

(1 Corinthians) ch.3:18-4:14

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faithfulness and not boasting in men, while also highlighting the dangers of passing judgment before the appointed time.

Duration: 43:50

Topics: "Judging Others", "Gods Judgment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of not passing judgment on others before the appointed time, which is the judgment seat of Christ. He emphasizes that as servants of God, we are ultimately answerable to God alone. The speaker highlights that while we should not judge the hidden things or motives of others, we can assess one another based on the external fruit or actions. Ultimately, on the day of judgment, each person's praise will come from God based on their private life and motives.

Transcript

We turn today to 1 Corinthians, chapter 3 and verse 18. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish, that he may become wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. It's amazing how much emphasis Paul has placed on this one subject of human wisdom and human cleverness and intelligence, just being totally unable to grasp the things of God. Beginning with chapter 1, right on to chapter 3, his consistent theme has been human wisdom is useless.

Verse 20, he says it in so many words. He quotes from the Old Testament, Psalm 94, verse 11. The Lord knows that the reasonings of the wise are useless.

Now the thing is, men don't realize that. Men don't realize that all the reasonings of men are useless. Our human intelligence and cleverness, that which comes from our soul, and this is the point of the quotation from Psalm 94, verse 11.

In Psalm 94, verse 11, it says, The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are a mere breath. They are part of his soul, and it's quoted in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 19, as useless. They are vain.

They are worth nothing. And when we realize that, we can begin to serve God in God's way. And also, he makes another quotation there, in verse 19, from Job, chapter 5, verse 13, where it says, The Lord is the one who catches the wise in their own craftiness.

In other words, God uses man's own brilliance to trap him. When you turn to Romans, chapter 1, you get an understanding of what this means. Romans 1, verse 20 and 21, it says about people worshipping idols, in verse 23.

But in verse 22, the first step towards that was, Professing to be wise, they became fools. Claiming to be intelligent, and not humbly depending on God for wisdom, they became fools. Whenever I become proud, or huffed up with my own sense of my cleverness, God allows me to be foolish, and to do a lot of foolish things, spiritually speaking.

Men may not recognize it, but in God's eyes, I've become a fool. The opposite of Romans 1, verse 22, is here in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 18, that if I want to be really wise, let me acknowledge my foolishness before God. Let me acknowledge that all my reasonings and all my plans are useless in God's work.

And let me recognize that if I lean upon my own wisdom, God will allow me to trip up. That's the meaning of verse 19. And therefore, he says in verse 21, let no one boast in men.

He's referring to Paul and Apollos. Paul and Apollos were both brilliant men. Paul was a man with a brilliant mind, able to expound scripture wonderfully.

Apollos, we read from Acts 18, the last few verses, was a very eloquent man. These are human abilities, a good mind, ability to speak. But these things cannot do God's work.

And he says, so don't boast in people, whether they have brilliant minds or great eloquence. For these things are of no use in God's work. These are not the marks of spirituality.

So let no one boast in men. Earlier on, in 1 Corinthians 1, we saw that. Verse 31, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

God is a jealous God, as we read in the book of Isaiah. He will not give his glory to another. He will not allow his glory to be given to a man.

And when we follow a man or boast in a man, we are giving the glory of God to a man, and we're committing a terrible sin. We are defiling the temple of God, as it says in 1 Corinthians 3.17, by giving the glory that belongs to God to a human being. And that's extremely dangerous.

Let no one boast in men. Let's boast only in the Lord. For all things belong to you.

He says God has ordained things in such a way that everything is for us. In Romans 8.28, it says all things are going to work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose. And in this sense, every single thing, the all things of Romans 8.28, is the all things of 1 Corinthians 3.21. Everything is serving me.

Is there a Paul? God has given him to me to serve me, given him to you, to serve you. Is there an Apollos or a Peter? God has given them to serve you. The world, God has allowed everything in this world to take place, as far as God's children are concerned, for their good.

Life and death are in God's hands. Things present and the future things that bring so much anxiety and fear to so many people. If only we'd realize all things belong to us, as it says in verse 22.

In other words, every one of these things has been given to us for our sanctification. So much of fear and anxiety concerning the future would disappear if only we realize this truth of 1 Corinthians 3.22, that the things to come are given to us. They belong to us.

They are not in the hands of some demonic power seeking to destroy us. God makes it all work together for good. Provided I belong to Christ, provided my whole life, my ambitions, my future, and everything that I have belongs to Jesus, then everything belongs to me.

One is dependent on the other, of course. All things belong to me if I belong to Christ completely. And, of course, Christ belongs to God.

And so we see there a picture of God's total sovereignty over all circumstances, over life and death. People are afraid of premature death, of sickness, various things. People who boast in men seeking to follow this leader or the other one.

And there's a solution for it all in 1 Corinthians 3.22. I want Paul's ministry, Apollos' ministry, and Peter's ministry. This is the mark of a true child of God who is spiritually minded, that he wants the ministry of every man of God, whatever their emphasis may be. He wants to receive the ministry of all whom God sends across his way because he wants all that God has for him through every member of his body.

And he allows everything to bring thanksgiving in his heart because he knows it's all designed for his good. And, therefore, he's continuing on the same theme of glorying in men. He says, don't let anyone regard us in any other manner other than as servants of Christ.

We are servants of Christ, and we've been appointed as managers. The word stewards means managers of the hidden sacred secrets of God. Or, as another translation has it, managers authorized to distribute the secret truths of God.

That's the calling of a true servant of God. He's a manager to whom God has given a file full of secret truths, and he has to minister and pass on and distribute to God's people these secret truths. The secret truths of God have to be distributed, and that's our calling.

So, he says, don't regard us in any other manner. God's given certain things to Paul, certain things to Apollos, certain things to Peter, different ministries, and he's called us together to distribute these. And, he says, the most important thing about a manager is that he should be faithful, not successful.

The emphasis very often in Christian work today is on success. God doesn't place value on success, but faithfulness. Noah was faithful for 120 years.

He never saw anyone converted outside his own family, but he was faithful. Faithfulness is the main thing, not success. And, the most important thing in a servant of God, 1 Corinthians 4.2 says, is that he must be faithful.

Or, as the Living Bible puts it, a servant, the most important qualification that is to be found in a servant is that he does just what his master tells him to do. Not what he feels like doing, but what his master tells him to do. This is the mark of a true servant of God, that he does not do what he feels like doing.

He does what his master tells him to do. And, since he lives as the servant of a heavenly master, Paul says in verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 4, to me, he says, it's a very small thing to be examined by you. He says,

it doesn't make the slightest difference to me what you people think of me.

Your opinion about me and your judgment of me does not make any difference. It has no value in my eyes, because you are unable to assess me. He says, I'm a servant of God.

God alone is able to assess me. He says, in fact, I'm not even able to examine myself. I do not examine myself, means, I do not pass a verdict, an assessment of my own life and ministry, because I'm not able to know everything within my own life.

He says, I'm not aware, particularly, of anything that I've done to dishonor the Lord. I'm not aware of any unfaithfulness of which I'm guilty. But, I'm not acquitted by this.

I'm not conscious of any sin that I'm committing. But, that doesn't mean I'm free from it, because in my unconscious part, there's too many things which are unlike Christ. So, he says, I don't waste my time assessing myself and assessing other people.

I want to get on with the job of being faithful. And, there's a good example for us to follow. To stop judging and assessing others, and get on with the job of being faithful.

We turn today to 1 Corinthians, and chapter 4, and verse 3. Paul was saying here, as we considered in our last study, that if he was called to account by any human court, it mattered nothing to him. And, this is a very important attitude to be found in a true servant of God. That he's ultimately answerable to God alone.

The fact that people appreciate him, or depreciate him, should not puff him up, or discourage him. The important thing is, God who sees the heart, sees the motive, sees the hidden things that men cannot see. What is God's assessment of his life? Paul lived like this.

In other words, he was a servant of God, who sought to be faithful before God's face alone. And, not before the face of man. He says, it's a very small thing.

Or, in other words, we could put it like this. It mattered nothing to him, what the Corinthian Christians thought about him, or his ministry. The Corinthian Christians could have examined him, evaluated his ministry, evaluated his doctrine, evaluated his life.

It mattered absolutely nothing to Paul. What God thought about Paul, meant much more to Paul, than what man thought about Paul. And, this is very important.

It's only thus that we can be true servants of God. Only thus will we be free from the opinions of men. Luke 16, 15 says, all that is big and great in the eyes of men, is an abomination to God.

The fact that man has a high opinion of us, may still mean that we are an abomination in God's eyes. That does not necessarily guarantee that God also has a high opinion about us. Likewise, Paul says in Galatians 1, 10, if I seek to please men, I cannot be the servant of Christ.

My service may be very good, but if the motivation behind it all is the pleasing of men, men will be impressed, but not God. There are many other examples like that. He says, the final day, the fire is going to test all of my work.

We considered that in 1 Corinthians 3, verse 12 and 13. And, if the fire is going to test my work, concerning its origin, power and motive, what difference does it make what you fellows think about my

ministry, or about my life, or about my doctrine? It means absolutely nothing. He says, I do not place any value on the opinion of men.

But, that doesn't mean he lives a careless life. It doesn't mean that he ignores his conscience. Some people can use that in a wrong way, as something which is an excuse for their living a sinful life.

No, Paul is not doing that. He says, in verse 4, I am conscious of nothing against myself. In other words, he says, consciously, I am not committing any sin.

This is the standard of life God wants his children to live in. Where, at every time, and at all times, and at any time, they should be able to say, in sincerity, before God's face, Lord, I am, at this moment, conscious of nothing against myself. If there has been something troubling my conscience, I have confessed it, forsaken it, set it right, with God and with man.

That's how Paul lived. As it says in Acts 24 and verse 16, I always exercise myself. In other words, I do my best to maintain a blameless conscience before God and before men.

And because he did his best to keep his conscience clear, he lived in this state at all times, 1 Corinthians 4. I am conscious of nothing against myself. The only perfection that we can attain here on this earth is perfection according to our conscience. In Hebrews chapter 9, verse 9, it speaks about being perfect in conscience.

This is the perfection that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 4, verse 4. Perfect in conscience. Total perfection in our entire personality and being. In other words, total likeness to Christ.

1 John 3, 2 tells us, can only take place when Jesus returns. But until we reach that total perfection, we are to live on earth with this perfection, the perfection of our conscience. In other words, I am conscious of nothing against myself.

But he goes on to speak in 1 Corinthians 4.4 about unconscious sin, where he says, that doesn't mean I'm acquitted, that doesn't mean I'm not guilty of any wrongdoing in my unconscious life. There may be a lot of things, there are a lot of things. I'm doing unconsciously, which I'm unaware of, which are un-Christ like.

As I progress spiritually, as I mature spiritually, I'll get more and more light on those hidden areas of my life. The one who examines me is the Lord. Not you Corinthians, not you carnal Corinthians, not even the spiritual brothers like Peter and John and Apollos.

But the Lord himself. Now once we take this position, we are free from the opinions of men, and yet we live in a healthy fear of God that acknowledges that there is sin in our unconscious part that we are unaware of. We're not guiltless before the Lord, and yet as far as our conscience goes, we are guiltless.

We are perfect in our conscience, but imperfect in our unconscious life. This is true spiritual maturity. And because of this, because we can only see a person's external fruit, and it's only by that external fruit that the Lord has authorized us to judge others.

In Matthew chapter 7, verse 16, Jesus said, By their fruits you shall know them. Many people are confused by Matthew chapter 7, verse 1, which says, Do not judge. But Matthew 7, verse 1 must be balanced up with Matthew 7, verse 16, Do not judge, but you shall know them by their fruits.

And we understand a little more about that when we come to 1 Corinthians 4, verse 5, because he's dealing here also with this subject of not judging others. What do we learn from this, Paul says, Therefore, verse 5, do not go on passing judgment before the appointed time. What is the appointed time for judging others? The appointed time for judging others is the judgment seat of Christ.

Until that day, we have no right to judge, to pass judgment. Wait, he says, and waiting for the Lord's time is one of the most difficult things for human beings to do. They are in such a hurry in all matters, including the matter of judgment.

He says, Wait until the Lord comes. There are certain things, he says, in 1 Corinthians 4, 5, which will be brought to light only in that day. And there are two things particularly that he mentions here.

And we need to read this verse very closely, because it's telling us not to pass judgment in these two matters. One, the things hidden in the darkness. In other words, a man's private life, his thought life, the areas of his life which you cannot see, don't pass a judgment on it.

Don't imagine that a man is doing this in his private life or thinking this in his thought life, because those are all hidden things in the darkness which we do not see. We've got no idea about. And so how in the world can we ever pass a judgment on them? Being children of Adam, we have a tendency, and having a flesh that has come from the children of Adam, we have this tendency to think the worst about other people.

But when we become children of God, we stop judging, or we should stop judging, the things that are hidden in the darkness. The second thing Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4, 5 not to judge in other people is their motives. You see a particular action, it may be a good action, but then because you don't like that particular person, you attribute a bad motive to that action, and you say, well, that was good what he did, but he did it with a bad motive.

And the question is, how did you know his motive? You cannot look into his heart. His motive may have been good. His motive may have been for the glory of God.

And so that verse teaches us there are two things which we cannot see, and therefore we should not judge. The model of that verse is that do not judge what you cannot see. A man's private life is thought life, and secondly, the motives with which he does certain things.

But that doesn't mean that we should not judge his fruit. Matthew 7, 16 said, we are to judge a person by their fruits. In other words, the part of a tree that we can see.

If the fruit is rotten, we know the tree is rotten. The point of 1 Corinthians 4, 5 is don't go digging into the tree to find out the quality of its sap that flows in its branches, or the roots that are underneath the tree. Just look at the external fruit, and by that you can assess a man, because the fruit indicates the quality of the tree.

And so we are told to judge righteous judgment. Jesus said that in John 7, 24. He said, do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.

Do not judge, but judge. This is the balance in the New Testament. Do not judge the hidden things, do not judge the motives, but judge the fruits, the external life.

Thereby we can assess one another. And in that final day, we read in verse 5 of 1 Corinthians 4, each man's praise will come to him from God, not from men. Today we get our praise from men, but in that day our praise will come to us from God.

On the basis of what? The two things mentioned in verse 5. According to our private life, our thought life, and our motives. How is it going to be with us when we stand before the Lord, and the Lord judges our thought life? Will we get praise from God? When He judges our private life, which men could not see. When He judges the motives, with which we did and said various things.

Will we get a reward and praise from God or not? This is the thing that should occupy our mind. Then we shall find plenty to cleanse ourselves from, and we shall stop wasting our time unnecessarily judging other people. We turn now to 1 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 6. Here Paul says, Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant or puffed up in behalf of one against another.

He says here that he has used the name of Apollos and his own name merely as examples to show the Corinthians that they should not favor one brother over another brother. In other words, he's not applying it only in the matter of Christian leaders. It's not a question of just choosing one leader to the exclusion of another, but also among themselves in the Corinthian church.

There should not be any cliques. There should not be any exclusive soulish attachment to one or two brothers to make other people feel excluded. That is carnality.

That you should not be puffed up on behalf of one against another. For that is partiality. And partiality is sin that destroys the work of God.

And he says that you might learn not to think of men above what is written. Above what is written in the scriptures. And what is written in the scriptures is that we are to see and assess a person by their fruit.

That's all. Beyond that, like we considered in our study of verse 5, the hidden things, the motives, we do not know anything about. And so what he's saying is, from our example you must learn to observe what is written.

Keep what is written in the word of God. That is our example and that is what you are to do. And don't be arrogant or puffed up in partiality, champions for one teacher against another.

Or as another translation says, let none of you speak boastfully of one teacher to the disparagement or speaking evil of another. And if you are in Christian work yourself, you must not encourage younger believers to speak in favor of one against another. Even if it is in favor of you against another.

That is unchristian. And he goes on here in verse 7 to say, for who makes you to differ from another? Who is the one who gives you superiority as you think you have? When you begin to think about it, he says to the Corinthians, what do you have that you did not receive? And there is a question before which it is good for all of us to pause and think. What have we got which we did not receive? There is not a single thing, whether physical, intellectual, emotional, financial or spiritual, that any of us have got today, which is not received.

And if you received it, why do you boast as though you had not received it? You see, we usually boast about things that we have accomplished ourselves. It is the height of stupidity to boast about something which we received freely. And yet, when you come to analyze it, you find that almost everything that people boast about, even Christians, is what they have received freely.

Have any of us ever thought about boasting that our sins are forgiven? We cannot think of that because forgiveness of sins was freely given to us. None of us deserved it, but it was freely given to us on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. In exactly the same way, if only we could see this, that anything which we have which is good is given from above.

James chapter 1 and verse 17 says, James chapter 1 verse 17, that every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights. If there is anything evil or imperfect in us, that is not given to us by God. That may be of our own manufacturing.

Our jealousy and our bitterness is what we have manufactured ourselves or received from evil spirits. But, everything good and perfect has come from above. What is there in our life that we can boast about? We cannot boast about the color of our skin, for we were born with it.

It's the height of stupidity for a person to boast about the color of his skin. Or, it's physical attractiveness, that's something we are born with. What about our intelligence? That's not something we manufactured, we were born with.

Any ability that we have, musical ability, if we have an ability, it's God-given. Knowledge of the word of God, how did we get that? God-given. Any spirituality we have, God-given.

Any spiritual gift that we have, God-given. And if only we could understand this and be gripped by it, it would eliminate pride from our life completely. There would be no more room for pride.

Once we understand the simple truth of 1 Corinthians 4, 7, what have you got which you did not receive? And the answer to that is nothing. Nothing good, which I have not received as a free gift from God. And if that is the case, how in the world can I ever boast about it and compare myself with a feeling of superiority over another brother in the church thinking that I am better than him or greater than him? This is the mark of a carnal Christian, that he does not realize that everything he has is the free gift of God.

He boasts in it. He thinks that this is his own accomplishment, not realizing it is a free gift. And because they are carnal like that, Paul now speaks sarcastically.

It's amazing how the Holy Spirit uses sarcasm in Scripture. There is a place for sarcasm in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus used it and the Apostle Paul used it too.

Particularly in these verses he says, in verse 8, he says, You are already filled. You have already become rich. You have become kings without us.

And would indeed that you had become kings, that we might reign with you. It's very obvious that the Corinthian Christians were anything but filled with divine nature. They were not spiritually rich, even if they were materially.

They were not spiritual kings. But he is being sarcastic here. He says, Look at the opinion that you people have about yourselves.

You think you are filled with the divine nature. You don't realize your true condition. It's somewhat similar to the Lord's rebuke to the church in Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3. And he says in verse 17, You say that I am rich.

You say I have become wealthy and have need of nothing. And you don't know your real condition, which is wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. That was the condition of the Corinthian church.

Wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. But they thought, like the church in Laodicea, that they were rich and increased with goods and had need of nothing. And so Paul says, You think you are filled? You think you are rich? You think you have become kings? You think that you have advanced spiritually beyond us apostles? Well, he says, I wish you really had the kingdom.

The kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He says, I wish you really had it so that we could also share that kingdom with you. He is being sarcastic.

Paul had already possessed the kingdom. But he is being sarcastic here. And then he says, concerning himself and the apostles, he says, God has exhibited us apostles last of all.

He has put us at the very end of the procession, given us the last place. There was only one person behind the apostles in the very last place, and that was the Lord Jesus himself. He humbled himself down to the very depths.

He went lower than anyone else ever went. But next to him, last in the line were the apostles, which teaches us that the apostles were truly spiritual. They knew how to take the last place in the eyes of men gracefully.

And those who are last in the world will be first in the kingdom of heaven. God has exhibited the apostles last of all. They will be first in the kingdom next to Christ.

And God has shown them as men condemned to death. We have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. Those whom God calls for a special ministry, an apostolic ministry, will usually be placed like that, last in the line, dishonored by men, a laughingstock of the world, evil spirits mocking them.

We're fools, he says, for Christ's sake, in verse 10. In the eyes of the world, we're stupid. We're like criminals, condemned to die, condemned to death.

But you, you are so clever in the eyes of the world. We are weak in the eyes of the world, but you're strong. And here we see the contrast between true spirituality and carnality in all these verses, that carnal Christians want to appear great in this world, but truly spiritual people are willing to appear fools and weak in order that they may fulfill God's purpose and be great in His eyes.

We turn today to 1 Corinthians and chapter 4 and verse 9. In verses 9 to 13, we have a description of how God allows His greatest servants to be seen by worldly people. And that is a very great passage of Scripture, a very important passage of Scripture, a great example for us to look at and consider and meditate on when we want to evaluate God's servants even today. God exhibits His apostles, and the apostles are first in the church.

1 Corinthians and chapter 12 and verse 28 says, God has appointed in the church, first of all, apostles. They are number one in God's eyes. But in the eyes of the world, they are last of all.

Verse 9. What is first in God's eyes is last in the world's eyes. And that's just an indication of how God's view and man's view are so totally opposite to each other. In the eyes of the world, they are last.

In the eyes of God, they are first. And God has allowed them to be exposed in the eyes of the world as though they were criminals condemned to die. The world thinks of God's servants as criminals, not great, but fit only to be the dregs of society.

They have become a spectacle to the world. They have been put on display, the laughing stock of men. And angels and men watch them as in a theatre.

For Christ's sake, verse 10, they are considered as fools. But the carnal Corinthians, on the other hand, were considered as wise and clever. And that's the mark of a carnal Christian, one mark of a carnal Christian, that he wants to appear wise and clever before the intelligent people of the world.

When we preach the word of God, it's a great temptation for us to preach it in such a way that the clever and intelligent people in the world will think that we also are clever. And that's a tremendous temptation. We are to preach the word of God in such a way that we don't bother about the opinion of the clever and the intelligent people in the world.

What they think about us, about our ministry, and about our way of speaking and our message, has absolutely no value for a true servant of God. But the Corinthians were not like that. They wanted the esteem of men.

They wanted to be esteemed by worldly people as clever. And sometimes we think if only we can convince these worldly people that we're not such duds, that we are clever, that we can present Christ more adequately. That's the reasoning of the world.

Paul says, in the eyes of the world, we're fools. We're not intelligent. The world thinks we're stupid, dumb people.

That's fine. But he says, you carnal Corinthians, you are seeking to be wise. In the eyes of the world, we are weak.

But you people are strong, capable, powerful, influential. But we are weak. Here is the mark of a true servant of God.

He says, you Corinthians are distinguished. The middle of verse 10. But we are without any honor.

We're despised. A true servant of God is one who is lost in the eyes of the world. Not intelligent in the eyes of the world.

Weak in the eyes of the world. Despised and not distinguished in the eyes of the world. In verse 11, he says, to this present hour, we suffer hunger and thirst and are poorly clothed and are roughly treated and are homeless.

God's greatest servants are not necessarily eating the best food. In fact, Paul struggled to earn his living as he says later on in verse 12. He says, we toil to exhaustion working with our own hands.

We have to work for our living by manual labor. Paul worked with his own hands in order to earn his living. And he didn't earn very much.

A true servant of God can never be a rich man in this world. A person who calls himself a servant of God and becomes rich in this world is something wrong somewhere which will be exposed in the day of judgment. A true servant of God can never be rich.

He experiences hunger and thirst. He does not have all the rich food that many other rich people can have. His clothes will not be the fanciest clothes.

It says, he was poorly clothed. The greatest apostle perhaps this world has seen was poorly clothed. Did not have enough food to eat.

Just sufficient to keep him alive. He was roughly treated by the people around him. Buffeted, knocked about and homeless in the sense, like Jesus, no permanent home.

Simplicity when it comes to these earthly things. Working with his own hands. And when he was cursed, he blessed those who cursed him.

Another mark of a true servant of God and of a spiritual man. When he was persecuted, when other people made his life miserable, he took it patiently. Another mark of a truly spiritual man that he doesn't complain about the people who are making his life miserable.

It's amazing to see the number of believers who are full of complaints about other people who are trying to make their lives miserable. That is a clear mark of a carnal Christian. All those who have complaints about other people are carnal.

They are babies. A truly spiritual man believes that everything works for his good. He's got no complaint against anyone.

Even if he's persecuted and other people make his life miserable, he submits to God and he accepts it. When he is slandered, in other words, people tell false stories about him and he's defamed, a true servant of God tries to conciliate. That means he tries to patch up and live at peace.

He blesses those who curse him. And he sums it all up in the last part of verse 13 saying we are the scum of the world, the rubbish, the dregs of all things, the scrapings underneath everyone's feet. How many people are interested in such a ministry? This is the ministry of a true servant of God.

And I wonder how many people whom we respect as great servants of God today would qualify according to the qualifications mentioned here in verses 9 to 13. There are hardly anyone who would be interested, hardly anyone at all who is interested in having a ministry like this. And yet this is the ministry of an apostle.

There are many who claim to be apostles these days, but when you put the test of an apostle mentioned here in verses 9 to 13, almost all of them fail. In the eyes of the world, true apostles are last of all. In the eyes of God, they are first.

And if we want to see who is a true servant of God, we have to see through God's eyes and not according to the world's opinion. So many Christian teachers and leaders are seeking for honor just like film stars and politicians and other people in the world. They live grandly, they live in great style, they earn great incomes, they travel about in great style, along with the business executives and the jet set of today's world, but Paul would not find himself in that category.

He was a humble man who lived simply, worked with his own hands, blessed those who cursed him, was rejected and despised by the clever and great people of the world. But he stood true to God, and he was number one in God's eyes. And when he wrote all this, verse 14, he says, I'm not writing all this just to make you fellows feel bad.

I'm writing this because I want to teach you. I want to correct you. I want to correct the wrong opinions you have about true spirituality, my beloved children.

He calls them children, my beloved children. He says, I love you, and I just don't want you to go astray. That's why I want to warn you about the characteristics of a truly spiritual man.

He says, you can have 10,000 teachers, countless teachers, but you don't have many fathers. And that's the great lack even today. It's easy to become a Bible teacher, it's difficult to become a father.

A teacher just teaches in the class and goes away, couldn't care less for his students after that. A father has to nurture his children day and night. Even when the children are absent from him, he's concerned.

And the great need is for fathers. Teachers, there are many. Teachers can be great in the world, but fathers care for their children.

And he says, I became your father through the gospel. I'm not just a teacher, he says. I'm your father.

That since I'm your father and you're my children, it's good for you to follow me. If you want to be spiritual, verse 16, he says, follow me. Don't seek to become great in this world.

Bless those who curse you. And if the world treats you like the scum, just humble yourself and accept it, because it has no value in God's eyes. And then he gives an example of one servant of God like that.

That's Timothy. He says, he's a child of mine too. I'm sending him to you to teach you these things more thoroughly.

He will remind you, verse 17, of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. In every church, Paul taught these truths. The marks of true spirituality.

And then he says about certain people in Corinth who had become arrogant, verse 18, as though Paul would never come to them, as though they could just take over the church and run it and make it a carnal church. But he says, I'm going to come to you soon if the Lord wills. And then I'm not going to listen to all the clever words and the arrogant words of those who think that they are very spiritual.

I want to see the power in their life. Because, verse 20, the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power. A very important word.

It's not our knowledge, it's not our speech that proves how much of the kingdom of God we have but the power in our life. And he concludes with this question in chapter 4. What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod or with love and a spirit of gentleness? A father has the spirit of gentleness, he has a rod as well, depending on the condition of his children. And the great need is for spiritual fathers who know how to lead their children on gently, at the same time correct them with the rod when they need it.

Like the Apostle Paul.

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