

# 1 Corinthians 4 - Judging According to the Word

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1 Corinthians chapter 4. I'm going to read out of the ESV and I'll have you follow along as I do. We're going to read through the entire chapter and then we're going to pray. Paul says,

*“<sup>1</sup> This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup> 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.*

*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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?*

*<sup>8</sup> 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! <sup>9</sup> For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. <sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. <sup>11</sup> To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless <sup>12</sup> and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.*

*<sup>14</sup> I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup> For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> I urge you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup> That is why I sent you Timothy, my*

*beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.<sup>18</sup> Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.<sup>19</sup> But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power.<sup>20</sup> For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.<sup>21</sup> What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (ESV)*

Let's pray.

Father God, as we dig into Your Word this morning, as always, we need the ministry of Your Holy Spirit. Because without You, Lord, we are unable to grasp and assimilate the things that you want us to learn. You are the teacher; You are the instructor. We ask that You would do that work among us and reveal Jesus Christ. You're so faithful to do that, Lord. So, Father, do that work that only you can do and open our eyes, open our ears, and open our hearts to the ministry of truth. We ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen.

You know that awkward time when you walk into a room, and somebody is on the phone, and you can tell as soon as you get there that they're having a tense conversation. And if you're like me, and you're nosy, you want to play around like you're busy so that you can figure out what's going on with this conversation.

Some of you are like me. I know because I just saw you smile. And you're trying to put the thing together. But the challenge is, you're only hearing one side of the conversation, and that makes it very challenging. Well, actually, that's very much what, like reading chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians is.

We're really only getting one side of a conversation, and yet it sounds tense. Did you notice how the chapter ended? Paul basically says to the Corinthians at the very end of the chapter: So what is it? You want me to come with a stick, or you want me to come with love? I mean, if you heard somebody say that on the phone, and then they hung up afterwards, you'd probably say, what was that all about? Right? Wow, that sounded a little tense.

That's what we're doing here. We're asking ourselves the question, what is that all about? What's this all about? Now, if you haven't read through or studied through the Book of 1 Corinthians, you just have to wait, read, and find out why Paul is so tense. Why does he seem like he's confrontational with these people here? I mean, he's already dealt with the issues of divisions and factions that have risen up in the church, but I don't know, it seems like he's going a little overboard just based on all of that. So we're left to wonder what was so serious that Paul would threaten them with coming with a stick.

And obviously, I don't think that was a literal sort of thing. He wasn't coming with a literal spanking spoon, but he was using the symbolism of that to say, shall I come with further correction, or shall I come with a heart that wants to embrace and that sort of thing?

Well, for those of you that have a hard time waiting and perhaps haven't read through the book of 1 Corinthians before, let me give you a little bit of a list here of some of the things that Paul is going to address or some of the issues that were going on within the Corinthian church.

### **Problems in the Corinthian Church**

1. Divisions among themselves
2. Looking to worldly wisdom rather than to God
3. Arrogant opposition to Paul's leadership
4. Flagrant sexual immorality within the fellowship
5. Suing one another in court
6. Lack of grace toward those weaker in their faith
7. Misuse of the Lord's Supper
8. Misuse of Spiritual Gifts
9. Lack of love toward one another
10. Confusion about the Resurrection of Christ and its implications

Number 1, of course, we dealt with the problem of **Divisions** (within the body) **among themselves**. They were creating these groups of popularity based on who they liked the best. Secondly, they were, **Looking to worldly wisdom rather than looking to the wisdom of God**.

There was also, thirdly here, **Arrogant opposition to Paul's leadership**. I mean, there were people who just, frankly, didn't like the apostle Paul. They didn't receive his ministry, and they didn't have a whole lot of good to say about him. That's very difficult when you're a leader, when you've got people that just flat out don't like you very much, and yet, you have a responsibility to minister the Word of God to those people.

Fourthly, there was **Flagrant sexual immorality going on within the fellowship** that the church itself was just not dealing with. And we're going to get into that in the next chapter.

They were also **Suing one another in secular court**, which was bad. And Paul said, and we'll get to that when we do, Paul will actually say, this proves to me that you guys are, you've lost it. So we'll talk about that.

Number 6, these people **Lacked grace toward those who were weaker in the faith** in the sense that they didn't have the patience and tender-heartedness toward those who were just still growing and learning in their faith. There was a blatant **Misuse of the Lord's Supper** that was going on that Paul told them was the reason why some of them were ill and some had even died. That's going to be a sobering study when we get to it.

There was also a grave **Misuse of Spiritual Gifts**, which Paul will take up during his—to us chapters 12, 13, and 14. And, of course, 13 will deal with the **Lack of love that they showed toward one another** and other things related to that.

And then finally, there was great **Confusion in the church as it relates to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the implications** of that resurrection to us as believers.

You can see what's going on. This was a really immature church. They were prideful. They were arrogant. They were rebellious. They didn't want to listen to leaders. They had their own little pet favorite leaders, but they were arrogant toward all the others. And it was just—it was a cesspool of problems.

And you can get a sense here, maybe, from this laundry list that we've just gone over, and which, by the way, is not entirely exhaustive, that Paul is confrontational in this letter.

He begins here in verse 1, finishing up his comments about this party spirit, this popularity spirit that the body was involved in: I like Paul the best. No, I like Peter. And no, we think Apollos is the guy. And he says in verse 1, well, then this now is how you should regard us. We're servants. We're servants of Christ, and that's all.

And we notice he introduces another word: “...(we are) *stewards of the mysteries of God*.” I don't know how often you use the word steward or stewardship in your regular daily conversation. It's a great word, and it's something about the way that we all are. Every single person in this room is a steward.

What is a steward? A steward is someone who has been entrusted with something of value, which belongs not to them but rather to their master, to his or her master. So every single one of us in this room has been given something from God: gifts, talents, abilities, you name it.

We've been given those things, and they don't belong to us. They belong to Him. And there's one other thing that is very interesting also about a steward: they're constantly being checked upon to see how they're doing. That's what Paul goes on here to talk about.

Look what he says in verse 2. This is important. Right in your Bible, verse 2. He says, *“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”* What is a steward? Why? Because they're handling somebody else's property. They're handling somebody else's money, somebody else's goods. And so, therefore, they must be found faithful. That means there's going to be an accounting between the steward and the master. And the master is going to say, all right, what have you been doing with the stuff I've given you to work with? Right.

And like I said, everybody in this room is a steward. You've been given stewardship of something. All that you own, all that you have, all your money, it all belongs to the Lord. You're a steward—your house, your vehicles, your body. You are just a steward. It belongs to Him.

That's what the Bible says. It says you've been bought with a price. Okay, by the precious blood of Jesus you belong to Him (1 Corinthians 6:20); all that you have belongs to Him, and all the gifts and talents and abilities that you have belong to Him. And there will be an accounting. There will be a reckoning that will take place one day where He will say, how'd you do? That's what Paul's saying here. Every steward needs to be faithful or found faithful and so forth.

So why is he talking about this? Because he's talking about the fact that as a steward, when you're going to stand before your master and you're going to answer for the things that you have and the job that you do and that sort of thing. But remember, it's your master that you're going to stand before.

The fact is Paul was standing before the Corinthians. They were acting like his master, and they were criticizing him. And he's using this teaching to show them that he's going to stand before God, not before them. Okay? Here's what he's going to go on and say.

Look at verse 3. This is really an important verse. He says, *“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court...”* It almost sounds like he's coming back in your face, sort of a thing like, you know what? Frankly, I don't give a rip what you think of me. And it sounds like that.

And some of you might even be like that. You might be the person who just, you don't care what people think of you, and others of you are quite the

opposite. And people say something nasty or critical of you, and you go into a tailspin because you care very much what people think. Paul starts off by saying, I really care very little if I'm judged by you or any human court.

Then he goes on to say, and this is vitally important that you see this, cause we'll see how this plays out. He says, “...*In fact, I do not even judge myself. (I do not even judge myself.)*” Now, that's weird! Because even people who say that you might know, or even maybe it's you. For those people who don't care what other people think about them, they care about what they think. And they still judge themselves, even though they reject the judgment of other people.

So you see, Paul's dealing with some different cards here. He's got something different going on, and we need to figure out what it is. Look what he says in verse 4. He goes on here in verse 4, and he says, “... *I am not aware of anything against myself* (right now, and he's talking about as a steward in the ministry, I'm not aware of anything that's against me, but he says), *but I am not thereby acquitted.* (And then he explains why.) *It's the Lord* ( It's the Lord's judgment, and it's the Lord) *who judges me.*” And that right there, that statement, if that isn't underlined in your Bible or marked somehow as important, it should be because it is vitally important: “... *It is the Lord who judges me.*”

Paul is saying there that even though other people are not competent to judge my ministry, and he's very gently saying to the Corinthians, ah, you don't got the goods. You just don't possess the competency to judge my ministry. But instead of being cocky about it, he's saying, here's the other truth. I'm not competent to judge my ministry. Okay? That's what he's saying. So it's not a cocky, sort of an in-your-face attitude. It's a humble attitude.

Who does have the competency to judge his ministry? Oh, the Lord! He says, I stand before God; God judges my ministry. I don't judge it; I'm not competent to judge it. And you, you Corinthians, even though you are actively judging me, you're not competent to do so, all right? And he says again, “...*It's the Lord who judges me.*” All right let's, so stop here for a moment. Let's talk about what we've just looked at because this is really important.

Here's the question: Why do we judge one another when it comes to how they do things, how they use the gifts or abilities the Lord gives them, or whether? Why is it that we do? Why do we judge? Why do we judge? Why do we deem ourselves judges in their lives? Well, it's because we believe we're competent to do so, and that's pride. We look at other people and judge them about their ministry, even though they're supposedly serving God, right? But we judge

them anyway because we deem ourselves competent to do so. And that reveals our pride.

It's not uncommon to meet people like Paul who will say something to you like, I don't care what people think of me. I don't care what you think. And yes, sometimes they're just blowing smoke; sometimes they do care. They're just providing that tough exterior. But there are some people who genuinely don't care. I mean, yeah, I learned that the hard way by being a basketball referee. Every call you make on the floor, 50% of the people are going to hate your guts. And if you're going to get all upset about it, then you're probably not going to do very well. But, and I wasn't a great basketball referee, but I learned how to take the criticism.

But people who say that, people who say, I don't care what you think of me, they still engage in criticizing other people. In other words, what I'm saying is they don't believe you are competent to judge them, but they do believe they're competent to judge you. That's pride, you see. Paul's not saying that. Paul is saying you're not competent to judge me. I'm not competent to judge you. I'm not competent to judge myself. Now, that's essentially what he's saying.

However, some of you might be thinking to yourself, now, hold the phone here a sec. You're saying that pastor Paul, or that apostle Paul, deems himself incompetent in the sense of judging them, and yet he's writing this letter that is correcting them on all these fronts. Isn't that judgment? Yes, it is. So what exactly are you saying then? I'm saying that the Apostle Paul did not consider himself competent to judge them on his own or with his own standards. But he did feel competent to judge according to the Word.

And people, the Word is our only competency, okay? That's the point of all this. And that's why Paul goes on to say a little bit later in this letter, you guys need to learn how to not go beyond what is written because what is written or the Word of God, that's the only means by which we can judge.

And do you guys understand? Let me just interject this. You guys do understand, right? Even though the word, judge has a very negative connotation. We're not talking about being judge and jury and condemner and wagging our finger in people's faces. When we talk about judging, we're talking about discerning. We're talking about critical thinking. We're talking about making a right judgment.

Do you guys understand that we are to do that? The Bible says, and people love to quote this, thou shalt not judge, lest you be judged (Matthew 7:1-5). And

people love to quote that as an all-encompassing, never judge anything at any time, ever. Which is stupid. That's not what the Bible says. The Bible says don't judge hypocritically. And that means that's why Jesus said, why are you working with your brother to get that little speck out of his eye when you got this log sticking out of your own (Matthew 7:3-5)? You see, hypocritical judgments are things we're never to do, but to rightly discern a situation, to judge, which means to discern or to evaluate a situation that we are called to do.

In fact, the Bible tells us to make a right judgment. Jesus actually said that to the Jews. He said, stop judging by mere appearances and make a right judgment (John 7:24). Well, what is involved with making a right judgment? Judging according to the Word, judging according to the scripture, right? That's our standard. That's our base. That's our platform. I don't judge you according to what I think. That I'm not competent to do that, but I will at times compare a life to the Word of God. And that's the only place our competency comes from, you see.

This is very, very important that we get this into our hearts and minds. Even though we are called to judge according to the competency of the Word, there's also another matter that needs to be injected here as well. And that is the spirit behind judgment.

Again, we're called to make right judgments, but we're called to make them for the right reasons. We don't judge people or circumstances even according to the Word of God because we're there to condemn. That's where some Christians make huge mistakes. They make judgments and they do it according to the Word of God, but their hearts aren't right. And they make a condemning sort of a judgment where it's that wagging the finger; God says in His word! And there's no love there.

One of the things you're going to see throughout the course of this letter—and we've already seen it in this chapter—Paul says, listen, do you understand why I'm saying these? I'm not saying this to shame you; I'm saying this because I love you. He calls them dear brethren. I'm doing this to help you. My heart, my desire is to do good in your life.

Every parent in this room understands that we engage in some form of discipline with our children, not because we want to be right but because we adore them so much. Disciplining kids is not a fun experience, as I'm sure writing this letter to the Corinthian church for Paul was not necessarily an enjoyable thing. You don't like disciplining your children, but it's necessary. Sometimes when they're doing wrong things, when they're thinking wrong,



when they're doing foolish things, a parent has to step in and say, no, we're not going to do that in our home. This is not the kind— we don't use that language in our home. We don't treat people that way. We aren't involved in this thing. And if there is continued rebellion along those lines, a parent has to step in and make some very hard decisions as it relates to the discipline and correction that they bring their child.

But why do they do it? Because they're crazy in love with their kids. That's why it's not this harsh spirit that says, don't you ever do that again? Listen, that's not discipline, okay? If that's what you got in your home, I'm sorry, that wasn't godly discipline. Godly discipline always, always, always loves first, and it is predicated upon love. It is based in love. It is expressed in love. And if a child doesn't get done hearing the discipline that you have to give and doesn't walk away thinking, wow, mom or dad loves me to death. Then you did it wrong. You need to be able to communicate that to your child. This isn't a parenting talk, but you understand what I mean? The heart behind correction is love. And that's what Paul is doing here.

And so, you see, when we do judge, first of all, number one, we judge according to the Word of God. I'm not competent to judge, neither are you. If we're going to make a critical judgment, an evaluation, let's do it, first of all, according to the Word of God; and second of all, let's do it for the right reason, for the right attitude. That attitude is an absolute total: I want you to walk with Jesus with all your heart, and I want your life to be good, and I want you to know the Lord. Those are very, very important things.

Paul gives his conclusion verse 5 look with me in your Bible: “*Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time* (What time is he talking about? He explains it), *before the Lord comes...*” Because he says, “...*(The Lord) will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and (He) will disclose* (what is totally hidden from you and I, which is the) *the purposes of the heart...*”

Do you know that you can't see what's in somebody's heart? We think we can; we like to think we can look through somebody's heart like we can look through a pane of glass. But we can't. God sees the heart; we don't. We see what we believe is the intent of the heart, and we judge based on what we see.

But that's in darkness, that's shrouded from you and I; we can't see that stuff. God sees it, God knows it, and so Paul says, be careful how you judge because when Christ comes, he will judge perfectly by seeing all things. And then it says, “...*(He will) then each one will receive his commendation from God.*” By the way, notice that doesn't say their condemnation, it's commendation.

Do you see? Do you understand what he's talking about here? He's talking about believers' judgment. You guys do know that you're not going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ for condemnation, don't you? I still talk to Christians from time to time who are deathly afraid of judgment or judgment day, and every time they read about it in their Bible, they just get shivers, and they are deathly afraid of standing before the judgment seat of Christ.

And I keep telling them, as often as I get an opportunity to tell them: If, listen, if God brings up one single solitary sin in your life before the judgment seat of Christ, then what Jesus did on the cross wasn't enough. Did you hear me? If one single sin is mentioned, then what Jesus did on the cross wasn't enough.

I got news for you. It was enough. And what He said on the cross victoriously before He gave up His spirit was paid in full. It is finished. It is done. And He paid everything for you. And I mean everything.

Listen, when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that's it. This is the Bama Seat. This is that judgment of commendation. This is where the steward, which is you, stands before the master, and the master says, how did you do with what I gave you to work with? And we say, here's what I did. And He gives the appropriate commendation for what you did. Again, no condemnation.

Isn't that what your Bible says?: *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 8:1) Why? Because Jesus was condemned for you! All of the condemnation that otherwise would have fallen upon you fell upon Him on the cross, and now there's none left for you. He was condemned fully for you. So now what's left for you is commendation. Pretty sweet deal, huh? Yeah, if you haven't taken advantage of that one, do so today.

So anyway, let's keep going on. He says in verse 6, *"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..."* I made reference to this already. When you're judging somebody's ministry.

In fact, when you're judging anything, when you're judging anything, don't go beyond what is written. Don't go beyond the Word of God. Because if you do now you're doing personal judgments, you see? If I go beyond the scriptures, when I look at your life and make a critical evaluation, I'm doing it according to Paul, this Paul, and that's not a valid judgment. I'm not competent to do that. Because I can't see. My eyes are blinded to what's in your heart. I don't know. I can guess. But am I really going to judge you based on my guess?

He says, don't go beyond what is written. And I've used this example of Apollos and I to exhort you. Don't go beyond the scriptures when you're making judgments about people, all right?

And then Paul asks a couple of questions, actually three. Verse 7: “... *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...*” All right, 3 rhetorical questions: The point of all of them is something that the Corinthians were forgetting, and that is that everything we have, every gift, every blessing, every ability that you are given and that you are a steward over, is something that was given you by God. You weren't born with it in the sense that we like to say, I was born with it, or whatever. God gave it to you, so don't brag about it. It's something He gave.

Now Paul goes on verse 8: “*Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich!...*” This is a little sanctified sarcasm, by the way. He says, “... *Without us you have become kings!(Oh!) And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!*” Now again, this sounds like sarcasm; but what Paul is doing here is he's using this language to show them their prideful attitudes.

Because you see the Corinthian church, they were just super spiritual and they considered themselves above pretty much everybody, including even the apostles. And it's like, we really don't need these guys anymore because we've arrived. And we're just, we have things dialed in. And teachers and apostles, well, thank you. Maybe they're for the young people that just don't understand what's going on, but we Corinthians, that's not us.

We're the first church of we've got it together, sort of a thing. And this is the attitude that these guys are having, and so Paul is addressing. He says, you guys, you act like you're perfected. You act like you're already ruling and reigning. He says, I wish you were because if you were, then we'd be reigning with you.

Here's the point. Here's the point: This is, and it's a very important point. There is coming a day when we will rule and reign with Christ. There is coming a day, but it's not today. We are not ruling and reigning. We will one day, when Jesus returns, establishes His throne upon this earth; we will rule and we will reign with Him. But that is not today.

Look what Paul goes on to say about what today looks like for the apostles. Look at verse 9, he says, “... (I think sometimes) *I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death...*” You know what he's

talking about there? When a general would go out and conquer another people, they would tie them up and they drag them behind their horses, and they would come back to their home city, and they would. First of all, the triumphant soldiers would march into the city, and the people would be cheering.

And then at the very tail end of the procession would be the prisoners, and their hands were tied, and sometimes they would even be blindfolded, and everybody knew what was going to happen to those guys when they got in there. Everybody would have a little party, and then they'd kill them for everybody to see. That's the way people at the end of the procession were treated. And Paul says, sometimes I think we apostles are like the men at the end of the procession, were just being paraded through just so people can mock us and do what they want with us.

And frankly, most of them, most of them love the Lord to the point of laying down their lives and being martyred for Christ. So this is not some wildly symbolic picture that isn't truly applicable to what happened in their lives. He goes on to say, *"...we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men."* (Verse 10) *We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise...* He says, *"...We are weak* (that's what we look like) *but you are strong.* (Again, a little bit of that sanctified sarcasm.) *You are held in honor, but we in disrepute."*

What's our life like as a as an apostle? Verse 11: *"To the present hour we hunger and (we) thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, <sup>12</sup> and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled (we don't revile back), we bless; when persecuted, we endure (it); <sup>13</sup> when slandered (we pray for them), we entreat (the Lord on their behalf). We have become, and (in fact) are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things."*

Stop there for just a moment. Again, here's what Paul's saying: there's a day coming, you guys, when we're going to be on some trip ruling and reigning with Jesus, but that isn't now. Right now, we are living out His humiliation.

Do you guys remember the one that we call Lord was humiliated in this world? He was rejected. The world esteemed Him not; they crucified Him. And it's called the day of His humiliation. And we are His followers, the one who, the humiliated one.

We love looking at these pictures; it almost seems romantic to look at a picture of Jesus on the cross. And for the sake of modesty, they always usually paint or draw some kind of a loincloth. They didn't give them the benefit of a loincloth. When the Romans crucified people, they stripped them naked. They hung there

with no clothes. Why? To humiliate them. It was just one more form of stripping away every aspect of their dignity and their humanity.

And that's the way Jesus hung on the cross for you. That's the picture that He gives to the world, that humiliation. And what Paul is saying here is that is who we are today. Today, you Corinthians, you're acting like you're already ruling and reigning. No, we're still in the days of our humiliation.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews says this so beautifully, and I want to show this to you from Hebrews chapter 13.

**Hebrews 13:10-13 (NIV1984)**

*We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.*

*We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.*

He says, “*We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle...*” The Old Testament priests, they don't have any right to eat because under the Old Covenant, the high priest, you'll remember, carries the blood of the animals into the Most Holy Place, which is, of course, in the temple, as a sin offering.

But what would they do with the bodies of the animals? They'd burn them. They'd burn them outside the city gate, outside the camp. Why? Because they were unclean. And then he makes this connection. Where did Jesus die? Where did he suffer? He suffered outside the city gate, outside the place where it's unclean. But He did it in order to make the people clean or holy through His own blood.

And then he gives us this wonderful exhortation: “*...Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.*” You see, the message is clear. This is the day of our humiliation. We bear the same humiliation that our master did.

The writer to the Book of Hebrews says, you guys remember, don't you? Where they crucified people? It wasn't inside the city. It was outside the city where they throw carcasses and refuse, where they take their garbage. It's stinky out there. They don't want people dying and being humiliated inside the city. That's for outside. You guys remember that he's saying, right? And then he says this, let's go to Him.

And you see the fact that he says, let us go to Him gives the sense that maybe there's a reservation on some of our parts to go to him. We don't want to share in that same humiliation. We don't want to share in that same disgrace, but we have to remember He is the one who was humiliated in front of the entire world for our sake.

Why was He humiliated? Why did He bear that humiliation? So that people might be saved. Why do we bear that humiliation? So that people might be saved. Listen, you and I don't have the ability to bear the sins of the world like Jesus did, but by walking in the humiliation and the disgrace of our master, we communicate something to the world around us.

You don't get into heaven by being a cool person. We are nothing. We are nothing. And we have nothing to bring to the table. When it comes to the issue of salvation, there's no righteousness, there's no goodness. There's nothing that is important or significant in our lives that God is going to look at us and say, yeah, hey, you're worthy.

We are unworthy, and we communicate that to the world. When they look at us, they don't look at us and go, wow, impressive. No, that's reserved for when they look at our Lord. Hopefully they'll look at Him with the right eyes and see that, yeah, there is something very impressive here.

He takes people who are utterly lost, who are utterly drowning in darkness, and He lifts them up out of that darkness and saves them not because of good things that they've done, but because of His amazing love. We bear the disgrace of our master that we might also show forth the goodness of His love and His salvation to a lost and dying world. So, guys, it's humiliation time, and Paul wants us to remember that.

So he ends this section by saying in verse 14, again, here's the heart of Paul, *"I do not write these things to make you (guys) ashamed..."* I'm writing these things to admonish you. You're my beloved children. *"<sup>15</sup> For though you have countless guides in Christ (Lots of people coming in want to lead you. He says,) you do not have many fathers..."*

What he's talking about here when he says, father: he's talking about somebody who's going to exemplify a way of life. Dads, pay attention. This is your role. You are there as an example to your family. That's what a father should be. And he says to them, “.. *I became your father...*” I became that example for you through the gospel. And that's why he says in verse 16, “*I urge you, then, be imitators of me.*” In other words, follow my example. He says it in other letters as well.

Verse 17: “*That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord...*” And again, Timothy was not his biological son, he was his son in the Lord. He said, “...(Because Timothy will come and he'll) *remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.*”<sup>18</sup> (But) *some (some of you) are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.*”<sup>19</sup> *But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not...*” Just how, what these guys are saying but I'll find out what their power is.

Look what he says in verse 20: “*For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.*” We're going to end with this. What does Paul mean when he says the kingdom of God doesn't consist in talk, but in power? What power is he talking about? He's talking about some of those things we see in the Old Testament.

Some of those things, I always wish I could conjure up myself. Like, remember when Elijah was being mocked? They called him bald-y. He says, he called down a curse, and some wild bears came out of the trees and mauled all the kids that were mocking him (2 Kings 2:23-24). I thought, Lord, I'd like to try that one. Thank you very much. No, He never gave that one to me.

And then, well, there's the other one I thought would be pretty cool too. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel is going through the wilderness, right? And there's this group of guys who are part of the Levitical priesthood, but they think Moses and Aaron are putting on airs with the people and making themselves out to be a little bit more important than they really are, so they challenge them. We're just as holy to the Lord as you are. Moses and Aaron fall down on their faces and say, listen, it's God who chooses people who are His servants. And they challenge them. And what ends up happening, you'll remember, is the ground opens up and swallows them alive (Numbers 16:1-35). I always thought that would be pretty cool too. Now you know what's in my heart.

Anyway, I don't think that's the power that Paul's talking about. I think he's talking about the power to change a life. Because that is what the Gospel holds is the power to transform someone from the kingdom of darkness to the

Kingdom of Light, and actually change their heart to change their lives to make them a new creation.

And you know what? When people ask me from time to time, how does Christianity stack up against all these other world religions? First of all, it's a loaded question, but one of the things I like to come back and say is, it stacks up in power because through the gospel, we have the ability to be a new creation in Christ where the old is gone, the new has come, and he can change our lives (2 Corinthians 5:17).

And there are many of you here in this room right now, if you had an opportunity to stand up, you would be able to tell about how he's changed your life. Some of you, God has absolutely transformed your marriage. I'm one of those. My marriage was absolutely dead, and God picked us up, washed us off, and healed my marriage. Now, that is about 38 years old. And many of you could talk about addictions and things that used to rule your life which God has released you from. He's transformed you.

Some of you, like me too, before you knew the Lord, your mouth was a cesspool of vile language, and God changed you. You're different than you were before. I'm not saying you're perfect, and we still mess up on a daily basis, but there's change going on. There's fruit in our lives that wouldn't have been there otherwise. That's the power of the gospel, to transform lives.

There's something interesting about other religions. You can't change your life. They might be able to change some aspect of your thinking as it relates to this or that or the other thing. They cannot change the heart. That is reserved for the work of the Holy Spirit through the power of the Gospel. And that's something that you guys could get up and testify to. And it's a beautiful thing. The power of the Gospel sets us free. And Jesus said, whom the Son sets free, it's free indeed (John 8:36).