

Christ, Not Me (1 Cor 3:18-4:5)

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Preacher: William HC

[0 : 0 0] So this is the word of God. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours and you are of Christ and Christ is of God.

This then is how you ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court. Indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent.

It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time. Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart.

At that time, each will receive their praise from God. That's the word of God. Thanks so much, Fran, for reading that. And yeah, just such a lovely time, hasn't it, been so far to pray for Maisie and for Simeon.

[1 : 3 9] So thanks, everyone, again for joining us. And yeah. Please, if you can keep your Bibles open, so either on your phones or if you do prefer the paper version, that box out the front has lots and lots of Bibles.

Just longing for you to pick it up and take a closer look. But we will be looking at these few verses just in a little bit more detail.

So as some of you know, we're going through a series through the book of 1 Corinthians. We're looking at how to focus on Christ amidst the chaos of our world, right? Whether it be political or otherwise.

So it's great that we have politicians among us. I'm not a politician, but I'm sure you guys will think about these questions all the time. So I'd love to throw just one political question at you, okay?

So we won't solve it today. That's not our job. But, I mean, so let's just raise an issue. So there have been lots of issues this past week. But one that's been on lots of people's radar is ram raids, right?

[2 : 3 8] Or young people who, you know, unfortunately have been stealing things, like cars, going for joyrides, and then crashing them through shopping centres or whatever, and then leaving it, like, at our front door, which happened a few months ago.

So, all right, here's the question, though, all right? And maybe talk with the person next to you. Why would a young person steal a car and then ram it into a dairy?

Why, okay? So I'm not saying how they did it, okay? I don't need you to tell me how to steal a car. But why would someone do it? Yeah, so have a think about it. Why does a young person do it?

Talk to someone next to you. Maybe, yeah. Why would someone do it? Have a chat. I'll give you 20 seconds, and I'd love to hear some answers. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

- [3 : 35] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay.
 Got some good answers bubbling through. Why would someone do it? Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Okay. All right.
 Anyone? Anyone? Okay. Anyone brave enough to give their one-word answer? Yep. Anyone? Sorry, I can't hear you, Mariah.
 Maybe. Okay. Someone can bring the answer. Okay. Sorry. Someone can bring the answer. Anyone else? Yeah. I'd love to hear that answer too. All right. What's...
 The politicians are really quiet on this one. I'm sure they have lots to say. Yep. It's because they like milk. It's because they like milk. Okay. All right. Depends on the person. Okay. All right.
- [4 : 29] So they want something, right? There's something in them that they want. Okay. Anyone else? Internet. Okay. They want fame, right? Okay. They want a trend on TikTok. All right. That's why they do it.
 They want to be looking for the, you know, the stuff in the store. They actually want to be recognized. Well known. Anyone else? Leo? For fun. Okay. All right. Fun.
 So, i.e. they're bored, right? There's nothing better to do. All right. Any other thoughts? Livelihood. Livelihood. Okay. So some might... Maybe they are feeling a bit, you know, strapped for cash.
 Okay. They want to look cool again, right? So they want to build up themselves in some way. All right. Whether amongst their friends or so on. Any other thoughts?
 Peer pressure. Okay. They don't want to look bad in front of their friends. Okay. It's interesting, isn't it? Right? No one said, okay, they really needed, you know, that car to go to work or something.
- [5 : 26] Right? It's not functional, is it? Right? Often, a lot of the answers about some of our social problems come around how we view our self. Right? Whether we need to look good in front of others or bad.
 Not as bad. All right. So there are a lot of social problems in the world. Okay? So not so long ago, in our, say, parents or grandparents' generation, the root cause of everything bad in our society, whether it's ram raids or whether it's, you know, high crime rates in some other ways or just, you know, unfair policies, the root of everything bad is that people thought too highly of themselves.
 Okay? What's traditionally called a hubris or just being too proud. Right? If a dictator thinks he's a great leader, he goes and invades another country. Right? If a kid thinks he can bully anyone he wants, he'll go do it.
 That's the problem. Right? Why are there people hurt all the time? There's too many people being high and mighty. Right? And so what solutions do we come up with? Right?
 We convict them. We imprison them. We cane them. We call them criminals, maybe. Or we tell our children or grandparents, our grandchildren like this. Okay? That might be the solution.
- [6 : 36] That's because people think too highly of themselves. That's one view, isn't it? But more recently, in New Zealand as well, and lots of other Western cultures, we've been taught that the root cause, what's really at the cause of everything bad in society is that people thought too low of themselves.
 Right? Why does someone do something bad? It's because they have low self-esteem. Why does a husband beat their wife? It's because they need to be built up themselves to know who they truly are.

And so on. Right? So whether it's domestic violence, whether it's teenagers robbing dairies or so on, the issue, what we're told these days, is that they have too little self-esteem.

And so what are some solutions we offer? We offer rehab, rehabilitation. We offer counseling. We offer education and therapy. And obviously, I'm painting with a broad brush.

I'm not a politician called to solve all of our problems. So, but somewhere between too high self-esteem and too low a self-esteem, I think, sits almost every decision we make, all right?

[7 : 47] Whether it comes to what policies we do, how we teach our children, what goes on, okay? And how we deal with it. And how modern psychotherapy and counseling operates, doesn't it?

The path to success, to freedom, okay? The path to success, is either to raise your self-esteem or to lower it. So we're talking about the self a lot.

And actually, in our passage, I think what's fascinating is that Paul, he's not a politician. He's a preacher. He's a preacher. But his words in the passage we just heard, we see an approach to the self, a way of seeing ourselves that's neither this nor that.

It's not traditional in terms of how you view yourself. It's not contemporary, right? It's not really a Western way of viewing yourself, nor an Eastern. It's actually a third way. I think our passage shows us a way of viewing yourself shaped by the gospel.

I'm going to call it gospel humility. Gospel humility. Now, this is a phrase that the author Timothy Keller, and he's got a great book on this passage itself that's reflecting on this has been really helpful for me this past week.

[9 : 03] Gospel humility is what we ultimately want as followers of Jesus. Because if you're insecure, or if you're too proud, both extremes will not help you to grow in Christ, grow a secure identity in Christ, will not help you to be the person who God wants you to be.

But the solution is not just to lower your self-esteem, okay? Or to raise it up. It's to grow a sense of yourself that is so shaped by Jesus Christ and his gospel that it makes you into someone who is humble.

Gospel humble. And if you want to be a person that wants to serve and image Christ amidst the chaos of our world, then gospel humility is what you and I need.

So let's dig into these first few verses, right? Some of you will know already the pressing issue in these first four chapters of the book of the book of 1 Corinthians is what? Starts with a D?

Division, right? Okay? It's a young church in Corinth and they're gifted, right? And they've been gifted by lots of teachers who have come in amongst them, right?

[10 : 22] And unfortunately, having gifted teachers among them has become an excuse for division. And now, the church in Corinth, instead of being God's dwelling place, right, by the Spirit, let's turn into something like a debating chamber where people are fighting each other all the time.

One person argues, I should be leader in Corinth. I've done Bible study with the Apostle Paul after all. Don't you know, some say he's more influential than Jesus? Come on.

I know him. So make me leader. But maybe another person says, no, no, no, I'll have the mic, thanks. Because you may know Paul, but I know Apollos, and we know that Apollos has the best one-liners.

And you know what? I even have Apollos's autographed copy of his writings. Come on. I should be leader in this church. These are all excuses for division here in the church of Corinth.

And I say they're excuses for division and not reasons because, think about it. All right? Was it Apollos's fault that there's conflict among the Corinthians?

[11 : 40] It's not Apollos's fault. Was it Paul at fault that they are arguing over leaders? No. What is the root cause of division?

Have a look again. How does verse 21 start? It says, so then, no more boasting about human leaders. So you see, the issue is not the people.

It's the boasting in people. Do you see what I mean? In other words, the issue is pride. Pride is the reason why we cannot get along.

Pride is the reason why marriages struggle. Why siblings fight each other. Why countries go to war. Why we cannot live peacefully with each other.

Pride is deadly. And so what's the opposite of pride that we want? It's humility. Humility. That is a trait.

[12 : 41] A character worth its weight in gold, silver, costly stones. If we build our churches on the gospel with humility, imagine what a difference that could make.

Not just here, but in our world. And so I want us to trace gospel humility from Paul's words here. And so we're doing something very simple. We're just going to walk through the passage.

And actually, if you notice in the passage, he gives some instructions or commands. And there's five main instructions. And from that, I want to try and work out five steps towards gospel humility that you can pursue, that I can pursue.

Everyone here can pursue. Okay? So, I don't know. Let's call the next few minutes five scripture steps to having a successful self-image. Alright? So, step one towards being gospel humble is don't deceive yourself about being wise.

We see that in verse 18, right? Don't deceive yourselves. Paul's already explained earlier to the Corinthians, it wasn't their wisdom that made them become a Christian.

[13 : 49] It wasn't because Nasey was so smart that she became a follower at eight, right? It wasn't because Simeon was so smart that he chose to be in his gospel preaching family.

We all need to recognize our limits. It was not your wisdom that got you into the kingdom of God. God had to intervene.

He had to change your heart so that you would follow Jesus, even think about him. I know we live in a society where that values high intelligence, right?

Maybe your parents even moved you here to this country so that you could get a higher intelligence. But I need to tell you this. A high intelligence and selfishness combined together doesn't get you anywhere.

Actually, it just means you are smarter at manipulating other people to get your own way. Or that you are smarter at hiding or explaining away your faults. And so, don't deceive yourselves about being wise.

[14 : 55] Don't define yourself by how smart you are, what grades you get. That would be, Paul says, to deceive yourself. And we saw this in the book of Acts, didn't we?

We all think of Paul as an amazing preacher, wrote half the New Testament. But in Acts chapter 9, at one point, Paul needed Ananias to show him around literally because he was blind.

At one point, Apollos, right, so articulate. He once needed Priscilla and her husband to sit him down and acquaint him with the gospel and the ways of Jesus more accurately.

And Peter, right, the rock on which God's church is built. We all know that it took him a few goes to get things right. So, don't deceive yourselves.

Don't look at yourselves as being wise. Most of you are incredibly bright. I'm sitting here, standing here amongst really intelligent people, I'm sure. Alright, some of you know multiple languages, maybe not German.

[16:01] Some of you are training to be, I don't know, data scientists, doctors. We've got engineers, electricians in our midst. You're specialists. And yet, everyone has their limits.

For example, I could tell you what the Greek word for fool is, but I can't change a spark poke. I met someone actually, you know, on our street doing his PhD in machine learning.

But our kids had to teach him how to use a bike pump. Everyone has limits. So, don't deceive yourself. That's the first step towards gospel humility. Alright, step one.

Don't deceive yourself about being wise. Secondly, be a fool for Jesus Christ. Notice, Paul doesn't say you are a fool to the Corinthians, yeah, in verse 20, does he?

He says, let him become a fool. As in, consider yourself as a fool. Own the label that others give you when they say, you're a Christian?

[17:07] That's so silly. If you do that, you become truly wise. And we're going to explore this more next week, so I won't unpack this too much because Paul spends the rest of the chapter talking about this.

But remember that in the context of Corinthians, Paul has already described the gospel. God's announcement that salvation comes through Jesus.

He's already announced that this is like foolishness to the Greeks. In other words, if you follow Jesus, be willing, expect that others around you will call you foolish.

You might even have to expect that your parents who aren't Christians will call you foolish. Or your friends at school. Or your colleagues at work.

They might come politely, but they might still think that you've wasted your weekend by being here. Now, don't get me wrong. Paul is very rational about his faith.

[18:10] Right? We're going to see in chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians, he grounds his hope in the gospel of first importance. How? He talks about the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Jesus.

He really did die for our sins. He really did rise again. These are facts that can be verified. There are eyewitnesses recorded that talk about this.

And the Holy Spirit opens eyes and hearts up to see that everywhere around the world, people are becoming Christians because of a rational faith.

And yet, before Paul met the Corinthians, okay? In Acts chapter 17, the wisest people of Athens heard him talk and said that he was a babbler.

And Paul would stand before the smartest religious leaders and then he would be shamed and rebuked. But Paul was willing to be considered a fool for Christ.

[19:12] It's hard, isn't it? The moment you say, I'm a Christian, in some lines of work, you will be disregarded. You may be made fun of. You may be criticized.

And we don't want to be unnecessarily foolish, do we? Not every fight is worth the effort. Not every Bible verse needs to be put up front and center every time.

But do expect that when we tell each other and when we tell others about the historical Jesus, some will think you're nuts.

In verse 19 here in chapter 3 of Corinthians, Paul quotes twice from the Old Testament, the first half of the Bible. He quotes from Job chapter 5 and Psalm 94.

These are both wisdom books. And he's trying to drive home the point, again, God's wisdom is greater than human wisdom. We need to think this way, right?

[20 : 10] It seems backwards, but one of the most freeing facts I can tell myself each day is that I'm not the smartest person in this room, in this workplace, in this area.

But God, you're here, and you're wise. If you truly understand the gospel of grace, you don't need to prove how smart or gifted you are at a party.

You don't need to bluff your way, right, to looking cool and impressive so that your friends will like you. You can say, I'm not sure.

You can rejoice in how the Lord is using other people, even if not you. That's gospel humility. Don't you want that kind of personality, character?

That's why we gather week after week, isn't it, church? We want to reshape how we view ourselves. We're not all-knowing, so we come and hear from God's Word. We are not defined by how favorably others think of us, so we come and remind ourselves, I'm loved and known by Jesus.

[21 : 17] We're not defined by our IQs or how impressive our social media profiles look. We're not defined by how good our CV is. But we are defined by God's Spirit dwelling in us through faith in Christ.

And in Him, we may look like fools to the world, but we are wise in Christ. That's what it says here. So don't deceive yourself, step one, all right, about being wise.

Instead, be a fool for Jesus. And thirdly, verse 21, don't boast in people. And here we come back to the roots of the Corinthians' issues, isn't it?

It's not that they know Paul or Apollos, it's that they boast in them. It's that knowing someone has become a reason for them to look down on others.

And so Paul has to correct them and say, no, that's not how to think. No more boasting about human leaders. Why? Think what you have.

[22 : 19] Count your blessings. What do you have, all right? It's not just Paul or Apollos or Peter or the world. You have the world. You have hope in life and death.

Your present might look tense. Your future will be perfect, as Nasey reminded us. All things are yours because you are of Christ, i.e. you belong to Christ.

And Christ is God's. And you can't thank yourself for this. You don't have to thank someone else for this. But you can thank the Lord for this. It's all a gift from Him.

So don't boast in people. I mean, ask yourself. Are you going to tell your friends you met so-and-so at church tonight? Have you ever been proud that you got a selfie with that famous person?

Do you swoon when your crush replies you and not ghosts you? That's you chasing greatness like the world does. No more boasting about people who can't fill you like Jesus can.

[23 : 25] Think what you have in Him. In Him we have everything. So no more boasting in people. Instead, step four, chapter 4 verse 1 tells us, See yourselves as servants of Christ.

And this is an interesting word here, isn't it? Servant. He reminds the Corinthians to see him and Apollos, not as celebrities, but as servants of Jesus. And the word servant here is actually quite unique.

Paul is not using this word. He doesn't use this word too often. He uses it once or twice. And here he's, I think, referring directly to a time when the Lord Jesus called him into ministry.

The moment he was saved, Paul tells others that in Acts 26, 16, he reports that the Lord Jesus said to rise and stand on your feet, because I've appointed you as a servant and a witness.

In Christ, that is how we should view ourselves, as servants, whether in the workplace, in our schools, in our families. Because too high a view of yourself is going to make you proud.

[24 : 41] Let's say you're the only Christian amongst your classmates, right? If you inflate yourself too much, you might start being too proud. You might say, I'm the only Christian here.

It's me against them. I'm God's last defense in my classroom. Can you see the problem? Yeah? But don't go the other way either. Too low a view of yourself will make you timid.

I'm just a nobody. I'll just stay quiet. No one needs to know I'm a Christian. God can't use me. Can you see the problem? Too high yourself is wrong.

Too low of yourself is wrong too. But in Christ, you're far better. You're a servant and a witness. Yes, you serve someone. But who do you serve? You serve the living God of the universe.

What a privilege to look after the mystery of the gospel. To be a waiter, as it were, for the King of Kings.

[25 : 42] So don't need to be boastful. And yet we don't need to be timid either. We see ourselves as Christ's servant. And that moves us to be faithful to him in gospel humility.

That's what God wants us to enjoy through the gospel. God wants you, like Paul, to be humble about yourself, yet hopeful about yourself. Because here is the final clue to how Paul can be so humble in the gospel.

He says, let the Lord judge you. I mean, look at verse 3 again. Let me read that out. I care very little if I'm judged by you or by any human court.

Indeed, I don't even judge myself. As someone under pressure from the Corinthian church and their worthy opinions, Paul is totally unfazed.

We're going to hear there's a lot of problems in this church. And there's a lot of accusations even at Paul. And Paul is totally unfazed, right? He says, I don't care if you judge me.

[26 : 48] I don't care if the church judges me. In fact, what does he say? Verse 3. I don't even judge myself. Even I don't judge me. The Lord does. Can you see how he's thinking?

Can you see how he's thinking? Almost every modern counselor is going to try and answer your problem this way, right? Don't listen to what other people say.

Just be concerned about what you say about yourself, right? Choose your own adventure. Own it. You are worthy and so on. In other words, we've been told, fix your low self-esteem by just building it up yourself.

But can it really deliver? I can't live up to my parents' standards. I can't live up to your standards of me or society's standards of what I should be up to.

And even if I just go, I'll set my own standards, right? That's what we should be doing. I can't keep up with my own standards. I say I'll wake up at a certain time and then I keep forgetting, right?

[27 : 52] I say I'll achieve this by the end of the year and then I don't. I mean, unless I sit really low, you know, might as well do nothing standards. I'm the kind of person that cannot keep my own standards.

And even if I set them low, now I'm the kind of person with low standards, right? I can't win. That's not how we do it. Thank God for the gospel, right? My conscience is clear, verse 4.

But that's not what makes me innocent. Do you see that? Paul knows the truth. It's not what he thinks about himself that declares him right or wrong before God.

What makes Paul innocent before the Lord? What justifies him? Paul says it's the Lord. All your chasing, all your shaming, your competing, is speaking to something deep in your heart that you need and long for.

You are looking for a verdict, a judgment. You're looking for someone to say you are known and you are loved. Right? That's why we do what we do.

[29 : 00] That's why we chase after people's approval. Or we scroll our screens for satisfaction. Or we sleep with someone. Or we argue with our families. We just want to be known and loved.

But that means every single day, we put ourselves on trial. You notice the legal language here that Paul uses, right? I don't judge myself. I'm out of the courtroom. If you don't know the gospel, every day you are putting yourself in court, as it were.

You are putting yourself on trial. You are in the debating chamber. And some days you'll feel like a winner. Some days you'll feel like a loser. But it never ends.

But Paul no longer speaks like that, does he? Verse 4. It is the Lord who judges me. Paul's identity no longer comes from his critics or from himself, but from the Lord.

He is someone that has found the secret to a successful self. And I hope you find the secret too. It's not me before you.

[30 : 07] It's not you before me. It's Christ in me. And that fills our self in a way that nothing else can. Timothy Keller sums it up this way. The essence of gospel humility, and this is the money quote, is not thinking more of myself.

It's not thinking less of myself. But it's thinking of myself less. You want yourself, your ego, to be like your toe. Okay? Do you think about your toe much?

Anyone? No? It just works, right? Okay? It's great that it works. Let yourself be like that. Let your ego be like that. We don't think of it too highly or too low.

It just works. We know it works because it's been renewed and shaped by the Lord Jesus, instead of us, instead of anyone else. The gospel can give you that. An ego that no longer wants to be front and center all the time.

And that's the unique thing about the Christian faith. Some of you here may not be Christians. I don't want to assume. Almost every religion is going to teach you that you perform, and then you get a judgment or a verdict.

[31 : 13] Okay? Right? If you're an atheist, you try to be good, and hope everyone agrees with you that you're good. That's you performing before the judgment, right? If you're a Buddhist, right?

The Buddhist last words were, strive without ceasing. Okay? So keep striving, and your reward comes in the next life. Muslims obey knowing that they'll be judged by Allah.

Again and again, every faith says, performance leads to verdict. And so every day of your life, you're still on trial.

But only the Christian gospel says, you get the verdict before the performance. You get told there is now no condemnation if you're in Christ Jesus, and then you live for his glory.

The moment you believe in Christ, friends, and not yourself, with a verdict on your life, God frees you. And he gives you the perfect performance of Jesus instead in your place.

[32 : 16] Right? Paul is not on trial. He's left the courtroom. Because Jesus went on trial for us. That's the good news. Jesus, he stood before an unfair kangaroo court.

He did not complain. He was beaten. He was mocked. He was crucified for your sins, for my sins. He was declared stupid and foolish.

He faced the trial that should have been ours because of our sins. So that if we trust in him, you and I don't need to be in the dock anymore.

We are no longer on trial. We are free. And the way to get this freedom is just to ask God, please accept me, God, based on what Jesus has done for me on the cross.

If you've never done that before, you can do it today. And then only his verdict counts. Not my verdict. Not your parents. Not anyone else's.

[33 : 18] Not anyone else's. That is the freedom of gospel humility. Of forgetting yourself for Jesus. And Paul is free now. If he does badly, he's not going to drown in pity.

If he does well, he's not going to dance and boast. What a life. He's free to share the gospel without an excess of ego. I'm free to preach this message, pray for you guys, and sleep well tonight.

You're free to be a pediatrician or a politician, pastry chef, whatever God calls you to be, with humility and hope. Because Jesus went on trial for you instead.

So remember the cross. Remember that because of Jesus, the trial's over. The verdict has already been declared. He was guilty so you could be declared free.

And now only the risen Lord Jesus and his opinion counts. No one else's. So no more boasting about ourselves. Or belittling ourselves.

[34 : 21] We can forget ourselves. Why? Because we belong to the Lord. Not ourselves. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that in Christ Jesus, we have an anchor.

Sure and steadfast for our souls. We thank you that God so loved us and the world that whoever believes in Christ Jesus is no longer on trial.

He is free. She is free. And so I pray, even here among us, that this freedom would free us to be men and women who love you, who serve you in whatever you place us in.

Father, we thank you and we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.