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How We Regard Ourselves

1 Corinthians 3:18 - 4:5 (ESV) Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

So here we see there is a contrast, again the same contrast that we see in chapter 1 and chapter 2. There are two things here. If you look at it the issue is real wisdom. If you are from men's perspective clever then from God's perspective, you are stupid. If you are from men's perspective stupid, then you are clever in God's perspective. So everything is basically a reversal or inverse of values. Similar to chapter 2 of Corinthians you have got the natural person and the spiritual person, spiritual wisdom and natural wisdom as it were. Now how does he prove this. He goes back to the Old Testament.

For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

That verse comes from the Book of Job. There was Eliphaz inside that book and in chapter 5 he says,

Job 5:12-13 (ESV) He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success. 13 He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are brought to a quick end.

Eliphaz goes to Job and tells him the reason about his suffering that he must have done something wrong, you must have had some sin in your life. Same like some people try to heal you in a healing rally and suddenly you weren't healed and they say you must have done something wrong, your faith is not good enough. So it is your fault.

Job 4:7-9 (ESV) Remember: who that was innocent ever perished? Or where were the upright cut off? 8 As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. 9 By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his anger they are consumed.

So he is saying that the good guys never suffer, you must not be a good guy. Again God shows that this logic is wrong.

The second one is, [The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile](#). That is taken from [Psalms 94:11 \(ESV\) the LORD—knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath](#).

So all your loftier thoughts, most concrete ideas as far as God is concerned is nothing. So therefore if that is the case you should not boast in men. So the topic today is boasting. The word boast is called Kauchaomai or basically to glory in, to be proud of, to have your self-esteem filled with.

Where this started from

[Genesis 3:5-6 \(ESV\) For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he](#)

So the first thing that the devil tells the woman, you got to have the glory of God, you got to have the motive to be like God and rather than being following after God she would make up her own way, make up her own mind because said to her look at this tree with a fruit of knowledge of good and evil, you cannot touch. She didn't follow that, she had to make up her own mind. So she has a separate wisdom and that wisdom she falls on.

[Isaiah 14:12-14 I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.](#)

So in essence sin is like the woman having an independent thought and wanting to glory in her own decision, glory in her own mind, in her own knowledge. So if that is the case Soren Kierkegaard which is a Dutch philosopher said this

It is the normal state of the human heart is to build itself around something besides God. Spiritual pride is the illusion that you are competent to run your own life, achieve your own sense of self-worth and find a purpose big enough to give you meaning in life without God

So he is saying normal state of human heart is to build itself around something else other than God. So the problem with the church was they were moved by:

1. Entirely human drives
2. Self interest
3. Self sufficiency

Rather than spiritual motives. So here is the state of human ego which is like a heart, a big hole in our lives and we need to fill it and you fill it with all sort of things that knock around and causes pain

as you try to fill it because you actually cannot really fill it. All of us try to fill up our lives with our own self-esteem and basically the formula is performance versus expectation. So if you perform well people will look up at you and if you have high expectation which is bad if you don't perform. So basically what you do is lower expectation or increase performance that is what all of us do. So let's look at the performance you either compare with other people or you compare with yourself. We all do that and CS Lewis said, *Pride is something that is essentially competitive. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something only having more of it than the next person.*

It is because we set our standards comparing with other people, your glory compared to other people, so therefore the faster you run, the more people you beat then your self-esteem increases, your performance increases.

The other thing for the Corinthians is wisdom which they think is everything. So the cleverer philosopher they hooked themselves on, they group they joined on in church this will make them bigger than everybody else. This fills their self-esteem which is the cause of the conflict there. For the modern man, the more money you have more status you have, the better you feel about yourself. Madonna basically has her own standards. She says

But, then again, nobody works the way I work. I have an iron will. And all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy. I'm always struggling with that fear. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I'm mediocre and uninteresting. And I find a way to get myself out of that. Again and again. My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that's always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I've become Somebody. I still have to prove that Somebody. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will.

So here is a woman who has her own standards, it is like playing golf and because that standard can never be lived up to they are always been other standard to live up to she is then inadequate and she suffers in misery. So some people fill it with performance, some people fill it with fame. We live in a world today where you can get famous for being famous. So we fill human self-esteem with all sorts of things, but the word of God says,

1 Corinthians 3:19-20 (ESV) For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

The results of self-glory are that He catches them.

Human Wisdom

Friedrich Nietzsche was the one who first said that God is dead in 1883

God is dead, but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.

He is a start of the group of philosopher that said there is no God. The moment he said there is no God, the next century was the bloodiest century in the history of mankind. The first 2000 years of civilized history, war dead cannot even compare to 109 million people killed in World War I, World War II and all the wars in the 20th century. The moment you let go of God.

In our cleverness we change definitions. If we look at the dictionary of Nazi Germany, there are certain words there which a square bracket NS (Nazi Socialist Party). They put their own words to change the mindset of men. If you go to Russia after 1917 they actually designated certain people non persons. Once you call someone a non-person the next thing you have got no rights, you cannot get married, you cannot get food and they put them in Russian Gulag to be killed.

We now want to change the word suicide, suicide and self-killing is such a bad word so therefore it is illegal. So now people are trying to change the word from suicide to something else, so therefore then we can then condone our behavior that is what we are going to do change definitions of marriage. They want marriage now to be man and man, woman and woman. By changing definitions in human wisdom we begin to change the world but again the trouble comes and hits us again. So we can either increase our performance or change the gold post or decrease expectations. If you decrease expectation, it is basically self-esteem.

Moved into Christianity Robert Shuller did the same thing.

I don't think that anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality, and hence counterproductive to the evangelistic enterprise, than the unchristian, uncouth strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition.

When you bring the gospel to someone you must never tell them you are sinners, very bad, it lowers their self-esteem. This is the whole idea of self-esteem.

The gospel according to Judas, Ray S Anderson says

If our sin is viewed as causing the death of Jesus on the cross, then we ourselves become victims of a 'psychological battering' produced by the cross. When I am led to feel that the pain and torment of Jesus death is due to my sin, I inflict upon myself spiritual and psychological torment.

So according to him, you must never think that your sin caused His death, something else caused it.

The Sydney Morning Herald published an article [The generation brought up on self-esteem is struggling](#) Simon Smart 15/4/17.

The victims of this way of thinking are children brought up in an atmosphere of constant praise by parents who think self-esteem is more important than self-respect or self-discipline. Bewilderment, confusion, and (ironically) self-doubt come from unrealistic expectations and eventually the shock of hitting the real world where most people do not in fact shine more brightly than the other "stars" around them. A generation brought up on an endless diet of their own specialness appears to be

struggling with the hard truth that most of us are just ordinary. According to a survey by the National Youth Mental Health Foundation, reported last week in the media, university and TAFE campuses are reporting epidemic levels of mental health issues, with 70 per cent of students reporting high to very high levels of psychological distress. The reasons for this are complex, but many psychologists believe our prioritising of self-esteem based on the validation of others has taken a toll ...The self-esteem movement says you can find everything you need from within yourself. Decades of this programming have left many feeling deeply inadequate

There is a story told of a parent who just before when they camp, the son started to rearrange his room. He took all of his trophies on own hand, he put aside one big pile all of these trophies and on the other hand he did the same thing. The mother asked, what is the difference. The boy said, “these one on this side are all the trophies I won for actually being first, second or third. These are all the trophies I am going to throw away because they are just for attending.”

The young people whatever you tell them in the end they know the truth. They are just ordinary and this lowering your self-esteem or raising self-esteem does not help.

Glynn Harrison is Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry in the University of Bristol, UK writes

“The self-esteem movement spun the fantasy that questions of worth and value can somehow be uncoupled from questions of meaning and purpose. But despite the veneer of psychology, the core philosophical problem remains: how can the self be deemed ‘worthy’ simply because it asserts it to be so? On what basis? When you don’t know what you are for, it can be hard to believe your own propaganda about what you are worth. And why should you?”

So it is you cannot tell your son you are great or tell yourself you are great. 50% of people wake up in the morning and they tell themselves they are great and then they go to work and they think that this will make it great, not necessary. Glynn Harrison is saying that you cannot uncouple worth from meaning and purpose.

So what is happening here is that the woman is being confronted and telling you, you need to break meaning and purpose, you need to separate it from worth and value. So this whole idea of our true worth is based on basically what our purposes are in life. So therefore what Paul says,

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 (ESV) **21** So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, **22** whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, **23** and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

Very-very important. It is also in

Romans 8:37-39 (ESV) No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So the old days they have got the tyrannies of human existence, we are all trapped by the world, we cannot escape, we are all trapped by life itself, we are trapped by death, we are trapped by the future, we are trapped by the present, you cannot change the past. Everything traps you, so therefore you are a slave. This is called the tyrannies of life. Paul is saying, all of these things you defeat them and you actually own them.

The people in Jain religion can kill themselves. They do this in order to separate body from soul. They starve themselves to death in order to escape the tyranny of the world, the life present, future, death, everything else. But Paul is saying we are now victors, we are like the roman generals and the ones that are enslaved to us would be life, death, present, future.

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 (ESV) 21 So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23 and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

So therefore if you got meaning and purpose which is you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God, therefore you have worth and value. One aspect of your life cannot fill up your entire level of dignity. So whatever your worth must be tied up to your meaning and your purpose and when Adam and Eve fell from God they disconnected, they have no purpose. We are made in the image of God, we are made to reflect God, so therefore everything that you do that has got purpose and meaning is reflecting God. So whatever it is that brings value must be God.

“The Christian self-image is never an end in itself. It is always a means to the end of living for God, for others, and for the preservation and development of God’s creation. It leads us outside ourselves. It delivers us from the preoccupation with ourselves and releases us so that we may happily serve God and others”

So if we actually belong to God and our purpose of life is to be like God, reflect God. God pour his life on the cross for others, so therefore we can live for God we shall be looking at others.

When we feel our ego with things that don’t fit we will always be focusing on the pain in ourselves or when we look at the needs of other people rather than needs of yourself that is the way out of your ego.

How We Regard Leaders

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 (ESV) This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

There are two words here, Under rowers-huperetes and House manager – oiko-nomos

The leaders are called under rowers which is just like a ship in which huperetes are at the bottom. They have no rights. They are chained. House steward, basically in-charge of the whole household with accountability and delegated authority. So these two ideas are given to Paul and his leaders. This is how we regard them. They are in-charge of the mysteries of God, which is gospel. It is something that was hidden and God has to

reveal. So we are all stewards of the gospel, we don't have to be eloquent, impressive, well-educated but we need to be faithful and that is all.

Find Self Esteem in God

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

So first thing is that he rejects low self-esteem based on the judgement of others. So it does not only matter if I am judged by you or by any human court, but he also rejects high self-esteem build on self-judgment. Correct esteem is that the Lord is the one who judges me. Paul is one of the most influential person who ever lived. This is what he writes of himself

1 Timothy 1:15-16 (ESV) The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Paul is the greatest apostle who ever lived, he wrote 13 epistles and he calls himself the foremost sinner and this is in the present tense, it is saying I am still currently the most foremost of sinners. He sees his own sin but he does not connect it to self-worth or identity. Some of the problems that we have is that we see our sin and we connect it to our self-worth. The ego is related to meaning and purpose, if that meaning and purpose is Christ then your glory comes from Christ. Now if you look at your sin and the sin is connected to your self-worth then you have got a problem.

On one hand we are so valuable that Christ died on the cross for you and come alone the way for you and on the other hand you are horrible sinner. So therefore we shouldn't connect our sin with our self-worth, because if that is the case you will never get out of bed in the morning. All your sin is dumped on Jesus Christ and all your self-esteem is based on him.

It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

This is the thing that he is telling all the people who are looking down on Paul. They think Paul is ineloquent, Paul is a loser, he is not bright, he is not powerful, he does not do too many miracles, so therefore let's ignore him. But Paul says, it is the Lord who judges me. We can only judge a person if you know the purposes of his heart.

Romans 3:22-24 (ESV) For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

We are all saved by grace. So therefore this idea of performance, either you increase it or reduce your expectation we throw at a side as a basis of how we look and feel about ourselves when we wake up tomorrow morning.

C.S. Lewis says, *humility is self-forgetfulness*.

The best thing nowadays because the center of your being is to glorify God and have a God like character in you, the best thing is self-forgetfulness. If you forget about yourself that is called humility, not always talking about what you do.

Helen Keller says, *there is joy in self-forgetfulness. So I try to make the light in others eyes my sun, the music in others' ears my symphony, the smile on others' lips my happiness.*

If we have our self-esteem based on God who is our self-identity then you can start to look at other people, you don't look at yourself anymore, so when you don't look at yourself you become very happy, you look at other people. That is what Helen Keller says. You live to see the light in other people's eyes and when you do that you transform your life. Your ego is now filled up by Christ and when your ego is filled up by Christ it is not like a painful foot in an ill-fitting shoe, it is like your gallbladder. So when your ego does not hurt and you are not looking for attention all the time then you know you are basically looking that your ego is being filled by Christ. When you focus on other people you will never look at yourself anymore. So when people criticize you, if you are filled with your own ego you will be defensive because of performance or you will be devastated because of lower expectation.

How should we actually look at criticisms and commendations

We should look at all of them as ladders stepping stones to glorify God. So if somebody criticizes you and tells you what you did wrong. Then you can do what is right and climb up even higher and even glorify God. If somebody commend you and is right thing, I am doing the right thing, I must keep on doing more of the right thing. Because your purpose is to glorify Christ, so therefore you get yourself out of the rut.

Commendation or criticism becomes as a rung in order to glorify God. When you live this way, it is a much happier way to live. So he says,

1 Corinthians 4:6-7 (ESV) I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. 7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

We all have received things from God, so there is nothing to boast about.

SARCASM

He is now entering the mode where he confronts these people. These people think they are super spiritual, they are looking down on him. They are full of spiritual gifts, they can speak in tongue, they got prophecy all sorts of things and he is not quite so good and the worst thing is that they actually believe that they over-realised eschatology that they already reached the level of heaven. There are some preachers who talks like that.

1 Corinthians 4:8 (ESV) Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!

So therefore when we look at the rest of the verses on one side he paints the Corinthians, on one side he paints the apostles.

Corinthians	Apostles
You have all you want (v. 8)	We go hungry and thirsty (v. 11)
You have become rich (v. 8)	We are in rags (v. 11)
You have become kings (v. 8)	We are brutally treated and homeless and work hard (v. 11)
You are so wise in Christ (v. 10)	We have become fools for Christ (v. 10)
You are strong (v. 10)	We are weak (v. 10)
You are honored (v. 10)	We are dishonored (v. 10)

This is exactly reverse psychology which Paul is giving them that.

Apostles are first not because of rank but because of cruciform life

Super spiritual, sophisticated, have arrived. Succumbed to world's standards—calls into question their spirituality. Here is Paul Lowly, unimpressive, unsophisticated embarrassing message of cross

The apostles are first not because of rank but because of a cruciform life. Apostles have a CV full of suffering and that is God's eye matters, because when you suffer you suffer for other people. When you got all these gifts it is for yourself and God is not impressed and when we look at Corinthian Christians today and we look at the preachers that we have today. The richest pastor in the world has 155 million US dollars' worth. He is called Major Prophet Shepherd Bushuri. He actually works in South Africa. He bought his third jet in 2 years, worth 65 million.

So this is the Corinthian kind of pastors and apostle should be like that and this kind of Corinthian thinking has infested the entire church today, both in Africa, America, many parts of Singapore and Malaysia as well. But Paul's idea of true apostleship is a cruciform life which is basically hungry and thirsty, in rags, brutally treated, homeless, who work hard, become fools for Christ, weak and dishonoured. That is spirituality, not the fact that you have arrived. That is why he says

1 Corinthians 4:20 (ESV) For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.

This is the power to transform lives that people hear the gospel, actually come to faith in Christ and their lives are transformed. That means they become Godly, the repent of their sin, there character change. They are not criticizing everybody else, they are loving everybody else. The transformation is important.

I had a friend, David Watson, who was a pastor in First Baptist Church for a year many-many years ago. He comes from the United States and he was telling a story of him going to the people in India and he went to this village where they were all sick and he didn't know what to do because there were no medicines in that part of the world. So he went to the town and got some castor oil and starting rubbing on people's tummy and praying and miraculously everybody gets healed, as they became healed more people came to Christ, they started the church and as the church went on the number of healing dropped dramatically, no more healing and then they all came up to David and asked, Pastor David we all must be sinning against God, no more miracle'. David told them, "it is not the fact you are now distant or far from God, because the greatest miracle now that is a total witness to everybody is that one, this fellow use to be a thief, that fellow use to be a murderer, that one used to be a womaniser, that one used to be a prostitute and you can see all their lives being completely transformed."

To transform a life is a miracle and that is all the miracle that you need. See kingdom of God does not come in talk only, it comes in power, power for life transformation.