

Judgment in the Kingdom

“He really seems to like him,” said Dashaud.

“He’s a likable guy,” replied Kortney.

The two coworkers were speaking about Clayton, who had been recently promoted to manager of the rental car company by Juliet, the district area supervisor. Clayton had worked at the company for the past 2 years, having made salesman of the month more than 13 times and discovered ways to bring in more business.

“He’s a Denzel Washington wannabe,” spat Dashaud. “Why do the women always have to crowd around him? He uses his looks to get ahead.”

“Clayton is a good guy,” retorted Kortney. “He loves God. He has a wife and family. He also has a great personality. What has he done to you?”

“I think he is doing something to make Juliet favor him,” said Dashaud.

“Now wait a minute,” Kortney said. “Don’t hate on the brother because he is doing well. You don’t know what he’s doing.”

“I can see what he’s doing,” replied Dashaud. “Look at how she looks at him. Isn’t it obvious how he got his promotion?”

“You’ve crossed a line,” said Kortney, rising from the breakroom table. “I’d advise you not to repeat any of what you said. For one, it can be considered sexual harassment. For two, God alone is the judge. He will expose the things in a person’s heart—including yours.”

1. *What does God’s Word teach about how we should see ourselves?*

2. *How can knowing God’s Word keep us from competing with others?*

3. *Why is it important to know the difference between what God’s Word says and what man-made rules say?*

The Lord Judges Faithfully in Truth

1 Corinthians 4:1-4, KJV

1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

4 For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:1-4, NIV

¹This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ²Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. ³I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. ⁴My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.

Paul began Chapter 4 by helping the Corinthians, and us, understand that the Lord judges a person's heart. It isn't just what we do that matters, but also why we do it—the motive of the heart—that counts. Here we see three important matters of the heart to consider: first faithful stewardship, then faulty human judgment, and finally the flawless judgment of the Lord.

Paul and other ministers of Christ, such as Apollos and Peter, had been entrusted with the "mysteries" of God (vs. 1). These are not mysteries for Sherlock Holmes or Miss Marple to solve. No amount of human reasoning could solve the divine mysteries; rather, they must be revealed by God Himself. We are called to be stewards of the message of Christ that He reveals to us: we "have been given a trust [and] must prove faithful" in keeping that trust (vs. 2).

Keeping the trust also means we must be aware that human judgment can be faulty. People can be fickle and often seek after the next new thing. New does not necessarily mean bad, but God's people need to be careful when it comes to some "new" teaching or doctrine from Scripture.

Every teaching should be scrutinized against God's Word and solid doctrines that have stood the test of time.

Even Paul did not fully trust his own judgment in such an important matter. Though his "conscience [was] clear" (vs. 4), he understood that he was not innocent in every matter, especially his stewardship of the mysteries and revelations of God. Paul knew that Christ would judge him and his stewardship of the mysteries of God, so the apostle took great care in his teaching, as we should today.

4. *To what was Paul entrusted by God?*

5. *What is required of one who is a steward of God's trust?*

6. *How does human judgment compare to the Lord's?*

The Lord Judges with Light

1 Corinthians 4:5-6, 17, KJV

5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

6 And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

17 For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful

1 Corinthians 4:5-6, 17, NIV

⁵Therefore 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.

⁶Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.

¹⁷For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the

in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

Having introduced the case for believers to avoid going beyond what God says in His Word, Paul continued by providing additional justification. Not only do faithful stewards of God's trust recognize that human judgment is faulty, but they also understand the great potential for pride to hamper that judgment even further. So Paul reminded his readers that the day is coming when Jesus will return. And when He does return, His light will shine brightly through the darkness to reveal all that is hidden.

That the Lord's light will reveal all things when He returns means specifically that the thoughts and motives of each person's heart will be opened for His judgment. Though such exposure of the heart may be a painful process, it will lead ultimately to cleansing and bring to the forefront all that is praiseworthy in the eyes of God.

Paul gave himself and Apollos as examples of not going beyond what is written in God's Word. There was no division or quarrel between the two of them. Though there may have been style differences in their preaching, both Paul and Apollos were faithful stewards of God's truths. The problem was the pride of the hearers. They were puffed up against each other for no reason because the ones they claimed to follow were united in their stand for God's truth.

So, Paul decided to send his spiritual son, Timothy, to help remind them that Paul's ways were the ways of Christ, which he taught in every church that he visited.

7. *What does this passage say will happen when the Lord comes?*

8. *How were Paul and Apollos good examples for the Corinthian believers?*

9. *What was the real reason for the divisiveness among them?*

The Lord Judges in Power

1 Corinthians 4:18-21, KJV

18 Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.

19 But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.

20 For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

21 What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

1 Corinthians 4:18-21, NIV

¹⁸Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. ¹⁹But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. ²⁰For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. ²¹What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

One of the reasons those who were prideful felt like they could get away with it is that they did not believe they would have to face Paul personally. However, if the Lord was willing, it was Paul's plan to come to them and reveal the authority by which they spoke. Paul was confident that they spoke in their pride and not in the power of God, and he was willing to confront them so the others would see the truth.

In the power of God and His Word, Paul was prepared to confront those who allowed their arrogance to get in the way of their fellow believers. However, though he was prepared to use God's "rod of discipline" (vs. 21), he hoped they would resolve their divisive ways before he came. That way, his visit would be with a loving, gentle spirit.

10. *Why did those who were puffed up think they could get away with their divisiveness?*

11. *What would Paul determine when he came to them?*

12. *How would Paul handle the situation when he came to them?*

Judge Not

Every second and fourth Sunday, Mrs. Jones not only served as the church usher, but also the church “judge.” As she walked people down the aisle to their seat, Mrs. Jones judged what they wore to church. If someone wore the same dress as the previous week, Mrs. Jones looked down on the person as being poor. When the announcements were given, Mrs. Jones criticized the speaker as they nervously spoke and imagined she would perform better. During the sermon, Mrs. Jones was the first one to try to “identify” who the pastor was referencing when he spoke of sins. She truly believed that her judgments were correct and never looked inward to see why she was so judgmental.

One weekday, Mrs. Jones had a minor stroke and she could no longer serve as an usher. For months, she couldn’t attend church. Even when she returned to church regularly, Mrs. Jones could no longer usher.

One Sunday, Mrs. Jones couldn’t wash her clothes for service and had to wear the same dress she wore previously. Although Mrs. Jones had several dresses to wear, they were dirty. As she entered church that Sunday, the Holy Spirit reminded her of her judgmental thoughts about others who repeatedly wore the same clothes on Sunday. She was humbled as she realized she judged others without knowing the facts. Mrs. Jones knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking to her saying all people are imperfect and only God is the true Judge of the heart.

We tend to quickly look down on those who have less than we do or lack our skills. Yet, God’s Word tells us not to judge.

13. *In what areas of life do people tend to think too highly of themselves and judge others?*

14. *Why is judging others going beyond what His Word says we should do?*

15. *When do you tend to compare yourself to others and begin judging them?*

Judging Is for Him, Not Us

As Christians, we can get puffed up over our accomplishments or even the blessings God gives us and think we are better than others. Our pride controls us, and we forget that it is by God's grace and mercy we are who and where we are.

► *Examine your own actions to see if you have been judgmental toward someone. If so, write the person's name below and ask God to forgive you for your actions and/or thoughts. Pray for the Holy Spirit that lives within you to take control of your thoughts and actions, especially in regard to judging others.*

KEY VERSE

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. —1 Corinthians 4:5, KJV

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. —1 Corinthians 4:5, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 21 through August 27

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Isaiah 6:1-8—Earth Is Full of God's Glory.
- Tues.** Acts 17:22-31—In Him We Have Our Being.
- Wed.** Micah 4:1-8—Many Will Go to God's House.
- Thurs.** Hebrews 7:11-25—Jesus Is Able to Save Forever.
- Fri.** Isaiah 26:12-21—Awake and Sing for Joy!
- Sat.** 1 Corinthians 15:1-14—The Most Important Message.
- Sun.** 1 Corinthians 15:15-28—Jesus, the First Fruits.