

Servants and Stewards
1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5
November 1st, 2020

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. Do not _____ yourself – you must become “foolish.” (3:18-20)
 2. Do not _____ in men – all things belong to you. (3:21-23)
 3. Regard believers as _____ – they (and you) are accountable to God. (4:1-5)
1. How does the fear of man most often show up in your life? (i.e. when do you most find *yourself thinking about what others think about you*? When does that control you?)
 2. Review the following verses used in the introduction: Deuteronomy 1:17; Galatians 2:11-13; 1 Samuel 15:24; John 12:42-43. What effect can the fear of man have on people?
 3. How does 1 Cor. 3:18-23 reemphasize and bring to a conclusion themes that were first brought up in 1 Cor. 1:10-20?
 4. In what way should a believer’s perspective on the world, life, death, things present, and things to come (v. 22) change when we come to Christ? How are those same things discussed and addressed in Romans 8:38-39?
 5. According to 1 Cor. 4:1-5, why can Paul say of the Corinthians opinion about him that “it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you?” What principles in the passage can help you to care less about the way others view you and more about how God evaluates you?
 6. According to 1 Cor. 4:4-5, why is God’s evaluation of me more accurate than man’s judgment of me?

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Big idea: We (and all Christians) belong to God and are stewards accountable to Him.

Intro

One of the many things touched by sin is our relationships with others. In fact, that's probably one of the areas we see the stain of sin most clearly as we wound each other with sharp words, lie, slander, gossip, and more.

In those relationships we also tend to judge and evaluate.

Near universal experience of judging others in ways we would not want to be judged – assuming motives, lumping people in with others.

One of the most famous commands of Jesus, known and embraced (even if misunderstood) by those who wouldn't call themselves Christians is "judge not lest ye be judged."

Near universal experience of the fear of man – what do others think of me?

Kids wonder what their classmates think about them and often assume the worst. Adults wonder about coworkers or people at church – do I meet their approval?

It's no wonder that Proverbs describes the fear of man as a snare or trap

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.

It affects our ***judgment***

Deuteronomy 1:17 'You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.'

It causes us to ***compromise*** Biblical principles

Galatians 2:11-13 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. ¹³ The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

It leads us to ***disobey*** God

1 Samuel 15:24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice.

It can prevent someone from ***following*** Christ.

John 12:42-43 Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

In this section that spans the end of chapter 3 and first part of chapter 4, Paul points out yet again the folly of factionalism and the freedom of living for God's approval rather than man's approval.

1. Do not ***deceive*** yourself – you must become "foolish." (3:18-20)
 - a. What type of self-deception is warned about in this verse?
 - i. Other passages warn about self-deception.

1. Claiming to be without sin
 - a. **1 John 1:8** If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.
2. The effect of “bad company” on our character
 - a. **1 Corinthians 15:33** Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."
- ii. This self-deception has to do with the theme that has run through 1 Corinthians since chapter 1 – thinking you are wiser than you are.
 1. The path of true wisdom is to side with God, to view things God’s way, from God’s perspective, specifically in the context *about the church*.
 - a. There is a foolishness of thinking we can adopt the world’s values and infuse them in the church and not be harmed.
 2. But this comes on the tail end of a warning not to destroy God’s church or build His church carelessly.
 - a. DA Carson describes this as the folly of building a church on personality, speaking skills, positive thinking, smooth management, emotional experiences and not the repeated, clear proclamation of the gospel may lead to growing numbers but not a stable, resilient church that can stand in the day of judgment. That’s the fundamental weakness of the seeker-sensitive movement.
 3. It refers to a “wisdom” that thinks our persuasive words, wise rhetoric, or other values of the world can be used to “build the church.”
 4. That’s why we must become “foolish.”
- iii. The foolishness of God is most clearly seen in the cross.
 1. **1 Corinthians 1:20-24** Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? **Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased **through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.** ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.
- iv. We embrace the foolishness of God when we stick to the core principles of the reformation, that we are saved by grace along through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.
 1. 503 years ago Martin Luther famously nailed his 95 thesis to the door of the Whittenburg Castle, seen as a key moment in the Reformation. That spread throughout the Western world.
 2. Just this week I learned about how the reformation expanded into Iceland as German fisherman built the first protestant church in Iceland in 1533. In 1540 the very first book was printed in the Icelandic language – it was the New Testament. It took another 40 years for the whole Bible to be printed and translated. Lutheran churches around Iceland purchased copies of the Bible for their local churches for the same price of 3 cows, which might sound like a lot but a whole beef is around \$2,000 so 3 comes to a \$6,000 Bible. In the 16th century Iceland sent tutors around the country to teach the people to read so they could read their Bibles.

- b. Wisdom is waiting and available for each us! But we'll never find it if we reject God's views of the world, and life, and significance, and salvation.
 - i. Quotes from two OT passages that shows the impossibility of wisdom apart from God because there will be a fundamental misunderstanding about His world.
2. Do not **boast** in men – all things belong to you. (3:21-23)
- a. So then – no more boasting in men!
 - i. 4 chapters to make this point from several different angles!
 - ii. **1 Corinthians 1:11-12** For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's *people*, that there are quarrels among you. ¹² Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."
 - b. Why shouldn't we boast in men?
 - i. Two reasons – one before the point and one after.
 - 1. Boasting in people, lining up under people in a divisive way because they are powerful or eloquent or in some way looks good, is foolish. It doesn't follow God's wisdom displayed in the cross.
 - 2. All things "belong to you."
 - c. Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and any other leaders belong to them because they have been given to the church to build up the body.
 - i. These first three are the men already mentioned by name that they are lining up under in their divisions
 - ii. **Ephesians 4:11-12** And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
 - iii. You don't belong to them ("I am of Apollos") but they belong to the body of Christ!
 - 1. Now, in the very next section Paul will make the point that he is a servant Christ and a steward of the gospel accountable to the Lord, not them, so this isn't giving them some type of ownership or authority over these teachers.
 - d. These five things are sources of fear and anxiety. They have been described as the five tyrannies of the human life, things that enslave us, hold us in bondage.
 - i. World in opposition to God, full of temptation, strife, and conflict.
 - 1. What's wrong with our world? The world is so messed up! Etc.
 - 2. Romans 12:1-2 tells us that the world tries to squeeze us into its mold.
 - 3. We are warned about not loving this world.
 - ii. This present life holds us in its power if we live as if this life is all that matters so if this life disappoints or scars then there is nothing else to come.
 - iii. Death that looms always over the horizon line and can lead to fearful living, whether concerned about our own mortality or those we love. Death casts a long shadow backward (Carson).
 - iv. The present is full of uncertainty and pressures.
 - v. The future is even more uncertain.
 - e. And yet our sovereign Lord holds each of these firmly in His hand. God holds these petty tyrants in His hand (Carson). Christ is His and we are Christ's, and therefore these things are "ours."

- i. The world is made by our loving Father and will be remade one day without the mark of sin. We can delight in the good things He has made now and look forward to what it will be like when every trace of sin is gone.
 - ii. Life can be lived for His glory and our joy.
 - iii. Death is still the last enemy but it is a defeated enemy. To die now is to be present with the Lord.
 - iv. The present is an opportunity and the future is secure, unknown to us but fully known to God.
 - f. When we limit Christian experience down to which tribe we're in, which leader we follow, and we boast about it, our vision is tragically small.
- 3. Regard believers as **stewards** – they (and you) are accountable to God. (4:1-5)
 - a. As servants and stewards we are accountable to our Master.
 - i. The immediate context has specific application for leaders in the church, but what is true of leaders is true of all Christians.
 - ii. As stewards we must be trustworthy.
 - iii. **Galatians 1:10** For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.
 - iv. If we seek to please God above all then we are free to love people not fear people.
 - b. What others think of us is not most important – they may judge us incorrectly.
 - i. People do not understand your motives in the same way that God does.
 - c. What our own consciences reveal about us is not most important – we might incorrectly acquit ourselves.
 - i. A clean conscience is a beautiful thing and should be pursued diligently, yet our conscience is a flawed instrument.
 - ii. Tom summarized this well in an excellent message as part of the Men's Training on Tuesday.
 - 1. Our consciences can be
 - a. Defiled
 - i. **Titus 1:15** To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.
 - b. Calloused
 - i. **Ephesians 4:19** and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.
 - c. Seared
 - i. **1 Timothy 4:2** by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,
 - d. Untrained
 - i. Leviticus 4 – unintentional sin
 - e. Oversensitive/untrained

- i. Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8
 - ii. **Romans 14:23** But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.
- d. What is most important is what God thinks.
 - i. We're His stewards and it is required that we be faithful.
 - ii. He is the one who will examine us with perfect clarity.
 - iii. Consider an Olympic diver - As I watch from home, sitting on my couch, eating Doritos, I may have an evaluation of the quality of his dives. But they aren't accountable to me in any way. My evaluation is irrelevant. What matters is the evaluation of the judges. In the same way, our ultimate accountability is to the Lord not to other people.
- e. He will "bring to light the things hidden in the darkness." (v. 5)
 - i. This can be either freeing or terrifying.
 - ii. If there are things in your life that you feel like you have safely hidden from others, know that they are not hidden from God. That can be terrifying.
 - iii. But if you feel perpetually misunderstood, this is freeing. Or if you feel like someone else is "getting away with" something, know that they will not forever.
 - iv. The gospel is what can take away the fear and shame that things hidden in darkness will be exposed.



1

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Deuteronomy 1:17 'You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.'

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Titus 1:15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

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Ephesians 4:19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

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15