

1 Corinthians When Faith & Life Collide

Study 4

The Gospel and Self-Esteem

1 Corinthians 3:18 - 4:21

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

“18 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. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness”; 20 and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” 21 Therefore 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 things present or things to come—all are yours. 23 And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

Background

1. **What is your understanding of the difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom?**
2. **If we rely on worldly wisdom, we can only build our self esteem on ourselves. What is the basis of our self esteem based on the world today? (This is an open ended question - many different acceptable answers)**
3. **v. 18 says “If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.” What does it mean to “become a fool”? Does it mean we should forsake knowledge and wisdom we learn?**

- Hint for facilitators: Humility

4. **a) Based on v. 21, what would worldly wisdom lead to? Summarise in one word.**

- Boasting

b) Based on v. 21, the antidote is in the phrase “for all things are yours”. What does this phrase mean? Reference:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/all-things-are-yours> (Mandatory: Refer to this link in your discussion - under the “Looking at the Lightning” section)

- All things are ours
 - Whether it was Paul / Apollos / Cephas / Dr. Peter / John Goh / Kai Xian
 - They are all just your servants
 - Whether world / life / death / present / future
 - They are also just your servants
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- “When a sense of insecurity in your abilities, in your job, in your ministry, in your theology, tempts you to attach yourself to someone stronger, someone more competent, more esteemed, more gifted, more secure, don’t do it. You don’t need to do it, because all things are yours.”

c) If Paul / Apollos / Cephas / this world / life / death / present / future are ours, what are the implications? Do we need to strive to have something more than what God has given to us?

1 Corinthians 4:1-7

“1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 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.

6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

5. a) We are servants and stewards of Christ. What do the Greek words mean?

- Servants - Under rowers
- Stewards - House manager

b) Being “under rowers”, does our service need to be seen?

c) Being “house managers” of the Gospel, what would be counted as good stewardship?

6. a) What is the effect on our self-esteem if we based ourselves on the judgment of other people?

- Low self-esteem

b) What is the effect on our self-esteem if we based ourselves on our self judgment?

- High self-esteem

c) What is the effect on our self-esteem if we based ourselves on the judgment of the Lord?

- Correct self-esteem

7. As a Christian, what should our self-esteem lead to?

- A. Boasting
- B. Feel better about ourselves
- C. A means to live for God
- D. Confidence in meeting others
- E. A means to live for others
- F. A means to live for self
- G. Lead us more into ourselves
- H. Lead us more outside ourselves
- I. To serve God and others

8. a) As a saved believer, should we connect our sin to our self worth or our identity?
Why or why not?

b) What is our self worth / identity based on?

9. Should we boast in our spiritual gifts? Why or why not?

- Our gifts were given, not earned, so no basis for boasting

1 Corinthians 4:8-13

“8 You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you! 9 For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”

10. Paul sarcastically tells the Corinthians what they have. What was he rebuking the Corinthians about?

- Paul was criticising them for their worldly attitudes

- He was criticising them for boasting in their worldly wisdom

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

“14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. 15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you, imitate

me. 17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

18 Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. 20 For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. 21 What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?"

11. 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 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.

Takeaway

- A. Worldly wisdom is futile and we should not build our self esteem on it
- B. We should have the Humility to know that God's wisdom is greater than the world's wisdom
- C. We should not boast in men, but only in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31)
- D. There is no need to strive to prove ourselves "for all things are ours"
- E. Our self-esteem should be based on the Lord's judgment, not others or self-judgment
- F. Our self-esteem should lead us to serve God and serve others (outside ourselves)

Case Study

Case 1 – Self-Esteem?

[The following excerpt is false teaching - consider the reason why.]

Robert Schuller 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).

Summary: The only thing wrong with us is our inability to correctly value ourselves, not that we are wicked.

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. Schuller denies the idea of human sin and accountability to God for our own evil. Schuller 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.
- An illustration ...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. Schuller 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 Son.

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 Schuller 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.
- Schuller 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 preemptive actions and remedies to our spiritual bankruptcy. Schuller tells people they can just learn to feel good about themselves and they implicitly ignore their sin and spiritual peril until judgement day.