

1Corinthians 18-02-25b

We are looking at 1 Corinthians chapter 4, and not to go above what is written. And what is written, those five scripture quotes that Paul has included, all direct our attention to the reversal that is such a consistent theme throughout the Bible. The last shall be first, the first shall be last, the least will be greatest, the things that seem foolish in this life end up being the wisest, the things that seem very wise in this life end up being foolish.

We are to be wise in a certain way and in a certain sense and according to a certain standard and that is the exhortation. The way we do that is not to think beyond what is written, we look at what is written. This is why we are a Bible church, it is why we spend our time looking at what is written, because it refreshes the divine viewpoint in our souls.

Left to ourselves, in contact with the world, we will take on its color, we will take on its standards, we will absorb its viewpoint. We have to consciously avail ourselves of the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit and the content of God's truth in His word, what is written. We look at that, that reminds us of who we are and why we are here.

That gives us that perspective, it elevates our thinking, it raises our eyes to the hills from whence cometh our strength. So Paul says, look, I've used this earthly example of Apollos and myself to try to, you know, you're thinking of us in one way and I am consciously telling you that we are not these grandiose mountaintop prophet apostles that you're trying to paint us as and then trying to puff yourself up by association with us in that glorified role. We are lower tier galley slaves and look at us, we are fools for Christ's sake, we've been condemned to death, we've been made a spectacle in the eyes of the world and to try to look at us in another light is foolish.

He talks about hunger and thirst and their scarce provision in terms of clothing and having to work to support themselves, Paul in particular, beaten and homeless. You know, if you're going to try to use a worldly standard, look at us from the worldly standard. We're not achieving it.

You know, you don't even make sense from a human point of view, you're saying I am of Paul and I am of Apollos and these are guys that are as likely to be locked up and flogged as they are to be well thought of in the world. So you're not even being wise in a human perspective. We're defamed, we've been made as the filth and off-scouring of all things until now.

I do not write these things, verse 14 of chapter 4, 1 Corinthians, I do not write these things to shame you. Remember verse 5, each one's praise will come from God. Paul says, I'm not writing these things to shame you.

If you don't change your ways, your shame is going to, remember he said, you shouldn't judge me, I shouldn't judge you, I don't even judge myself. Judge nothing before the time, God's light is going to shine and then each one's praise will come from God. Here's the reverse of that, he says, look, I am not shaming you any more than I would praise you or want you to praise me.

I'm not judging you before the time, I'm warning you that you have the symptoms that are going to bring shame in the day. You see the difference? It sounds to me like, well, it seems like he is kind of trying to make them ashamed, but this is in the context of that praise versus shame, reward versus loss. He can't change horses in midstream and say, judge nothing before the time, but oh, by the way, I've just judged you and I have found that you're weak and lacking and falling short.

He says, I am not trying to shame you here, but it is his role as an apostle, just as it is the role of God's word, to correct, rebuke and instruct us. God's word is a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart, right? So when we look at what is written, that's where we get our rebuke and correction. Paul says, look, I'm warning you here, I'm giving you some information so that you can be looking ahead to the day of judgment and not be ashamed.

I'm not trying to shame you. Your shame is going to come on your own head at your own behest if you don't take this warning to heart, if you don't follow those let exhortations, if you don't pay attention to those ifs, if you don't look at the foundation and how you're building. When it comes time for the storm to come and your house is built on sand, it's going to wash away, to use another metaphor.

So he continues now. We're picking up in chapter 4, verse 15. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, and this is another sideways allusion to these others besides Paul and Apollos that have set themselves up to go beyond what is written and to sort of, well, I'm as glorious as Paul, and oh, have you heard so-and-so? He's my flock leader and he's better than the pastor, and this sort of thing.

I can say this because we don't have flocks, but comparing one to another and saying, well, I follow this guy, I follow this guy, and well, this guy's better than that guy, and oh, have you read this guy's book, have you seen this guy's TV program, have you heard this guy on the radio? Any guy. Paul says, look, you've got ten thousand instructors in Christ. You can listen to anybody and get instructed.

But what he says is, you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers. One thing about instructors, there are many wonderful, wonderful teachers that you can listen to, and they've got great insights, past and present. I love to pick up C. H. McIntosh and read through.

I love to pick up Arthur, not Arthur, well, actually you can even learn from Arthur Pink. He's pink because he's a flaming Calvinist, but he has some good insights. You just have to strip away the Calvinist husk and get at the truth inside there.

But there are several wonderful authors of the past, and I've got their work, and I love to go back and mind it. I like Clark's commentary. Clark, he was a Methodist, but given a choice, if I was going to pick Matthew Henry or Clark, I would go for Clark every time.

I just like his heart for the truth and his search for it. D. A. Carson, there's a lot you can say about him. I like several of my professors.

I had a DTS and their notes, and Dan Wallace for Greek, and as I mentioned, Dr. Constable, Tom Constable, and Reg Grant. There's a number. You can learn from all kinds of people, but let me tell you something.

Tom Constable does not know me. He might recognize me if he saw my face from sitting in a class. Reg Grant does not know me.

John MacArthur does not know me. David Jeremiah does not know me. The 10,000 instructors don't look into my eyes.

They don't correspond with me. We don't have any personal fellowship. They're an instructor.

It's like a big class, and you can glean a lot of information, and it's wonderful. It's great. I encourage you to listen to as many good teachers as you can find.

You can't go wrong looking at what is written and having it elucidated and brought to life and made real. There's nothing wrong with that, but what Paul is saying is there is a personal connection that he has with the Corinthians, and he says, I begot you in the faith. I know you.

I've looked into your eyes. I was able to communicate to you on a personal level, individually, face-to-face, and that makes me different than your 9,999 other instructors. I'm your father.

Now we're in a different situation because he was an apostle, and I'm not, and I am not your father in any sense of the word. But this is the beginning of what I mentioned at the close of the first session this morning because you know how so often we're in a passage, and suddenly the wheels lift off. We were in Daniel.

We were in some of the prophets, and the wheels lift off the ground, and suddenly you're in kind of an eschatological future that, yes, it's Antiochus Epiphanes, but it is also the Antichrist. Yes, he's talking about immediate future events, but it is beginning to resonate with an eternal perspective and a 3D future view. Well, that's what is happening right here, right now, when Paul says, "...as my beloved children I warn you." We are not Paul's beloved children.

We can't be. He knew the Corinthians. He dwelt among them.

He personally witnessed them and evangelized them and brought them into the church. He built this church with his own presence. He knows them by name.

He has eaten at their table, right? That's not our situation. Now, so should we skip over until we find something that does pertain to us? Not at all. This is now, he says, I've transferred these things to myself and Apollos so that you can learn by this theater, right? And then he talks about the suffering.

Now think about this. I'll tell you ahead where I'm going so that you can, you'll see connections that I don't even mention. Paul is to the Corinthians as the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit is to us.

Now the Lord and the Holy Spirit were to them as well, but we no longer have Paul and we don't have his personal founding of our church and we don't have his personal presence and his father in Christ status. That was the launching point. That was laying a foundation that has now been laid and it is built without the apostle and without the I am your father in Christ motif.

So how does this truth pertain to us since that no longer applies? We are now entirely in the realm of Christ. Now think about this. Keep the Lord Jesus in mind and let's back up to verse 6. But every verse, every time we come to a new verse number, I want you to think, what about the Lord Jesus Christ? Okay? You with me? Lord Jesus Christ, every verse.

Start in verse 6. These things, brethren, I have transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes that you may learn not to get above what is written. Stick with what is written, right? Guess what? This wasn't written when he said don't go beyond what is written. Don't go above what is written.

Now it is. So this is our what is written. This is what we need to not get above, okay? So that you may not be puffed up getting your eyes on intermediaries, right? On communicators, on false, what amounts to false standards of glory.

I'm associated with Paul. I'm glorious. I'm associated with the Dallas Cowboys.

I'm glorious. That idea, right? We've reviewed that. So now look at verse 7. What are we thinking about? Who are we thinking about? Who are we thinking about? Say it out loud.

Lord Jesus Christ, right? Who makes you differ and what do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? Ephesians 2, 8 and 9, say it with me. For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

Christ accomplished salvation, right? We don't act like we had any part in it. This is why we don't have to be Calvinist to recognize that faith is non-meritorious. It is all of grace.

It is all of Christ. Why would I boast as though I had not received when that's all I have done is receive? I can't be puffed up just because I place my faith in Christ. All the merit is in Him as the object.

I don't get glory because I recognize what a great Savior He is and because I accept His gracious gift as from the Father, right? I don't differ from any one of you and you don't differ from each other or anybody else in the whole realm of Christianity. We're all recipients of salvation through Christ. So what is there to boast of? What is written? Let him that glories,

what? Glory in the Lord.

Don't stop halfway with an intermediary. Don't start glorifying the phone. Glorify the Lord, right? That's here.

Now look at verse 8. Who are we thinking of? The Lord Jesus, right? You are already full. You are already rich. You are reigning as kings without us.

Who is the reigning king? Who is going to be the reigning king? Who is the one and only capital K King of glory? The Lord Jesus. If you start thinking in glorious terms, what are you doing? Well, you're trying to reign in His place. You're trying to elbow Him out of the way and say, well, you know, some of this glory belongs to me because, you know, it's me and the Lord.

We're partners. There's a horrible, I've told you many times of the gospel songs that I love. There is a gospel song that I hate, hate it, hate it, hate it.

And my idol, Jake Hess, sang it and put it on a record and I just want to take my pocket knife and just put a gentle curve right through it so it just skips over it on the record. You can do that digitally now. But the name of the song is God is my partner.

God is my partner. Are you kidding me? It gives me the hair on the back of my neck stands up just even saying the title of it. God is not our partner.

You know, that implies some sort of equality like, well, you know, me and God. He sang another one that I don't like either called You and Me, Jesus. It's you and me, Jesus.

You know, we're just going down the road. No. It is all of grace.

It is all of Christ. Let him that boasts boast in the Lord, not me and the Lord. It's glory in the Lord.

I don't get any credit because of how great he is. I'm just blessed to be saved. What do I have that I've not received? If you're sitting there feeling any sense of fullness, any sense of richness, any sense of rulership and ownership and taking charge and achieving, Paul says, I wish it were true.

And this is the equivalent of a fourth class condition. Remember the four classes, if and it's true. Somebody asked me, I think after last week when we reviewed these five ifs, well, are they first class if and it's true? Are they second class if and it's not true? Are they third class if maybe yes, maybe no? Which is what they essentially are.

Or fourth class if I wish it were true, but it's not. And that's the idea. There's not technically an if here, but the idea here is if you did reign, that would be great because you could pull us up and we'd reign with you.

I think that God has displayed us the apostles. Who are we thinking of here? We're in verse nine

now. Who are we thinking of? Who has actually been displayed on the great world stage as a spectacle, ultimately? Paul says, I'm transferring this to me and Apollos, but I'm talking about something bigger.

We have the perspective to see that something bigger and it's the Lord Jesus. So think about this. God has displayed the Lord Jesus as a man condemned to death.

He's been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. And this is a reminder that you've got to think of this in bigger terms. Angels see this spectacle.

Remember Paul says, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. He is in those early days before scripture was complete and before everything was written, he is a walking New Testament. He's a walking reflection of the suffering of the Lord Jesus.

Paul is gone and we have the scripture in its place, which is better. And so what is written for us instead of the apostles walking around as miniature reflections of the Lord Jesus, we can look straight at the Lord Jesus. We recognize the apostles did this, but they are not our New Testament.

We've got what is written right before us. God displayed the Lord Jesus Christ and in the first century in the apostles he continued to display the Lord Jesus through them as a man condemned to death. Here's the king of glory, here's the savior of the world.

Remember how they mocked him? Well, if you're the son of God, what are you doing on a cross? Get down off of there. You saved others. Why can't you save yourself? Ha ha ha.

He's a spectacle. In the eyes of the world, a failure, an executed convicted criminal. Made a spectacle to the world, theatros, we're a theater, both to angels and to men.

We are fools for Christ's sake. And from the time of the Lord Jesus until now, there are those who have said, he's a fool and you're a fool to believe in him. He was dumb, he got crossways with the Jewish leaders, that was foolish.

He got crossways with the Romans, that was foolish. He's a fool, a foolish religion was built around him by foolish men, and you're a fool 2,000 years later to still be believing such nonsense. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ.

You know, here we are, we're the ones that founded your church and taught you everything about Christ, but now you've surpassed us and you're reigning as kings and you're full, and now there's something wrong with us. We are weak, but you are strong. And here's what has happened, is that the power and the glory of the Lord Jesus have been eviscerated and taken away in the modern church.

And now, the Lord Jesus isn't sufficiently glorious. You need a glorious spectacle. You need a man-made spectacle.

You need sound, and you need lights, and you need ambiance, and you need crowds, and you need a multi-million dollar venue to bring about a Christian experience. We are weak, the Lord Jesus is weak. Well, you can't just talk about Christ, you can't just stand up here and read scripture.

You've got to put on a show. You've got to be strong, you've got to be impressive, you've got to compete with the entertainment of the world. That's in so much of Christianity, the modern ethos.

You are distinguished, we are dishonored. To the present hour, we hunger and thirst and we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless. What did the Lord Jesus say? Birds of the air have nests, foxes have dens, son of man doesn't know where to lay his head.

He was not rich, He wasn't the recipient of adulation and praise and fame and riches. He was hungry, He was thirsty, as we are. He labored, working with His own hands, and so did His disciples.

Being reviled, we bless. Being persecuted, we endure. The Lord Jesus said these very things.

You get the idea that Paul has that in his mind. Maybe he's already been talking to Luke about some of the content of Jesus' teaching. Bless those who curse you.

Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you. Being reviled, we bless.

Being persecuted, we endure. He's following the example of the Lord Jesus. He is embodying the example of the Lord Jesus, who did these things Himself.

Being defamed, we entreat. We've been made the filth of the world, the off-scouring of all things, right up to the present day. Do not write these things to shame you.

This is not the judgment. You need to be warned so that you can prepare yourself for the judgment, where each man's will come from God. Though you have 10,000 instructors in Christ, you do not have many fathers.

For in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel. And Paul is still, in many ways, our intermediary in terms of having penned the letters that explore the depths of the gospel. But the Lord Jesus is our Savior, and God is our Father.

And he says, I urge you, imitate me. What does he say in other places? Be imitators of Christ. Imitate Christ.

If Paul is imitating Christ, and the Corinthians imitate Paul, who are they really imitating? Christ. Well, Paul is out of our picture, except in the writings. And we just go directly to the Lord Jesus, because we've got the full revelation in the New Testament to imitate Him.

And this is the context. People say, well, look at this Paul, he says, imitate me, be like me. He's starting a personality cult, and they take it completely out of its context.

The only reason Paul can say imitate me is he says, I'm an imitator of Christ. And if you imitate me, you're imitating Him. 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.

Now some are puffed up, and this is the very same thing we saw in verse 6, that none of you may be puffed up, don't go beyond what is written. Because some of you are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. Now in our day, if we get the wrong-headed view, who's coming are we expecting? Are we saying, well, I better shape up because Paul may come back? Who are we talking about here? Every verse, it's the Lord Jesus.

For us, you go straight to the source. We are advantaged in not being in the age of the apostles, because having everything that is written, we go straight to the Lord Jesus. And when Paul says, look at me, look at Apollos, look at your instructors, for us, we look straight at Christ.

So the Lord Jesus has sent this truth to us, this Corinthian letter, and the others like it, by beloved and faithful men who lived it, who wrote it, who preached it, who died for it, to remind us, he says, remind you of my ways in Christ. What are Paul's ways in Christ? They're Christ's ways. They're the ways of life.

They are the ways of praise from God. They're the ways of God's wisdom that seem foolish to man. It's the Lord Jesus that's being preached.

It's the Lord Jesus who is our example. And some are puffed up as though the Lord Jesus was not coming to us. Paul is using himself as a figure.

Some are puffed up as though I were not coming back and looking you in the eye. Who's going to come back and look us in the eye? It's not the apostle Paul, it's the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And what does he say in verse 19, and this ought to quicken your pulse, 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.

Are you talking a big fight or are you living and fighting the good fight? Are you talking it or is the power of God's word in the hands of the Holy Spirit driving your thoughts and your intentions and your motivations and setting the standard of evaluation? I am not noticed, I am not adulated, I am not appreciated, I am not praised in the eyes of men, but I've taken this warning to heart and I am doing my best to be pleasing in God's sight, to build with gold and silver and precious stone, to not think above what is written. And what is written, it's what God thinks that counts. If God is happy with me, I don't care what these people say, I don't care what they think, I don't care if they understand, they may think that they've completely gotten it over on me, they may think that they've completely left me in the dust, they're manipulating me, they're taking advantage of me, they're getting the upper hand.

Their evaluation does not count. It does not matter what they think and the thoughts of men do not define me. Paul says, even my own thoughts don't define me.

It's the thoughts of God that define me. I don't even judge myself. I'm not aware of anything against myself, but that's not what counts.

I have to look to the light of the Lord for evaluation. I will come to you shortly. This is the Lord Jesus talking to us.

If the Father gives Him the word, He can be here today. There is no unfulfilled prophecy. There have been times in the recent past where there was unfulfilled prophecy.

It would be very difficult for the tribulation to start if you don't have some Israelis over in the land, if you don't have a city of Jerusalem where there can potentially be some sacrifice and offering. It is a situation right now where they could literally, in a matter of a few weeks, start sacrifice and offering on the Temple Mount. All they've got to do is broker a deal.

They say, we're going to have the Dome of the Rock, we're going to build a fence, we're going to build a wall, and you guys can have your little Jewish stuff over here. It could easily happen. There is nothing to prevent the Lord Jesus taking the church out and starting the seven years that culminated in the Great Tribulation today.

Nothing stopping it. And by the way, we're coming up on Passover season, coming up on the Feast of First Fruits and all of that, and we always kind of remind ourselves that God still runs history on the Feast schedule of Israel. And I personally think that the Second Coming of the Lord is going to correspond to the Fall Feasts, and when it's the voice of the Archangel and the Trump of God, it would not surprise me at all if the Trump is the Rosh Hashanah Feast of Trumpets, Fall Feasts.

But I don't know. And so anytime you have a cluster of feasts in the spring, I'm not quite cutting a hole in a sheet and standing on the porch, but I'm aware that we are at a significant time in God's calendar. And it's fruitful to think about what all of those feasts signify.

And remember, the Lord Jesus is the firstfruits of those that sleep, and in Christ we are firstfruits, so the church may be the last thing. You remember, the church started on the last feast in the spring cycle, Pentecost. Well, we could easily leave on the Feast of Firstfruits or on the Feast of Pentecost.

Began on Pentecost? Why not end on Pentecost? God can just start the Israel clock ticking right then. So any time in the next couple of months would be a very symmetrical time for the Lord Jesus to come and get us. I come shortly, if the Lord wills.

Jesus is just waiting for the word of the Father. No man knows the day or the hour, not even the Son of Man. Only the Father knows.

If the Lord wills. And the Lord Jesus is going to be the judge. It is the judgment seat of Christ.

He will know, not what we say we are, but what power has been implemented in our lives. And we need to be thinking about this day by day by day. We have not got that many days left.

Whether you measure it to the end of your life or to the return of the Lord Jesus, we've got a finite number of days, and for a lot of us, there's less ahead of us than there are behind us. And the time that remains, we need to make it count. This is the time to sprint to the tape.

This is the time to expend all remaining, as we used to say in the artillery. You went and drew a bunch of ammunition. Do you really want to do all the paperwork to turn it back in? Shoot it.

Use it. Make it count. By the time you cross the tape, the tank is empty.

You have expended all remaining. That's what we need to be looking to do. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

It's not what we tell ourselves. It's not what we tell other people. It's not what other people tell us.

It is the power. It is the power of God in our lives. Now, as we have said many times over the years, how does the power of God come into the life of the believer? It is the Spirit of God and the Word of God, pretty much in that order.

The Word is not going to do you any good without the Spirit. The Spirit is not going to do you any good without the Word. It's like one tube of epoxy.

It's just kind of a smelly, gooey mess. You've got to have them both. Not in word, but in power.

Verse 21, circle it. What do you want? What do you want? What are you shooting for out of life? What are you shooting for in the life to come? That ought to be a memory verse. We ought to put it on a card and send it out to everybody.

What do you want? Shall I, the Lord Jesus Christ, come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness? You know, the Lord Jesus has got the rod. This is *rhōdōs* in Greek. H-R-A-B-D-O-S.

And it just sounds like something you thump people on the head with, or sheep. Ask yourself, what do you want? This is the summation of this first four chapters entirely. What are you looking for? What do you expect your life to mean? What do you want? You want to stand before the Lord ashamed or praised? With loss or with reward? Do you want the rod smacking you in the head, or love and gentleness from the Lord Jesus? You deny me before men, you live your life to try to please men, instead of confessing Christ, living out Christ the way the apostles did.

I'll deny you before my Father, Jesus said. You confess me before men, I'll confess you before my Father. You deny me before men, I'll deny you before my Father.

In case I misspoke the first time. How we live our lives on this earth determines and displays what we really want. And it's really kind of counterproductive to say, Oh yes, I want the rod, I want to be beaten and suffer loss when the Lord returns.

Who wants that? And what Paul is really saying here is, If we truly want to please the Lord, why would we live inconsistently with that goal? It's like the Dr. Phil question. If a guy is beating his wife and running her down and making her life miserable, does he want a failed marriage? Does he want misery in his household? Doesn't he want a loving wife who cheerfully and happily coexists in there? And he does for her and she does for him. If that's what you really want, why are you doing what you're doing? How do you see this accomplishing your goal? If your goal is a happy life and a happy home with a happy wife, how do you see your abuse and your disregard and your selfish self-centeredness and your stupidity, how do you see that accomplishing your goal? Same question Paul has here.

That's the one wise thing, as I've told you before, that I ever heard Dr. Phil say. Of course, I haven't listened to him that much, but that's a good question. You know, if you're being stupid and abusive and yet your goal is happiness and fruitfulness and productivity, how do you see this accomplishing this? You see a connection here? And if this is what you really want, don't you think maybe you ought to think about changing this? And it's a fair question.

And it's the question Paul asks here. It's the question the Lord Jesus is asking us. Jesus is speaking to us through Paul here.

We can just ignore the telephone and listen to the voice of the Lord. He is coming shortly. As soon as the Father gives Him the word, what kind of a reception are we going to get? Are we going to be riding white horses and riding with the Lord Jesus into Armageddon? Are we going to go in and be a part of the victory and a part of the celebration and a part of the reflection of the glory of the Father and the glory of the Son and the glory of the Holy Spirit and move into new and fruitful realms where we get all of the overcomer blessings? Or are we going to try to get glory in this world and appropriate it from bad sources and temporary sources and end up getting thumped with a rod and sitting in the darkness which is outside? And if we don't want to sit in the darkness which is outside, we need to examine ourselves and make sure we are in the faith and we are availing ourselves of this wonderful writing.

You don't have to go above it. You don't have to go beyond it. Just follow it.

That's our exhortation. That's our motivation. That's our encouragement from the Apostle Paul.

He gives himself as an example but ultimately it's the Lord Jesus Himself who is our example, who is our Father in the faith, who has begotten us to a new and living hope. He is the foundation on which we build. The gold and silver and precious stones that we have to put on that foundation are from Him.

We have all of this because we have received it. And that's where the glory is. That's where the

accomplishment is.

That's where the future is for us. Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for this wonderful Scripture and the clarity that it brings to our spiritual perspective.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will cause these things to live and breathe in our hearts, that it will enable us and motivate and encourage us to not be concerned with the things of this world and this life and the empty and shallow evaluations that are a part of human viewpoint, but that we will look at ourselves as You see us and live in that light. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.