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1 Corinthians

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. 1 Corinthians 4:3

Verse 3 begins with "but" to indicate a contrast in what he just said about being "found faithful" in the previous verse. In Paul's eyes, "it is a very small thing that" he should be judged by anyone except the true Judge of all righteous deeds and actions. The idea of being "judged" here implies the examination one would go through preliminary to a trial being held.

Speaking to those in Corinth, to him being found in this state had absolutely no importance at all when coming from "you or by a human court." He had already found them worldly and carnal and so noted it to them in the preceding chapter (see 1 Corinthians 3:3, 4). They had divided allegiances between individual teachers and were not focused on Christ. If this was so (and he showed them that it was), then any such inspection of his work by them would ultimately be irrelevant.

What should be noted is that the term "human court" is the Greek *anthrōpinēs hēmeras* - man's day; meaning the time from sunrise to sunset. It is translated as "court" because Paul is contrasting "the day of man" to the "Day of the Lord." This sentiment is seen in 1 Corinthians 3:13 -

"...each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is."

The brevity of human life and the lowliness of our knowledge in comparison to that of God finds man insufficient to make accurate and reasonable judgments concerning such awesome matters as Paul was blessed to impart by God's Spirit.

And so this wasn't just the case with those in Corinth, but with any human court. If a human court were to make an investigation into Paul's imparting of "the mysteries of God" which he spoke of in 4:1, they could never correctly investigate the matter anyway. Such information and revelation would be beyond a human court's ability to properly discern. And to prove this he continues on with words concerning himself.

He was so sure that such an investigation would come up short, that he exclaimed, "In fact, I do not even judge myself." In his words, instead of the word *krino* - judge, he uses the term *ankrino* - examine. In other words, he is unable to examine these things himself, even though they were relayed through him. The mysteries of God were revealed to him by the Spirit of God. As he is a creature created by God, how could he examine something which was of a higher Source than himself? It would be impossible!

As the Pulpit Commentary notes, This "verse discourages all morbid self introspection. It also shows that St. Paul is not arrogantly proclaiming himself superior to the opinion of the Corinthians, but is pointing out the necessary inadequacy of all human judgments." He, like they, was wholly unqualified to judge such high spiritual matters through earthly investigations.

Life application: Because the Bible is surely the word of God, having validated itself throughout history - both internally and externally, we must accept what has been received without judgment upon it. We are insufficient to judge what God has spoken. We may find it difficult, not suited to our taste in certain areas, or contrary to what we desire, but we must never attempt to find fault in it. God is God and God has spoken. Let us accept His word as it is written.

For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 1 Corinthians 4:4

The sense of this verse is hard to understand in some translations. However, the NIV does a good job of it -

"My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me."

Paul, speaking of his work as an apostle, and in his ministerial duties in handling the mysteries of God (see verse 1 for context), felt convinced that he had done and was doing his best in presenting it to properly. However, he acknowledged that just because he "felt" he had a clear conscience in no way implied that he was without guilt in the matter.

This verse is an important one in presenting to us, and the world at large, the fact that guilt has nothing to do with how we perceive our standing before God. We may be (and are because of the fall of man) guilty of an offense against God whether we realize it or not. This is no different than turning onto a road with a 35 mile-per-hour limit and going 45 even though we saw no sign at the point where we turned onto it. Ignorance of the law is no excuse and feelings of innocence are irrelevant. This is similar then to what Job said during his discussions. But in the end, he found that what he thought was correct was faulty -

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go;
My heart shall not reproach *me* as long as I live. Job 27:6

Paul understood that God is sovereign and that if he had done something wrong in his gospel ministry, even unknowingly, he bore the responsibility for his actions. In the end, he states his affirmation that "He who judges me is the Lord." We are His subjects and to Him we are accountable. Therefore, doctrine really does matter. People who dismiss this precept and arrogantly state that "doctrine doesn't matter" will face much loss at the judgment seat of Christ.

The Bible is a book of doctrine and it has been given to us for our learning, guidance, and instruction. When we fail to handle it properly, we are offending God who gave it.

Life application: Better to spend your time with your nose in the Bible in expectation of approval before Christ, than to ignorantly walk through your Christian life, hoping for a light sentence at the judgment of rewards and losses on that great Day.

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. 1 Corinthians 4:5

Paul has been speaking of matters of doctrine and he is continuing on in this regard. It is similar to what Jesus said in one of the most misapplied verses in all of Scripture, Matthew 7:1, 2 -

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Jesus was not implying that we weren't to make judgments against others on matters of morals, ethics, or adherence to the word of God. In fact, within just a few short sentences of His words, he noted to us that we are to be firm and steadfast in making right moral judgments. Paul cites a similar thought in Romans 2:1 -

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things."

Our judgments and our decisions are to be based on what God decides rather than on our own perverse machinations. Understanding this, Paul begins with "therefore." This is given in anticipation of us returning to see why he will now state what he states. He just finished indicating his belief in his innocence concerning proper doctrine, but just because he felt innocent, it didn't mean he actually was. Instead, the Lord would determine that.

Because of his uncertainty in this matter, even though he felt convinced, he now adds to that thought by saying "judge nothing before the time." Again, this isn't asking us to not make right judgments but to exercise care in our determination of why someone is taking a particular course of action. A good example of this is when Jesus sat and spoke with prostitutes and other "sinners." If one were to judge by mere appearances, they would think He was like them because of His association with them. However, the appearances would be faulty.

In like manner, Paul made his presentations, Apollos made his, and Peter made his. Divisions arose among those in Corinth based on who they approved of, but in fact all three were working towards the same end. Making such limited judgments only caused harm, not edification. In the end, each will receive his reward when "the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveals the counsels of the hearts."

These two thoughts parallel each other. "The hidden things of darkness" are those things we conceal. What we may put forth as our motivation for a deed may actually not be at all what truly motivates us. The "counsels of the heart" refers to this same concept. Our heart directs us, it guides our emotions and our desires, and it is what we cannot search out in another, only the Lord can (as the Bible shows numerous times and in both testaments.)

And so it is the Lord who will do the searching and it is the Lord who will judge us for rewards and losses. At that time "each one's praise will come from God." This word "praise" is from the Greek *epainos* and denotes the idea of a reward which is due. When the Lord does His great search of our hearts, motivations, and doctrine, He will pronounce the sentence fairly and with justice based on that.

Life application: Truly, we cannot know the motivations behind the actions of another. At times we might feel certain, but in the end we may actually be proven wrong. Therefore, let us withhold such judgments, allowing the Lord to do His work without our prior interference.

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.

1 Corinthians 4:6

"Now these things" is referring to everything from a certain point in his writings thus far. In other words, the context of everything that has been analyzed from that point has dealt with the same issue. This is important to understand, because many of the verses between that starting point and where Paul is now have been used incorrectly over the ages as "stand-alone" verses to establish doctrine contrary to what is intended by Paul. These have been addressed individually as they have come up, and Paul's words here now confirm the context of this continuously running thought.

He goes on with "brethren." Again, he notes that his words are addressed to believers, not unbelievers. What he has been communicating then is doctrine for already saved people.

"I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes" shows us that the starting point for the context of Paul's discourse is the introduction of whatever issue involved both Paul and Apollos. This takes us all the way back to chapter 1 verse 12 where Apollos is first mentioned. And that verse included everything back to verse 1:10 which was speaking of "divisions."

Considering this, we see that the proper context of Paul's entire discourse thus far has been that of internal divisions within the church. One can truly see the need for applying proper context when evaluating Scripture by looking at Paul's words here which are noted as "for your sakes." They are words and examples given to

the church for edification. They have been a continuous thought which has been figuratively applied to Apollos and himself.

And the reason for this... how important is his next statement! "That you may learn to not think beyond what is written." How different Christianity would be today if people took the time to read their Bibles and then apply proper context as they study. Some churches are very legalistic, some are far too liberal; some churches forbid that which is acceptable and some allow that which isn't. There are churches which deny the importance of doctrine at all and others which make doctrine up as they go along, not considering context. All of this stems from thinking "beyond what is written."

Paul is showing us that doctrine is of the highest value in our walk after salvation and he is indicating that proper doctrine is what is important, not "any" doctrine. And he gives the reason for it explicitly - "that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other." If one follows proper doctrine, by understanding the context of what is being said, then they will not be puffed up, meaning prideful. Instead, they will be standing on the authority of God's word, not their own individual division. And divisions are what have been the subject of everything Paul has said.

The metaphor, "puffed up," comes from yeast which is introduced into bread. When it is, the bread rises. Like a loaf of bread, where there is pride, we become boastful and puffed up. The Corinthians were boasting in Paul or Apollos and not in Jesus. They were dividing over it and this had led to sin, which yeast pictures. This is the reason for Paul's words, and they indicate a man who is willing to go to great length to establish his case and defend his argument.

Life application: When evaluating Scripture, context is king. Always look for the proper context to a verse less you be found misrepresenting what has been presented.

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*? 1 Corinthians 4:7

"For" explains the thought in the previous verse which said, "that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other." Why should one be puffed up against another? If we think it through, it should never happen. To help us consider logically, Paul asks a series of questions to mull over.

First he asks, "Who makes you differ *from another*?" Paul and Apollos certainly differed from one another, as do all teachers. But who is it that made them different? Of course it is the Lord. If Paul differs from Apollos and they are both proclaiming the same message, then obviously the Lord should get the credit for the difference because He gave them that ability or grace. As this is so, then why should those in Corinth boast about their superiority over one another in their allegiance to Paul or Apollos? Rather they should be boasting in the Lord who made each according to His own wisdom and purpose.

If a potter made two pots, one beautiful and one simple, each still has a particular purpose. The beautiful one can be put on a shelf to admire, but it may not be as good for transporting olive oil. However, we need olive oil for cooking. So which is more important? And because the same potter made them both, do we praise the individual pot, or the potter who made them for various uses? Paul asks them to think.

He next asks, "And what do you have that you did not receive?" What predominate gift does Paul have? He was the one to plant. What predominate gift does Apollos have? He watered. Who gave them these gifts? Likewise, he would have them look to themselves as well. What do each of you have? And if you have it, you received it from elsewhere. Was it from Paul? Was it from Apollos? No! It was from God. So why then are you puffed up? Why are there such divisions?

If a group goes into a royal palace and the one on the throne has gifts prepared for each of them. Who will they thank, the attendant who brings them the gift, or the one on the throne who offered it? The answer is obvious. Paul asks them to think.

Finally, he asks a follow-up question to get them to consider their actions, "Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*?" His words make it clear that what they have, they received. There can be no arguing against it and so his question is like a sharp knife, intended to cut away their pride. In essence, "Of course you have received all that you have, so why would you boast as if you had earned it?"

In the end, this is true for all things. If you have a big house and lots of money, it is because God gave you the time, place, intelligence, strength, etc. to earn these things. So do you say how great you are, or do you thank God for His grace upon your life? If you understand properly, it is God who must be given the credit. Paul asks them to think.

Life application. No matter what you have, it ultimately came from God. Illogical divisions which fail to recognize this are sinful. If we in the US boast about our strength, but fail to give God the credit for it, we sin. If those in Japan boast about their technological prowess, but fail to give God the credit for it, they sin. In all things, "To God be the glory."

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!
1 Corinthians 4:8

Paul makes a sudden transition from his words concerning the boasting of the Corinthians. In this verse his pen shouts out the irony of a man who sees their true state. And he does so in an a way which shows his breaking heart over their childish behavior (something he will note directly in 1 Corinthians 14:20). In this then, he makes three statements which ascend in their tone and force.

In each of these thoughts, the emphasis is on the completed action indicated by the adverb or verb. As they are analyzed, stressing those words shows his intent. "You are *already* full!" You are *already* rich! You *have reigned* as kings." Likewise, he has changed his wording from the previous verses which were singular to plural here. He is redirecting from the personal singular to the impersonal group to correspond with the emotion of his words.

And so he begins with "You are already full!" The idea here is one who is fully sated. The only other time this phrase is used is in Acts 27:38 -

"So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea."

Those in Corinth acted as if they had all they needed of the word and instruction in order to continue on in faith and practice, but Paul is just beginning. He will write another 12 chapters to them in this letter and a second letter comprising 13 chapters. Adding in his other letters and those of the other apostles, it is quite apparent that they were far less than full; they were lacking in the extreme. As he noted to them earlier, they were still babes, not yet able to move from milk to solid food (1 Corinthians 3:1, 2).

Continuing with his thoughts, he next says "You are already rich!" Not only did they assume they were full and had enough to sustain them, they felt so comfortable that they were rich. The idea of richness is that of having taken the food that they had consumed and processed it into grand knowledge and understanding. So much so that they could rest easy in what they possessed. This is similar to Jesus' words to those in Laodicea in Revelation 3:17 -

"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'— and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

However, Paul's continued instruction to them will show that they are in fact poor beggars needing a handout of spiritual doctrine. And finally, he takes them to the highest level of irony by telling that that "You have reigned as kings without us..."

The idea of a king is one who is elevated to the highest position of all. They sit at the throne and direct others rather than taking orders. In this, he is literally mocking them over their boastings because what they have come from Cephas, Paul, and Apollos, to whom they had broken into warring divisions. So how could they be kings if they were claiming allegiance to mere messengers! Their thinking is utterly nonsensical and they have only made themselves look like fools in the royal court rather than the king on the throne.

With these thoughts now stated, he lessens his charge against them to show them grace by saying "and indeed I could wish that you did reign, that we might also reign with you." They have assumed that they were kings with crowns and he has charged them otherwise, but his hope is that they will in fact be there to reign with him. He spoke in a similar manner to those in Thessalonica when he wrote to them -

"For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy." 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20

Paul wasn't looking for divisions, but for a united heart and attitude directed solely toward Jesus Christ. He is where the prize is. He is where the throne is. He is where the crown of rejoicing is. Their attitude about Paul is that they had entered the kingdom apart from him when he in fact was the one who had planted what they now possessed.

Life application: Running ahead in spiritual development without understanding the basics inevitably leads to unsound theology, prideful demonstrations which harm the fellowship, and leaders being exalted in an unhealthy way. One cannot

be sound in their theology without much study and a complete focus on Jesus Christ.

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. 1 Corinthians 4:9

"For" begins this verse and explains this statement made in the previous verse - "I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!" Paul was rebuking those in Corinth for their attitude of feeling full, rich, and reigning as kings when no such thing was the case. In those comments he added that he wished it was in fact true because if it were, then the apostles would also be right there with them. However, it was painfully apparent that this wasn't the case.

Rather, Paul felt that they (meaning the apostles) had been on display by God in several notable ways -

- 1) last - this is a reference to the custom of the times where those who were to fight in the amphitheaters of the Roman Empire were brought in last, after all the other spectacles were finished, in order to fight to the death. They were the condemned about to die. Which is exactly what he then refers to.
- 2) as men condemned to death - those who first went into the amphitheaters may be orators or actors, and maybe animal shows as well. Only after their displays were finished would those who fought to the death be brought in. Those condemned to die had but one chance which would be to fight so well that they would be pardoned. In this they were made....
- 3) a spectacle to the whole world - the Roman Empire was the known world at the time. Amphitheaters were found throughout its borders and the condemned would be paraded through the streets to any and all of them as a sign of power of the empire and as a gory sport for those who watched.

Like these people, Paul found that the apostles were in a similar situation. In fact, all but John were actually killed for their faith and even John suffered greatly. For the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they lived their difficult lives as a "spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." In the sight of both those on earth and those in the heavenly realms, they went about their business of witnessing to the splendor of the gospel, unafraid of even death for the sake of Christ.

Life application: Far too many see Christianity as a means to wealth, prosperity, ease, and a fist-bumping relationship with the Creator. In this, they see their faults as easily dismissed and feel they possess a guarantee of protection and safety. But this is because of the prosperous circumstances which surround them. In most of the world and for most of history, Christians have been the brunt of hatred, torture, and death. Our pleasant surroundings are bound to end. How firm will we be in our faith at that time? Be prepared to serve the Lord through any and every trial.

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!

1 Corinthians 4:10

Paul again introduces irony into his thoughts as he did in verse 8. He is showing the folly of their boasting and divisions within the church. He, and the other apostles, have done nothing but proclaim Christ, and they have done it with complete and undivided loyalty. But among those in this world (and even among those in the faith) they have been taken as fools, men of weakness, and those who are dishonored. His words are confirmed throughout Acts and the other epistles.

He begins with "We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ." In his statement, he speaks in an ironical tone in order to highlight his words. His message is one which proclaims only Christ; theirs is in divisions within the body. Later, in his second letter to the Corinthians, he will repeat this sentiment -

"I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing." 2 Corinthians 12:11

Two examples from Acts shows that this wasn't limited to those at Corinth, but was a thought which permeated society at large as well -

- 1) "Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, 'What does this babbler want to say?'" 17:18

- 2) "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" 26:24

In opposition to how he is perceived, he ironically states that "you are wise in Christ." In verse 8, he told them that they were already full, a way of saying they were full of knowledge when in fact they were mere babes in what they knew.

He then shows another irony about being mature in Christ when he says, "*We are weak, but you are strong!*" Again, in 2 Corinthians, he will explain very carefully how one who is truly weak in the ways of the world can actually be full of strength in Christ -

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:10

This statement came after his explanation that only when relying solely on the Lord can one be truly strong. The paradox is explained in Jesus' words to Him which said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Because he had to rely on the grace of Christ, he possessed the greatest of all strengths. The Corinthians had failed to understand this and were busy in the art of division of Christ rather than total dependence on Him.

Finally, Paul again introduces a note of irony by stating "You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored!" The natural result of division is to feel distinguished. When someone argues with another about their favorite pastor being better than the other person's pastor, there is a smug feeling of self-confidence. "I follow Pastor Pillowfeathers and he is all I need. I cannot see why you even listen to Preacher Pointypants."

The attempt is to be distinguished among a crowd, just as Paul noted about the divisions in chapter 1. And yet, it harmed rather than helped; it destroyed rather than developed. But instead of divisions and mis-directions, Paul kept his eyes on one Prize and held fast to one Hope. And that is to be found in Jesus Christ and Him alone. His previous words to the Corinthians show this singleness of mind and attitude -

"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." 1 Corinthians 2:2-4

Life application: What the world sees as foolish, weak, and dishonorable is the only true Source of sanity, strength, and honor. Jesus Christ is the Source of wisdom. Reliance on Him is the position of highest power and might. And there is no more exalted place for any person in heaven or on earth than to be found in Him, covered with His garments of righteousness. Eyes on Jesus! Hearts on Jesus! Minds on Jesus! Rest in Christ alone!