. And he said, "Why Lord? I served you all these years in Africa, I never wanted any kind of reward. But why wasn't there anybody here to welcome me home?" And the Lord said to him, "My son, you're not home yet. You just wait until I welcome you home."

You know what God is going to say to those who have been faithful stewards? The under rowers and stewards? I think he's going to reach out his hands, and he's going to say to you, "Well done, good and faithful steward." And I don't care about crowns. I don't care about mansions, but just to hear God say to me, "Well done, good and faithful servant,"—that'll be enough reward for me. How about you?

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