

So, we've been going through the book of Corinthians for the last, I don't know, couple months—last month and a half, something like that. And Pastor has been talking about how this church was in many ways a dumpster fire. But he calls them saints. And you know, when you read something like that, when you first start out, you read that, you think, "Oh man, this must be a great church. Paul's writing to this great church." And then you start reading and you get into chapter one, chapter two, chapter three, and it's like, "Wait a minute. This doesn't sound like the people he was just talking about. He must have somebody else in mind that he's talking to here."

We have a church that was divided. There was jealousy. There was pride. And we saw last week how he said he had to feed them milk because they weren't ready to take the meat of the word. And we're going to see further on that there's open sexual sin that the church is just totally turning a blind eye to. And then, you know, this all sounds kind of contrary when we think of somebody that's been called "saints." I think some of that's because—and I think Pastor might have mentioned this—how, you know, we're used to when we think "saint" nowadays, we think of Saint Peter, Saint Paul, Saint Jude; these people who are like up on pedestals up in heaven. And there's nothing in scripture that supports that.

But it's, you know, sometimes we hear things and we begin to accept them because we hear them so much. But when Paul called them saints, he wasn't trying to flatter them. He was reaching out to identity. And then Pastor mentioned this again several weeks ago about how they belong to Christ. And what he was trying to do was he was trying to establish identity. "You are a Christian. You are a saint. But you guys aren't acting like it. And here's how you need to start acting like what you are saying that you are."

So, we're going to look here in chapter four. Paul doesn't call them saints so they can stay comfortable in their immaturity. He calls them saints so they begin living consistently with who they already are. Basically, what's going on here in chapter three, he confronts their immaturity, their division, their obsession with leaders. They're boasting in men. Well, this guy says, "Well, I follow Paul." Well—and this just came into my mind—you guys remember when you had kids growing up, reading Dr. Seuss books? And you had the one story about the, was it the star-belly Sneetches or whatever it was? And these guys were glad because they had a star upon their belly. And this group was proud because, "Well, we don't have stars upon ours." And they were in these two groups, these two factions. "Well, we're better because we have it." "Well, we're better because we don't have it."

And then that's what we see going on in this church. "Well, I follow Paul." "Well, I follow Apollos." And they've totally gotten their eyes off of Christ and they're creating superstars out of these guys who are just there as preachers. And that's what Paul's going to get into later on. He's going to say—I mean, he's going to lower himself to almost the nth degree, we're going to see here. And in trying to get out of that, he says we're going to see here that they're servants and it's God that gives the growth. And I think that might have been in last week's message the pastor was talking about.

So, when we come to chapter four, it can seem like—is this too loud? Can you guys... it seems like it's too loud? Okay. Alrighty. But we come to chapter four, it might seem like he's changed topics, but he hasn't. He's just tightening the argument a little bit. So what he's going to start saying is, "If you're saints, this is how you should think about leadership. If you belong to Christ, this is what maturity should look like." And he'll remind them that everything comes from God. And if that's the case, then we have no room for boasting. So, it's something that's very simple. And basically, what he's saying here is grace gives us identity, faithfulness will shape our maturity, and humility will protect our unity.

So, let's jump in here into 1 Corinthians chapter four, verse one. He says, "*Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God*" (1 Corinthians 4:1). So he basically comes on and says, "This is how you guys should be thinking about us. We're servants of Christ and we're stewards of the mysteries of God." And he reframed this idea of leadership because the Corinthians were comparing preaching styles. They were elevating the personalities. They were basically nitpicking over preferences. "Well, I like this guy because he preached more charismatic." "Well, I like this guy because maybe he preaches out of this kind of Bible," and they're not worrying about following Christ.

We have any Ford fans in the room here? I might get myself in trouble on this one. Ford fans? Yeah, I just know what you're talking about. Okay. Would you follow me for a minute? Well, do you know why so many Hot Wheels cars are made as Fords? So, kids... I'm afraid to ask... so kids can get used to pushing them at a young age. I say all that to say that there's people I know that work there that they're like, "Well, my wife's got a Chevy. She drives Chevys, but I got a Ford because I don't drive anything but a Ford." We can nitpick and divide so easily, so quickly. I mean, think of Android and iPhone. I mean, we have that in my family. My sister's family, they're wrong—they have Androids. And we have iPhones. And people can get so nitpicky over the smallest of things that there's no reason to nitpick over.

And so Paul, basically what he's saying here is that as servants, we're not celebrities. We're not brands. We're not personalities. We are servants. And if we're servants, then we're under authority. It's no different than going to work and having a boss. I don't care, unless you're the owner of the company, more than likely, no matter your position in the company, you have a boss. The word that Paul uses here actually references the rowers. The word meaning "under-rowers," which is referencing the guys who, when the Roman warships would have the slaves underneath running the paddles. That's the word that he's using here. He is saying, "We are the people under the deck. We're not the captain up on top shouting orders. We are the under-rowers. We are the ones at the very bottom of the deck, so to speak. We are under the authority of Christ."

Then he goes on to talk about—then he says we are stewards. And a steward manages what belongs to another. Back in Paul's day, it was an understood thing that even if you were a steward, you were simply just one of the most privileged slaves in the house to be able to oversee everything in the house. Think about how Jesus has said that we are going to have to give account of everything that we do when the time comes. So, we are stewards. We are simply managing what God has given to us. Paul is trying to undo this idea of, "Well, if you're a minister and just because you're up in front of people and teaching, that man, this makes you some super kind of rock star." No, those people are the servants or the shepherds. They are the ones that are there to take care of the people.

When I became a team leader several years ago at work, there were people that worked there that misunderstood what being a team leader was. They assumed that it meant authority and that I could basically just sit back on my desk all night and say, "Oh, well, you guys do this. I'm just going to sit on my desk for the rest of the night." What they didn't understand was, as a team leader, I kept just as busy as them, if not more, because I was the one that oversaw everything and said, "Well, here's what we need to get done. But in order for you to get that done, I've got to make sure that there are certain things that you have." And so, I had to work almost harder than they did to keep everybody fed with the work that they needed for the night. And the same is true with our leaders and our churches, that they might be up in front of everybody, but they are still servants. They are still under authority.

Then he goes on to verse two. He says, *"Moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful"* (1 Corinthians 4:2). Not impressive, not charismatic, not widely followed, not—you know, you can fill in the slot A, B, C, D, and E. All that is required for saints is faithfulness. That is the metric that is required for us as citizens. But that can raise a question: If faithfulness is a standard, who gets to be the judge of that standard? Who gets to decide whether someone is actually faithful or not?

So that's where he goes on in verse three. He says,

*"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God"* (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

Essentially he is saying it is a small thing to be judged by the people in the church. He goes on to say, basically he says, "You know, I don't even judge my own self; it is the Lord who judges." Paul is not rejecting accountability; he is just rejecting the wrong courtroom, so to speak, if you will. You think about it, there are three different courts that we tend to live in around us. First one is the court of public opinion. And we see all the time people on social media will get upset at somebody, and so they will try to change public opinion about somebody because they don't like them, and they will either twist an action, or they will twist a phrase or something. It is a very powerful tool to use public opinion to try and get somebody condemned.

Then there is the court of our own self-evaluation. And I don't know about you guys, but I think we tend to be our own worst enemies in this area because we know ourselves, we know our own faults and failures, we know the high standard that God calls us to, and sometimes we just—we are very hard on ourselves. So these are the three courts that he is talking here. He says, for our anniversary, *"it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you"*—that would be public opinion—*"or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self"* (1 Corinthians 4:3). And then lastly we see the court of the Lord.

Remember when Samuel was called to go anoint a new king over Saul, and he went before Jesse's sons? And the first son came in front of him, and man, he was good looking, he was tall, he was buff, he was—oh man, that guy looks like a king. And he said, "Okay, let's get ready to eat. I found the guy." And God says, "No, no, no. Go to the next one." And he went through all of Jesse's sons, all six of them, and nothing. And he called them back again, and after he got through all of them, he said, "Well wait a minute,

are you sure we're not missing someone?" And who was it that God chose? God chose the little shepherd boy who was ruddy looking. He—I don't know what shepherds dressed like, but I'm sure he didn't have a fancy wardrobe. And God said, "That's the guy right there because I see the heart."

And so it is only God that can do the judging of the—and what we're talking about here is we're talking about judging the intentions of the heart. Paul says that, so what he's saying here, he says human judgment is small. Our own self-assessment can be limited. The Bible tells us that the heart's deceitful and desperately wicked. There's times when our heart will deceive us, and so it's not always—we can't always trust our own heart to say, "Well, yeah, everything's fine, you're doing good." So we know that the final verdict belongs to the Lord.

So, verse five he says,

*"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Corinthians 4:5).*

Because God sees our motives fully. We don't. But yet when I was going through this, I thought, "Well, now wait a minute," because—and we didn't mention it this morning—but many times when we're getting ready to have communion, a lot of preachers will say, "Well, no, this is a time of reflection," and then they reference 1 Corinthians where it talks about how before we partake of communion, we need to self-examine ourselves and make sure that we've got everything right before the Lord, before we take the communion.

So, do we ever not like—ever self-evaluate or ever quote-unquote "judge" things? So here's a couple of things: We do evaluate teaching, and the question that we're looking for is: Is it biblically correct? Secondly, we evaluate conduct: Is it consistent with scripture? And then lastly, we look at fruit: Is it producing godliness? And my grandma used to say, "Well, we're not supposed to judge, but we could be fruit pickers." You know, we can say, "Well, you know, well, this person says one thing from the pulpit or in a teaching situation, but is their life living that out on the sidelines, so to speak?" So we're not judging them the same way that God is. We're evaluating what we see in public compared to what we might see in a more private lifestyle. Because like Paul says here, God evaluates hidden motives. He evaluates the full measure of faithfulness and He gives the ultimate reward of commendation.

So, in other words, we judge what is revealed; God judges what's hidden. So we need to be careful that we don't do like the Corinthians. They were overreaching, not by discernment, but by prideful evaluation and ranking. They were basically—they were nitpicking the lives and saying, "Well, that's wrong in that person's life," and it wasn't necessarily a rightful evaluation by scripture. It may just be something as simple as, "Well, my preference is that person, and since they're not doing it, I don't like it."

So, throughout this whole context here, we see that Paul is lowering everyone. Remember, I said how he said, "I'm a servant. I'm the slave on the bottom of the row, so to speak." You know, as Christians, we are all slaves of Christ. Leaders are servants, stewards are measured by faithfulness, and God alone sees the heart fully. He pretty much lump sums up this whole context here, but truth should not make us suspicious—something like this should make us suspicious? It should make us humble instead.

And once we understand that the Lord alone sees clearly, it brings us to one more evaluation. And that is here in verses six and seven, that saints need to remember that everything is grace. So he's here and says here in verse six, *"And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"* (1 Corinthians 4:6-7).

So basically, he's saying, "Who sees the difference in us? What do we have that we did not receive?" What do any of us have that we did not receive? Now, there's people in here that make more money than other people. There's people here that are inherently smarter than other people. There's people in here that are more attractive than other people. People in here drive fancy vehicles than others. They have better standing in the community or whatever. But where did that all come from? And in this kind of question, it dismantles the pride that we can feel in our hearts, especially in the church setting.

Do we have talent? Where do we get that from? "Well, I went to a teacher and they taught me how to speak or they taught me how to carry myself out in public." But you still had to have had some kind of talent that was given to you for that. Where did you get that talent from? "Well, I got that from God." "Well, I have understanding," whether it's in the scriptures or I have understanding on how to do these kinds of things or those kinds of things, where did you get that from? "Well, I saw it on the internet." But I can tell you, there's things that you can watch on the internet, you're like, "I have no idea what they're talking about." To have that kind of understanding, you have to have that understanding from somewhere. Where did you get that from? "Well, I was born that way." Okay, how did you get born that way? "Well, I guess God gave it to me."

Spiritual gifts, where did you get that from? "Well, I went to a good Christian college." Okay, but you had to be able to absorb that somehow. And then again, back to understanding—"Well, I had the money." Where did you get the money to be able to go to Bible college? All along the way, we can see that these are things that we have received from God, whether it could be spiritual growth—I think of salvation alone. The Bible says, well, we were dead in our trespasses and sins, Christ died for us, we were the enemies of God, we were going the opposite direction of God before He drew us to Him and we got saved and became a Christian. So, we can't even boast in our salvation because that was received by God drawing us to Him.

And if that wasn't enough, the fact that it was a gift—it is a complete gift, there's nothing that we can do for it. Everything that we have, from salvation up to what it is we do in life, we have received from God to be able to fulfill that in some form or another. If that is the case, how can we boast? We can't say, "Well, I'm better than you because I have a star on my belly," or "I'm better than you because I don't have a star on my belly." We all got what we've got from God.

Corinthians, they were judging prematurely, they were boasting arrogantly because they had forgotten that grace was where everything came from. In chapter three, Paul says God gives the growth. In chapter four, he says everything is received, and when pride forgets grace, humility remembers it.

So, let's bring it all together. In chapter one, Paul calls them sanctified; they were set apart in Christ. Doesn't mean that when he calls us sanctified, that doesn't mean that we're perfect, we'll never sin

again, we never have a bad thought, we never say a bad word, never do anything wrong again. All the word sanctified means is to be set apart. Just like in the Old Testament, when they made the dishes for the tabernacle and they were blessed, they were sanctified, they were set apart, they were never used anywhere except in the temple. And the same is true for us: When we become a Christian, we are sanctified, we are set apart, we are only to be used for God's glory, for God's service, whatever it is that He has for us.

And of course, he calls them saints. In chapter three, he calls the same sanctified saints "immature"—the conduct did not match the calling. In chapter four, he shows them the path forward. He says saints are servants, saints are stewards, saints are not obsessed with human applause, and they remember that everything is a gift. We belong to Christ; that is what gives us our security. Now we are to grow into what we already are. And that's what Paul has been trying to do these last couple chapters is saying, "Hey, here's your guys' identity in Christ."

I don't know if you guys remember, I think it was the first week when the pastor had the slides of "Here's where you are," "Here's where you are practically," "Here's what you are practically," and I think it might have been our standing. So as a Christian, we become sanctified, we become saints, but that's our standing before God in Christ. When God looks at us, that's how He sees us. That doesn't mean that that's how we physically are; that's where through sanctification, through growing closer to God, that's how we now actually become physically what we already are in our standing position before God.

So, it says here in verse two, *"It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful"* (1 Corinthians 4:2). That's what we need to do. There's no bells and whistles, there's no drums, there's no flashing lights to it. Just be quietly faithful. And you know what? Sometimes God calls people to be up in front of people like He does with Pastor Dustin. Sometimes He calls people to stand in front of groups. I don't know if you guys remember, he was telling the story of Bubba, the guy that was the track coach that he didn't really teach track, but he was there to talk with the guys and he's the one that drew them closer to God. He was faithful in what God had called him to be, and we see the results in Pastor Dustin's life from that.

And I think we say the same is true in all of us, that the people that had the impact of drawing us closer to God weren't necessarily the big TV preachers or the radio preachers or anything like that. Sometimes it was just somebody who sat in the back pew of our church but was faithful to what God called them to do and made an impact on somebody's life. So, we need to be found faithful, leave final judgment to the Lord, and never forget that every good thing in our life is grace. And if graced, we have no reason to boast.

Let's pray. God, I thank You for this time to be able to go over these a handful of verses. God, I pray that I was able to articulate them well enough to be understood, Lord, and pray that You would just plant these words into our hearts. God, as a reminder that faithfulness is all that You are asking of us, God, and that You would help us as we go about our weeks. Lord, I know it can be easy sometimes to get back in the grind of working everything and get back in the schedule and stuff, and sometimes things can be seen as interruptions and "This didn't go with my plans." But God, if it's what You've put in our way, God, we need to remember to be faithful to follow You in whatever direction You ask of us. Lord, I pray that You would just watch over us all this week. Keep us safe. God, I bring us all back together. Thank You, Lord, for this great church, Lord, and the love of the people in it. I pray that You draw us all closer and our love for You. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.