

GAMMA 2017

STUDY 4

1 Cor 3:18-4 :21

SECTION 1: Learning to Interpret the Word

1. Read the verses 1 Cor 4:1-5 and can you determine what is the main issue at hand in this passage? Underline the words that are related to this theme in the passage. (Note: repetition of words will give us an idea of what the main issue is)

¹A person should think of us as servants of Christ and managers entrusted with God's secrets. ²Now it is required of managers that each one should prove to be trustworthy. ³It is a very small thing to me that I should be examined by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even examine myself. ⁴For my conscience is clear, ⁵but that does not vindicate me. It is the Lord who examines me.

⁵Therefore, you must stop judging before the proper time, before the Lord comes, for he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and reveal the motives of our hearts. Then each person will receive his praise from God. NIV

The main issue at the back of this passage is the attitude of the Corinthian Christians in judging Paul and comparing him, both his oratory and his gospel to other leaders. He seems admittedly inarticulate in comparison to the polished oratory of other speakers and unsophisticated when seen through the lens of the contemporary wisdom of the day. The Corinthians stood judgement over him and decided that he and his gospel lacked the credibility. In fact the prevailing atmosphere in the church resulted in the polarisation along the lines of leaders not unlike today's churches where people also polarise by following of leaders whom they fancy and judge to be eloquent and powerful.

2. What does Paul mean when he refers to the servant being entrusted with the secret thing of God, what is this secret thing? C.f. 1 Cor 2:7 what is its implications for us today?

The "secret thing" of God is His audacious plan of salvation through the crucifixion of His Son. This plan had formerly been hidden from all human knowledge hence the description as secret. Then the plan was revealed to us by His Spirit. 1 Cor 2:10

All Christians particularly leaders are entrusted with this one important thing the gospel of Christ and it is our faithfulness in the stewardship of this gospel that we will be judged and accountable to Jesus in the end of time. We will be judged on the accurate preservation and the faithful propagation of this great message. Not

just sitting the message and extolling its virtues and the beauty of the message as an end to itself. This is our mission this is our goal in life.

3. **What is Paul's conclusion as to who is the person who is qualified to judge the servant? Does this mean that we are not to judge anybody in the church and that leaders are not accountable to anyone but Christ? What is he advocating? Does this negate accountability to each other in church? Look at 1 Cor 5:12 and 6:5**

There are several reasons why Leaders ought not be judged by their church.

- a. Using the analogy of the steward or manager, Paul is saying that the Master is the only person to whom the steward is accountable to not to fellow stewards.
- b. Any kind of judgements they make will necessarily be pre-mature and lack the full picture as it is only in the last day of Judgement when Christ comes to judge that the secret motives of man will be revealed.

Scripture supports this view with plenty of passages where Christians are told not to judge each other. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:1—2). "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24).

However, there are also passage that talk about the need to exercise judgment.

In the same letter in 1 Cor 5:12 Christians are asked to judge the immoral brother. In 1 Cor 6:5 Christians are expected to be able to judge disputes between brothers within the community. Although Paul in verse 1 Cor 4: 3 says he does not even judge himself due to his own fallibility, in the second letter to the Corinthians he says "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Cor. 13:5).

There is an obvious tension in Scripture on the issue of judging each other. Careful examination of the passages will reveal however that the prohibitions against judgment is always within the context of a hasty premature judgement. The appropriate place of judgment is in a careful measured manner along Scriptural guidelines.

Thus the issue of judgement that Paul is against here is the kind of hasty premature jumping to conclusions about leaders that have arisen basically out of a wrong theology and personal allegiances to certain leaders thereby resulting in automatically writing off others not in the same camp. It is to this type of judgment that the Corinthians in their own air of superiority based on worldly wisdom has so hastily judged him.

4. In verses 14-21 what metaphor is Paul employing and to what end? Can you tell us why he is using this particular metaphor? How does Paul admonish the Corinthians?

Paul is employing the metaphor of the Father and child. He has to re-assert his authority but does not want to do it in such a way as to negate his current teaching on servanthood as the integral part of leadership. Thus framing it in the terms of the Father and child analogy he is able to convey both the sense of authority needed to correct a wayward child and yet the love with which such an admonishment takes place.

He encourages them to imitate him, he does not ask them to go where he himself has not been. Yet at the same time he promises strict discipline to those who would persist in their arrogance and not yield to his appeal as their spiritual father.

5. Can you share whether criticisms and backbiting occur within your church particularly toward its leaders and how we can all practically contribute toward negating this sort of ungodly behaviour?

Sharing on experiences

- a. Concentrate on our own stewardship of the gospel. What are we doing with the gospel in our own lives. Are we sharing it or sitting on it. Are we discussing it and debating the complicated doctrines as an exercise in oratory debating skills or idle speculations or are we studying His word in order to be so equipped that we handle the world well and are effective in our ministries.
- b. Stop commenting on the performance of others where it is not your business. The situations that require judgement in church are thankfully few and often within the jurisdiction of the leaders where they have to weigh matters for the progress of the body. The favourite pastime of many members is sadly to also weigh in on such matters often with only half the information and in hastily assembled conclusions. If decisions are made contrary to their own perceptions of things then these members start to politic and criticize and make things uncomfortable for their leaders. This has an adverse effect on the members in hasty unwarranted judgments and on the leaders placing on them enormous pressures to yield to popular opinion and not to lead as God would have led them.
- c. Stop criticizing leaders in public. Sometimes business meetings are conducted in a very adversarial manner, members with again very little details on certain issues will want to weigh in on decisions and delight in making their leaders squirm with difficult or potentially embarrassing questions. Apparently there may be some who just love the sound of their own voices and sound off they often do, not for collective progress, but just so their opinions are heard. Even outright accusations have been levelled in public. Members should learn to bring up issues for clarification privately in an effort to give feed back to the leadership. Leaders should also learn to listen to the members and gain

wisdom from their concerns and not ride roughshod over them. The instances where public criticism of leaders is thankfully very rare indeed and this will only involve issues where there is direct scriptural contravention and not on issues like what colour one would like the hall to be painted in.

- d. Seek to build up leaders

SECTION 2: Learning to Apply the Word

Case History 1

Robert Shuller writes

The core of original sin, then is LOT: Lack Of Trust. Or, it could be considered an innate inability to adequately value ourselves. Label it a "negative self-image," but do not say that the central core of the human soul is wickedness...positive Christianity does not hold to human depravity, but to human inability. I am humanly unable to correct my negative self-image until I encounter a life-changing experience with non-judgmental love bestowed upon me by a Person whom I admire so much that to be unconditionally accepted by him is to be born again. (Robert Schuller, Self-Esteem: The New Reformation (Waco Texas: Word Books, 1982).

Consider what Robert Shuller writes in the passage above

1. What does it imply about our own intrinsic self-worth?

It implies that there is nothing basically wrong with us other than the fact that we do not have the ability to adequately value ourselves. Shuller denies the idea of human sin and accountability to God for our own evil. Shuller has taken away the entire concept of sin and the consequences of it. He has instead inserted the idea of us having a bad self-image and if we just have to correct our self-image then we will be fine.

Let me illustrate this ...imagine a man is told by his accountant that he should cut back on his spending. The accountant has done the books and he has only huge debts and the cash flow of his business is looking bad. The man goes into depression. The man's wife instead tells him the problem is the accountant we should change the accountant as he is useless and only tells you bad news. Shuller is like the wife who ignores reality and encourages the husband to live in an alternate reality in which he can choose to feel good because he can believe he is still a very rich man

2. Is there a difference between self-worth and self-esteem?

Self-esteem is based on a subjective, emotion-skewed opinion of yourself. A little girl might be praised for being pretty by family members, friends, and strangers.

Heard often enough, praise about her can cause the girl to grow up believing that she is valuable because she is pretty. As long as she believes she is pretty, she will have high self-esteem. But what happens when she becomes a teenager and develops blemishes on her face? Her self-esteem is shattered. She loses the confidence she once had, simply because her self-worth is based on her appearance. For some, self-esteem is based upon achievement. When you meet the goals you set for yourself, you tend to feel good about yourself. When you fail to reach the goals you set, you tend to feel bad about yourself

The Difference between Self-Esteem and Self-Worth.

The problems with the concept of self-esteem are that:

- a. It is not Biblical, but developed in the minds of men opposed to God,
- b. It is based upon our own perceptions of ourselves and,
- c. It is subject to change.

Ideas about your value as an individual should not fluctuate with every change in your personal circumstances. You should not feel great about yourself today because you have just gotten a job promotion and then feel worthless tomorrow because you've been fired. Your looks, your achievements, or your material possessions do not determine your value as an individual. What others think of you or even what you think of yourself does not determine your personal worth either. And remember, [society's views of beauty are far from realistic](#).

It's time we dumped the idea of self-esteem for a Biblical perspective. Rather than striving for greater self-esteem, we should strive to understand our value to God. A clearer view of our worth to God will result in a lasting sense of self-worth.

Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." If Jesus was willing to leave His glorious place in heaven, suffer humiliation, torture and death, so that you might enjoy heaven with Him forever, then you are priceless. What you're worth to God never changes. You are worth the life of His only

3. Can you examine the bible and see if this view is biblical? (Jeremiah 17:9; 1 John 1:8; Romans 3:23)

Robert Schuller directly contradicts the Bible when he denies the wickedness of the human heart, for Jeremiah 17:9 declares, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." The Bible also teaches that Satan committed the original sin when he rebelled against God and His government. Regardless of how Schuller and others would like to redefine sin, the Bible is clear that "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). And none of us can claim that we are without sin, because 1 John 1:8 tells us, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Romans 3:23 affirms, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." When a person realizes this truth and feels his need for a Savior, he can turn to Jesus for salvation. To believe Schuller's lies is to forfeit God's gift of eternal life.

And while it is true that Jesus loves us even though we are sinners, He is in fact our Judge. Schuller may say that God bestows "non-judgmental love" upon him, but the Bible tells us that "we must all appear before the [judgment](#) seat of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Those who live in rebellion against God will have to give an account to Him. Amongst them will be many religious people who trusted in their own righteousness, rather than in the righteousness of Christ (see [Matthew 22:11-12](#) and [Philippians 3:8-9](#)).

4. What do you think will happen if we follow what Shuller teaches?

Let's take our example of the man and his accountant

Imagine a man is told by his accountant that he should cut back on his spending. The accountant has done the books and he has only huge debts and the cash flow of his business is looking bad. The man goes into depression. The man's wife instead tells him the problem is the accountant we should change the accountant as he is useless and only tells you bad news.

The man listens to his wife and goes out to spend even more money and feels really good about it. He is really happy until one day the bank comes in to call on all his loans and he winds up in bankruptcy court.

Shuller blinds people to the ultimate reality of the depravity of our sinful nature in such a way as to prevent us from taking the necessary pre-emptive actions and remedies to our spiritual bankruptcy

Shuller tells people they can just learn to feel good about themselves and they implicitly ignore their sin and spiritual peril until judgement day.

5. Do you think his writings have influenced Christian culture and churches?

This is what a pastor in a church recently told his members

"I decided that the pulpit was no longer to be a teaching platform but an instrument of spiritual therapy. I no longer preach sermons; I create experiences. I don't have time to write a systematic theology to give a solid theological basis for what I intuitively know. What I intuitively believe is right. Every sermon has to begin with the heart. If you ever hear me preaching a sermon against adultery, you'll know what my problem is. If you ever hear me preaching a sermon about the coming of Jesus Christ, you'll know that's where I am heartwise. It so happens I'm not hung up on either of those areas so I've never preached a sermon on either one. I could not in print or in public deny the virgin birth of Christ or the physical

resurrection of Jesus Christ or the return of Christ. But when I have something I can't comprehend, I just don't deal with it."

Look at 1 Cor 4:2 and discuss whether he is right or he is wrong?

What are the advantages or dangers of his approach?