

# 24ID3717

**1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5**  
**Some Judgments to Consider**

**Jack Abeelen**  
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Let's get our Bibles out and go to 1 Corinthians 3:18 tonight. 1 Corinthians 3:18. And we're going to go down through chapter 4:5.

Paul, on his second missionary journey, ended up in Corinth all by himself, really, for quite some time. He was running from everything that had happened in Europe. They got fruit and then got chased out of Dodge. They saw people get saved and then they got beat up and thrown in jail. And many times Paul got kind of passed along by his friends, just to get out of trouble so he could get away. So, with his friends hundreds of miles behind, Paul ended up in Mars Hill there in Athens and then came here to this very corrupt and very horrible, if you will, city, and he stayed for eighteen months. And the Lord appeared to Paul and encouraged him that He had a lot of people in the city, he was not to be afraid, He would protect him, and He did if you read the book of Acts. And we have a lot about the Corinthian church plant. You can see how the Lord worked.

Eighteen months later, Paul left. He would bring Apollos over to take the pastorate from him. Paul would end up going home and then, on the way home, he stopped by Ephesus and saw that there was an open door there. So, when he got home and turned around and got situated, he went right back to Ephesus, where he spent three years planting the church there. But it was while he was in Ephesus that the word to him came from - both by letter form and by visit - that the Corinthian church was having lots of trouble. They were in some spiritual dilemma. This was a very corrupt and immoral and idolatrous city. God had planted the church there, and yet they were having some trouble. Paul wrote at least three letters to them; one of them we do not have, but it is referenced in chapter 5:9. These two we do: 1 and 2 Corinthians. But they're all really corrective epistles that are designed to just encourage the church in their walks with the Lord; especially living in a world like the Corinthians that was just....the world had gotten into the church a little bit and in the hearts of God's people.

Paul started off with great encouragement in chapter 1, first nine verses. He basically said, "I know God has done a work there. I really have great hopes that the Lord is going to continue what He began, and He's going to finish what He started." And he took a very optimistic attitude by saying, "I have confidence in the Lord, and when I was with you I saw the fruit of His Spirit in your life, the wisdom, the gifts of God's Spirit. I know that the Lord is working." But there were a lot of issues, and certainly the Corinthian church was one of the weaker churches that we have the most information about in the New Testament.

And so, beginning in verse 10 and actually chapter 1 through the end of chapter 4, Paul focuses on this division that had come into the church where there were a lot of factions being taken one against another. And Paul started in chapter 1 by saying, "Look, how

did we get saved? How did all of us get into the church? And it certainly wasn't by following me or Apollos or somebody else. We didn't help you to do that. We may have been the vessel, but God's the One who saved you. And so how can we end up on different sides of the fence arguing about who's greater and where do we stand?" And so Paul, in chapter 1, just went to the cross and said, "Look, this was the door that got us all in, the sacrifice of our Lord."

In chapter 2 he then wrote to them about the joy of knowing God's Word and His power, and Paul said, "I had determined, when I got there, that I was just going to preach the gospel, wasn't going to rely on education" (but he certainly had plenty) "or big words." And he could have easily formulated them as well, very educated guy, but he came to just be simple and get out of the way. And so he began to speak to them about the wisdom of the Word of God and how the natural man saw it as nonsense but the Holy Spirit was teaching it to them, and they should be encouraged that the wisdom God had given them was far greater than the wisdom that the world had to offer.

When we began chapter 3 last week – the first seventeen verses – Paul then turns and says to them, "There are really three categories of men. There's the natural man moved by the world, there is the spiritual man moved by the Spirit," and then he added a third category, "there's a carnal man." And his definition was a carnal man was someone who knew the Lord but has been overcome by or has been leaning into those fleshly desires, and he's refusing to grow up. And as a result, he's suffering in every way. And that's exactly what Paul really saw the Corinthians as doing. They weren't bearing much fruit, they weren't going forward, there was just trouble at every turn. He said to them that they were childish, they were driven by their old life. The symptoms showed it: there was envy and strife and division. The cure, Paul said last week, was to set yourself aside and to begin living for the Lord again, to start pleasing Him.

Paul mentioned to us and to them that one day our works, all of them, would be tested by the Lord by fire. And he said He would test out what we had done with our lives. And the rewards – or the lack thereof – would come as a result of God laying bare the heart of those who had come to know Him and then looking at, really, what motivated them in their service. And so you could invite God's judgment, I guess. You could lose your reward if you went around the church doing what these folks had been doing, which was anything but honoring the Lord or servicing Him as a result

Paul, when he wrote to the Philippians in the first chapter (verses 15-18), said to them, "There are some folks here in Philippi that are preaching Christ out of envy and some are doing it out of strife and some have really good will. Some preach out of selfish ambition; they're not sincere at all. But they want to add to the affliction of my chains. Others do it out of love." He said, "I don't really care why the Lord's name is being preached; as long as His name is getting out there, that's fine."

But when it comes to the church and rewards, there is a definite interest that the Lord has that you have the right motive so He might bless you and reward you and use you in a mighty way.

Tonight we continue with Paul, beginning in verse 18, as he gives to them, really, a series of solutions for the divisions and the side-taking that had plagued this carnal church. And he puts them under three categories. He literally says, "You have to have a right view of yourself, you should have a right view of others, and you have to have a clear view of the Lord that you serve and what He has done for us." So we entitled this message tonight "Some Judgments to Consider."

By the time we get to the end of chapter 4, the division issue will be laid to rest, and for the next seven or eight chapters, every chapter deals with a different problem. So this church had its problems. Let's say it that way. But Paul loved them. He had seen the Lord plant them, and he wanted them very much to do well.

So let's begin in verse 18, where Paul continues, and he says this, "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness,' and again, 'The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'" "Let no man deceive himself." I think a lot of division and struggle in the body or among the saints will stop when people will stop being so impressed with themselves; impressed with their wisdom, impressed with their ways. Real unity, biblically, comes when we are able to submit to each other and to the Lord's wisdom and set the world's ways of life aside. To bring the wisdom of the world into the church, verse 18 says we deceive ourselves, we fool ourselves. And here's Paul's advice, in verse 18, "Become a fool to the world's standards of wisdom. And if you do, you can become wise in the ways of God. Or else we will just fool ourselves." God does not help those who help themselves. He will not bless you if you continue to live a life of sin. He's not impressed that others feel the same way you do. God doesn't really want you to harbor anger and bitterness and then pray for an answer to your life. It just doesn't work that way. That's the wisdom of the world. Forgive, don't get even. Love, don't hate. Place others before yourself. Jesus first. Man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things that he possesses. All those things are contrary to the world's wisdom. You're very much swimming upstream here as a Christian. You have the wisdom of God. But if they are true in the eyes of the Lord, then they should be true in the practices of your life as well.

So Paul starts this section by saying, "Look, don't fool yourself." And I've thought about that a lot. You know, self deception is not an easy thing to overcome, and you really only find yourself having a handle on it when your commitment to the Lord is such that you're able to say, "God's right and I'm not, and I want to know what He wants. I want to rely on His Word, I want to rely on God's Spirit to teach me and deliver me from it." When James wrote his in-your-face little book that everyone likes to be beat over the head by, he said, in chapter 1:23, "If you're a hearer of the word and not a doer, you're like a man who looks himself in the mirror and he sees himself, and he walks away and forgets what he's seen." Hair standing on edge, spit on his beard, make-up that didn't get wiped off. You just don't look good. But you looked in the mirror, "Yeah, that's okay," and you walked away. And James says, "That's the kind of guy that gets to the

Bible, goes to Bible study, sits in the Bible study, listens and hears, sees all the reflections of God's Word, and then walks away and absolutely forgets what he has learned about himself, warts and all, blemishes and all."

In the Old Testament, when the priests were to go into the sanctuary to minister, they had to first pay a visit to the brazen altar to ceremonially wash themselves clean. The altar was made of brass. Now brass was a judgment metal in the Old Testament. But, more than that, it was used in women's mirrors. It gave a good reflection, and it held water, the symbol of being cleansed. So a mirror reveals the outward defilement. The Word of God reveals the inward defilement. And every time the priests had to go serve the LORD, they had to look at their own reflection and realize that they really were only able to stand because of the LORD.

The Word of God has that double, I think, action of revealing and then removing. And Paul calls this young church to hear what God has to say about worldly wisdom and to say to them, "This fails you. Don't buy into the world's idea of wisdom. Don't be deceived!" And self deception dies hard, and Paul recommends that what we should do is become fools to the worldly wisdom, not have anything to do with it, and instead embrace God's Word and His ways altogether. That's a big challenge. But it was not happening in this church. They were all about the world's wisdom.

You know, five men (years ago) were murdered by the Auca Indians in Ecuador, who had gone there to share the gospel with them. And to be honest with you, most folks said to him and to them, "You are foolish. These are violent people. You'll never get anywhere." Jim Elliot, at the time, one of the five, in response to the criticism, wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he can't keep to gain what he can't lose." And he was one of the fellows that.....they killed him eventually. He gave his life for the sake of the gospel. I think Paul would have endorsed this sentiment.

And I like his counsel here. "If you want to be wise, become a fool in the ways of the world. Just tell yourself there's no solution here."

And in verse 19 and in verse 20, Paul quotes out of Job 5 and Psalm 94 to tell them that acting in the wisdom of the world – which they were doing with their factions and fault-finding – that it would just lead nowhere. Not leading to where you want to go. It only ends up in destruction. If you go and you read Job 5 and you read Psalm 94, in that context, that's exactly what they wrote and said. Job, very early on; Job was written probably in the days of Abraham. Psalms were written about 1,000 B.C. Now Paul writes this early on into the church's history.

The word, in verse 19, "catches," " 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness.' " In Greek, it means to grab ahold with one hand. It's kind of like you're not letting them go, if you will. That will just kind of hold, if you will, onto you and not let go. And the word "craftiness" in verse 19 is a word for unscrupulous kind of conduct. Jesus used the word to describe those who tried to fool Him back in chapter 20:23 of Luke, with those foolish questions. "He perceived their craftiness," we read. "He said, 'Why are you

trying to test me?’ ” Or, “What are you up to?” Jacob was caught in his dealings with his crooked Uncle Laban. You read there in Genesis 30-31 that he had changed his wages, and he served for fourteen years, and he said.....he was aware of his craftiness.

So Paul’s, I guess, warning to this Corinthian church was, “Look, the way you’re going to overcome these fleshly deals is, first of all, be stupid when it comes to worldly wisdom. But be very wise in the ways of the Lord. Follow His advice, His counsel, His direction because worldly ways,” according to these two verses, “will grab you and not let go of you and will produce in you a lifestyle that God doesn’t accept.” So why be there?

We read, here in verse 20, “ ‘The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.’ ” The word “futile” is the word for void, void of results. The thoughts of the worldly wise might seem logical, beneficial to them. I just want you to know God sees worldly wisdom as futile. “Hey, Lord, we came up with a new thing,” and He just says this, “Futile.” “No. Have You read the whole thing? There’s been a report, you know, the Harvard people....” “Futile.” “Really? How can that be? Because lots are doctors, you know? Wear the mask.” “Futile.” (Laughing) You know what I’m saying. You’ve got to go with God’s Word.

Verse 21, “Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours. And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” I like the “therefore.” As a result of knowing that the ways of the Lord are wise and the ways of the world are futile, instead of all that stuff, do this. Start with no confidence in men. No boast in men. And that was really one of their big in-fighting, wasn’t it? They had gathered around their pastors, whoever they liked – the past, the present. Paul, here, steps back and applies God’s Word to say, “Look, first of all, no man is trustworthy or worthy of boasting in. If you have someone in your life that God has used, praise the Lord for them. They’re all yours. Whether it’s Paul or whether it’s Cephas, it doesn’t matter.” I’m sure there are folks that you love to listen to. And then there are other folks in the church that you go, “Oh, he’s boring!” But yet God uses them mightily, just not with you. But, hey, they’re all accomplishing God’s work. What’s the common denominator? God’s Spirit, His Word, and the fruit that comes with it. I love a couple of teachers that I just.....I go to to read, to listen to. I like a lot of dead authors to be honest with you, guys who have come and gone, who seem to have a real heart for God’s Word. But there’s folks I love to listen to. And others, when they come on the radio, I go, “Oh, sorry, Lord.” KLOS, you know? And we’re singing along with the old Stones numbers. But.....but.....Paul just says this, “It doesn’t really matter whether it’s me or Apollos or Cephas or what you think you’re getting out of it. These are all from the Lord.” So, He’s the common denominator, not the individual, if you will. So change your focus from the vessel to the source. If they’re useful to your walk, thank the Lord. If they’re not, then move on. Because the Lord’ll give you good overseers. There’s a place that you can grow. There’s people that you can look to. There’s friends that you can have. But it’s the Lord

who does that. So, “Oh, I really like him, I really don’t like him.” Well, good for you. Thank the Lord that He’s using the likes of all of us.

So, how we love to be....you know, people tend to be around.....they love to be around the rich and famous, they love to be around people of worldly note. I went to see Ringo in Vegas a couple of weeks ago with my wife. Ringo Starr. He’s like 80-something. He had us doing jumping jacks to “*Yellow Submarine*.” It was ridiculous. Anyway.....there were 300 people in line that had paid some exorbitant price to take a picture with him. I thought.....well, I had a word for that.....and it wasn’t pretty. How dumb can this be? “I just want to touch.....stand by him, get a picture.” Look. We do that in the church. We should just honor the Lord, shouldn’t we? We should give Him a standing ovation. Let’s give Him time. You want to come in early to get a seat? Come in early just so that people don’t distract you. Sit where you want. But don’t do it for any other reason.

It’s just so amazing that when you get right down to it, everything that we have in the church.....that He’s the only One that has produced fruit in us. We worship Him, we praise Him, He’s our longing and our desire, and every man is just still a man. And that, I think, is Paul’s argument. Look, we’re the product of God’s work, not mine, not the worship leader, not the usher, the Sunday school teacher. God can use us all. David failed. Abraham failed. Moses failed. Calvin failed. Luther failed. Spurgeon failed. Paul failed. Feet of clay. It’s best not to glory in man. “Oh, I can’t believe if we get the next President, life will be different.” They’ll fail you! He will not. To claim Paul or Apollos, that’s kind of narrow thinking when it’s the benefits that we’ve gotten, we’ve gotten from the Lord.

So Paul says, in verse 22, no matter who, no matter where, no matter what, no matter when, all is yours in Christ for He is the wisdom of God to you, and because of Him, you can grow, you can find life, and one day you can join Him in glory. We have life now, we have life then. It is all good because of Him. So don’t forget – one person is not better than another. It’s just who’s God using to move you forward and who are you listening to that will help you to grow? We have a lot of churches in the area. There’s a Calvary La Mirada. You can throw a rock at it, I think. La Habra Calvary is up the street. Downey Calvary.....I used to work there, 10 miles away. Let me just say this to you. I don’t care where you go. Wherever you grow, go there. But once you get there, stay there, and suffer the difficulties, and go through the tough times, and unless there’s a doctrinal issue or the Lord says to you, “I want to move you to,” I don’t know, “Manhattan,” stay there. Find a place and serve. But God has a place for you, and He’s the One that gets honored.

So Paul was so disappointed that....you know, he was one of the guys that they were, “Well, I liked it when Paul was here.” “Well, you should see.....this Apollos, he’s very articulate, you know, he’s an orator. And Paul was kind of a bent-over old guy, he didn’t look really exciting. He used little words and.....” Yeah. But Paul was used by the Lord to plant the church, and Apollos is now watering.

As Paul was one of those chosen by the factions in Corinth – though he himself had not been there for quite some time – he used himself to address what naturally comes along with fleshly-sided side-taking exercises. Because if you're going to do favorites - if you're going to exalt the one that's - the only way you can do that is to downplay the other. You've really got to devalue or negatively critique the other. So Paul speaks to one of his favorite Christian pastimes.....or what Christians do a lot of time: they evaluate and they critique the ministries of others while defining his limited goal. And he'll say here in chapter 4, "I just want to be a faithful steward and please the Lord, and I'll wait for His evaluation rather than anyone else's," which I think is right.

So, verse 1 of chapter 4, he goes on. He says this, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Let this be your consideration, or may we leave this perception with you of ourselves; look at us this way. And then he takes some titles. Number one – a servant of Christ. He uses the word for minister (servant) the word for underrower. It was a menial, galley slave job, an oarsman who would sit in the bottom of the boat with the long oars and take command from the helmsman to row. He was out of sight, he was out of mind, he was just one of the laboring few. It was a dirty, sweaty job. Completely slave like. And that's the word that he uses here for servant. Rather than being better, Paul saw himself as one rower among many who would move the work of Jesus forward, who would get the ship moving. I sit on the lowest rung, I serve at His command, I seek no honor for myself, but I row with all of my heart to please the Captain. I please Him, I serve Him, I look to Him alone. Furthermore, he said, "I'm a steward." The word "steward" here, in Greek, is house manager. It's a word for someone who supervises the property or the holdings or the field or the employees or the financial oversight of a master. You might remember that Joseph was given that position with Potiphar, back in Genesis 39. He was trusted, he was promoted. He said to Potiphar's wife one time, "Your husband has given me everything. How can I not but be faithful to his trust?"

So Paul uses two pictures that need to be kind of taken together. A galley slave is at the bottom of the rung; a steward is really at the top of the rung. He is entrusted with someone else's possession. But both of those are important valuable insights because ministry, on one hand, is servanthood. We just humble ourselves and die to ourselves. And, on the other hand, God entrusts to us care of His saints, of the church, of the need to reach the lost, and it's a very privileged position. So we are servants, but we are also entrusted by the Lord to be managers or overseers.

Paul says here, in verse 1 at the end, "I am a steward of the mysteries of God." Now we've gone over that a lot over the last few years. In the Bible, certainly most of the time, the mystery that Paul talks about is the gospel of Jesus Christ and how you can be born again. That really wasn't made clear in the Old Testament, although it is referenced. But when the Lord came, and He began to talk to us about setting up His kingdom in our hearts, and that we would be the temples of God, that one day His kingdom would be upon the earth, but now it would be within and out of sight, primarily that was the gospel that was veiled or hidden. But when Jesus came, He was fully revealed to us, and the key phrase for that mystery of the New Testament, the mystery

of the Lord, was, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). So Paul was to be faithful to preach God's Word, a message that was entrusted to him to deliver as a servant who took his place before the Lord. Some ministers are not all faithful stewards. You know, there're a lot of churches people honestly don't get up and just teach the Word of God, and so they leave their flock, their church, undernourished. They don't have a balanced diet, they don't grow in the ways of the Lord, and that's frightening. An overseer is to share the truth from God's treasury, lead the people in the ways of the Lord for His sake. And Paul took this trust seriously.

Now he talks about the mystery of things a lot in his epistles. He writes to the Romans about the mystery of the cross. He writes to the Ephesians about the mystery of the church. He writes to the Thessalonians about the mystery of the coming of Christ. But here he's only interested in pleasing the Lord whose Word that he is willing to share. When folks criticized Paul and his style, he would ask, in a couple of places, "Have I not been a faithful steward? Have I not delivered to you everything that God has delivered to me?" You might remember his meeting with the Ephesian elders in Miletus on his way to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey. And he gathered the leaders about 30 miles outside of Ephesus on the coast. And he talked to them about having been faithful and not holding anything back, and one of the things he said to them, there in Acts 20:27, he said, "I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God." "I leave here knowing I've given you everything I have. I've been a faithful steward." And he was confident in the fact that God had used him to deliver His Word. But that's all he wanted. He said that in chapter 2:2, "I'm just here to deliver God's Word" because that's the mystery that now sets men free.

Verse 2, "Moreover," he writes, "it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." The main quality of a good steward is faithfulness, trustworthiness. You hand your keys, your checkbook, the care of your children to somebody else, you hope they're faithful. You better hope they are. God will supply His Word and His Spirit, but we have to be faithful to share it, to live it, to give ourselves over to it. And faithfulness is a quality that God alone can assess. You cannot assess the faithfulness of somebody else. There's a lot you can do with their behavior; the Lord gives us lots of guidelines about how we can make judgments in regard to those things. But the bottom line is only God can really determine the quality of our faithfulness, and we talked about it last week when it came to rewards. Have we been faithful to the calling? But fruit isn't the standard; faithfulness is. I think we mentioned to you last week Jeremiah went 50 years, had nobody get converted that we can tell. Reward for faithfulness. And I think I mentioned to you Jonah, who didn't want to go to Nineveh, was mad about it, preached with an I-hope-you-all-die kind of attitude, a million people repented. Was he faithful? No! Did God still use him? Yes! Will he get rewarded? I don't think so. But certainly Jeremiah will. So, faithfulness is the key. And unlike these carnal Corinthians choosing sides and leaders and allegiances and using worldly wisdom, they should know better.

So Paul speaks here, in verses 3 and 4 and 5, about three "*anakrinos*." "*Anakrino*" is a word for judgments or evaluations, and it all is about motive and intent. So he says, we should be careful about the judgment of others, we should be careful about our self judgment, and we should be aware of the fact that God is going to judge us. And we



will end with these verses tonight. Verse 3, "But with me," he said, "it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court." Now think about that for a minute. Paul's in ministry. He's got a lot of people who have an opinion about him. He's planted church after church, went to area after area, been in prison and beaten and left for dead, and chased down and abandoned. And then he says this, "I really don't care what you think about me. I really don't care what you think about me."

And, man, even at his best has a terrible time coming up with good judgment. Why? Because I can't see somebody's heart. I can see their behavior, but I don't know their intent. And I'll tell you what: the Bible would expressly forbid me to trespass into that area. That's His sole perusal. He alone can say what's in somebody's heart. God has never allowed us – and we shared that verse before (Luke 6:37) – to judge onto condemnation. Here's what God allows you to do: He allows you to judge things for identification, He asks you to have an eye towards restoration, and He tells you to pursue those judgments with careful self-examination. But you really can't judge to condemnation. I can say to you, "If you don't have Christ in your life, you're going to go to Hell." But I can't look at you and say, "You're going to Hell." I have no idea what your heart is like even if your behavior is something I don't understand. In Luke 6:37, Jesus says, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and it shall be forgiven you." Judge, and you shall judge not. I've had people throw that in my face lots of times. "How can you say that? Haven't you read the Bible?" Well, yeah, I'm not supposed to judge to condemnation. I don't have the final say. But I'm told in the Bible in a hundred places to make judgments. We're going to read it in a couple of weeks (1 Corinthians 5:9-12), "Hey, if someone says they're a believer and living in sin, get away from them. Don't have 'em over for dinner. Don't make it easy on them. Put them out of the church if necessary.....to get them to hunger to come back." It's a judgment call. Based on what? You'll know them by their fruits. But I certainly can't judge the long-term. That's God's perusal.....it's under His purveyance. Anyway, He's the One who looks at it. (Laughing) I'll come up with the word later.

I'm sure you have been misunderstood somewhere along the line or you've done the wrong thing with a pure intent, and it has brought criticism to you rather than encouragement. I think we spend way too much time being concerned about what other people think about us and very little time being concerned about what God, what pleases Him. And really – at least later on in life – I've learned it really doesn't matter what people think as long as you're pleasing the Lord. Not that you should be a jerk. You should be kind and merciful and all those other things. But, look, if you're doing the best you can, even if it's not very good, it's the best you can, and you relied upon the Lord. You know, we should be respectful and polite. But it's important to be sensitive to people and express yourself well, but you will never be able to stay the course with the Lord if you walk around all the time worried about what people think about you.

And Paul really says the same thing here, "I really think it's a very small thing that you would judge me." He had other things to be concerned about. You know, Job spent much of his time (in the book of Job) defending himself to his accusing, so-called

friends. Eventually he would hear from the LORD, and things would change even his opinion about himself. But if my conscience is clear before God, that's sufficient. Paul will say, here in a minute, "I don't know anything about myself that I'm ashamed of. But, hey, I'm not going with that judgment either because I don't know myself very well."

Paul's view of the opinions of his ministry and life by others is very succinct. He considers the judgment of others or of the world, and he calls them this thing, and I want you to see it: "a very small thing." Not just small, very small. Because our stewardship comes from the Lord, it is only He to whom we must answer, and that was fine with Paul. Everybody, by the way, has an opinion. Let me give it to you from my perspective as a pastor these last 40 years here: the church service is too long, it's too short, we need more music, we need less music, that music tonight was too loud (I'm going to hear that from somebody), or, I really liked them – you should have them more often. I'll get all that tomorrow. (Laughing) It's too cold in here, it's too hot in here, can we start at a later time, did you have to go that long, how come you quit already, could we have a different meeting day, who chose the carpet color, we don't really like it. (Laughing) Why don't you wear a suit? You used to wear a suit! No, you wear a suit if you like a suit. (Laughing) At some point, you just have to go, "I've just got to try to please the Lord."

I think I've told you about the lady that sat in the front. Well, I have two stories. They're both not nice. But they're both older women that sat in the front, and one night, I wore a suit, I had a tie on, and the lady kept saying, "That tie is awful! It doesn't look good." So I did this, "My dad gave that to me before he died." (Laughing) Now, he hadn't, but she had made me angry. So I took it off, and I gave it to her. The other lady – when I had my hair long, like long-long, like Russ kind of long – she'd say, "Get your hair cut, get your hair cut. You just....." So I brought scissors and had her cut it. And she did!!!! (Laughing) You really can't win running down those roads.

Paul says this – and boy, this guy was under the gun much more than all of us will ever be – the results of a pastor leading his sheep can be disappointing and ought to warn us to be supportive and, I think, prayerful for those who are over us. You know, Aaron tried to lead the people astray, but he blamed the people. Saul didn't do what the LORD told him through David, and he blamed the people. Not the people's fault, man, you're the shepherd. Go be a shepherd. Be faithful to the Lord, not the opinions of others. That will not matter very much in the end. Because I'll tell you what: when you go to stand before the Lord, you're not taking your critics or your fans. You're going by yourself. "Next!" Ahhhh. Now we'll see how we do.

In particular here, those who were showing allegiance to Apollos or another could really only do so by finding fault with Paul. "No, he's better than Paul. He speaks better than Paul. He's more intelligent than Paul. I can hear him better than Paul." They could only be loyal to the one without seeing the benefit of God's work as a whole, which is what Paul ended the last chapter with. So Paul says, "This is a very small thing, for man's judgment is faulty, and there is no eternal consequence attached to the judgment of man. It won't have any effect in the long run."

So he says this, in verse 3 in the middle, "In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord." So first the judgment of others, now self judgment. Now, look, self judgment, for many of us, misses the mark because we love those proverbial rose-colored glasses. Your sin.....no, let me put that another way.....my sin looks far worse on you than it does on me. If I see you doing something that I might do that is sinful, I say, "Oh, did you see that?!" If I do it, there's an explanation. (Laughing) There's a good reason for it. "I didn't mean to make a sign to this guy who cut me off, but, look, he needs to be told he's driving terrible." (Laughing) If you do it, "Ohhh, I thought he was going to be an elder one day." (Laughing) "Ahhh, he can't be an usher. He can't even measure up." It's what Jesus referred to as taking the sliver out of one person's eye while you have a beam in your own" (Matthew 7:3-5). There is always a tragedy when you are a person that overanalyzes everything you do. We know folks like that. Everything they do, "Oh, I wonder if I did that right. I don't know." It's terrible. But, on the other side, there's a real danger in seeking to justify your own position as we try to clear ourselves of our own faults.

Here's what Paul says, "I don't know anything in my life that I'm concerned about, if you will, against myself. My best and most honest appraisal have revealed nothing that I should be concerned about. But I just want you to know that's not any comfort to me. Just because I don't see it, that doesn't do anything good because I have had myself be way off the mark in terms of judgment more than once. Even sincere judgment." But then he says, "God knows my heart, God knows my intent, God is merciful and gracious. I can't wait for Him to come and point out what we have and have not done right." I can confess my sin and seek to improve my walk and then get on with it. If my best produces a mess, it's still my best. God knows me better than I know myself. So I will hopefully learn and press on.

What did Jeremiah write, there in chapter 17:9, about "the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.....who can know it?" And so the Lord tests the heart, He tests the mind, He checks us out. That's good. I would be and should be concerned with His judgment. But also I'm willing to relax and rest in His mercy because He knows that we're just made of dust. He knows our frame. I think the Lord is much more like a father with his little kids, you know? My youngest son.....I think he was about 5 years old or 6.....decided to bring me breakfast in bed for my birthday. On a tray, with milk and, I think it was cereal. He never made it to the bed. (Laughing) It just went everywhere. But how can you be mad? You know, he's doing his best. I think the Lord sees us that way more often than not. As long as you're doing your best, you know? God is gracious.

So our judgment of ourself.....you know, Barzillai, he was David's friend who had helped him when he ran from the uprising of his son, Absalom. He was such a self-deprecating guy that if..... you can read his story, it's in 2 Samuel 19. But when he helped David and came to his rescue at a time when David was really, as an old man, running for his life, he refused the glory that David offered him because he just didn't see himself that

way. And he said, "I'm a servant. I'm only doing what should be required of a friend." And he saw himself in an entirely different way than most folks do. But he was this awesome man of God.

So you have the judgment of others, you have Paul's judgment of himself, and then, in verse 5 you read this, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." So here's the Lord's judgment, and this is certainly the one that we want to be most concerned about because one day we're going to stand before the Lord. Paul wrote, in Hebrews 4:13, "There's no creature hidden from His sight. We are all naked and open in the eyes of Him to whom we have to give an account." "Be diligent," Paul will write to Timothy, "to show yourself approved to God, a workman that doesn't need to be ashamed, rightfully dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). At this time, God is going to do some probing into the why's and wherefore's of your life, and you should be preparing for that; not so concerned with what people think because what people think, if that guides your life, you're never going to get where God wants you to be. The Lord will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will reveal each heart. He's going to put on display whatever nefarious or worldly wicked intent was driving you or give you commendation, give you reward, and your praise will come from the Lord.

Look, people may not always appreciate you. They certainly can be intolerant and unfair. They can question your sincerity. But that is of little consequence. When the Lord comes, He's going to set it right. It's good to know, isn't it? When Ezekiel was prophesying, the LORD, in chapter 8 of Ezekiel, took the prophet into the very minds of the priests serving, at the time, in the temple. And it was filled with pornographic things on the walls. And Ezekiel said, "What is this?" He goes, "These are the minds of the priests!" and he went, "Ugh, this is why the judgment of God falls." He knew them inside out.

The Lord, when He comes, will reveal – notice – "the counsels of the hearts" - the motive, the secret agenda, the purpose behind your actions. Paul will later say, in the same book, "whatever you do, whether it's in eating or drinking, whatever you do, do it to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Why? Because that will be in the plus column. You're doing it for God's glory. Fires will come, the works will be proven, and the rewards will be given out. And that day should be worth waiting for. Let no man judge you until that day.

So, the heart will be revealed. The judgments of God will be made. The rewards will be based on what He discovers. So rather than allying yourself to men and their various talents, seek the Lord with a pure heart and wait till He shows up. It'll get rid of all of the division because we're all trying to please Him. Amen? Okay, let's pray.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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