

Biblical Self Esteem – 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Thank you for worshipping with us this weekend. If you are:

- 1) Present here at the church. Welcome.
- 2) Following online. Welcome.

If you are:

- 1) New to our church. Please text the word, GUEST to the number on the screen. A staff member would love to personally welcome you.
- 2) Needing to talk. Please text the word, TALK to the number on the screen. A soul care team member would love to help you process.

My name is Jason Taylor. I am the Biblical Soul Care Pastor here at Coram Deo. It is my privilege to share the Word of God with you today.

Let's dig right into the Scriptures. Please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 4:1-5.

Today, I will unpack how to enjoy biblical self-esteem.

“This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. 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. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 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.”

Ancient cultures viewed too much self-regard as a bad thing. They called it “hubris”. They felt that too much hubris was actually the cause of evil.

In more recent, western culture, it is generally believed people need more self-esteem.

The belief of western culture is attractive because one does not necessarily have to make any moral judgments or corrections of others—just encourage and support one another.

In contrast, the traditional belief of ancient cultures solution to evil was to convict people and help them back.

So what is the truth? Should we have a high view of self? What does the Bible say about self esteem? In this passage, Paul presents a way to view self that is helpful.

As a spiritual father (1 Cor 4:15) Paul addresses the church in Corinth. The people were finding their personal worth (a sense of pride) in a relationship with a church

leader. Some were connected to Paul, some Apollos, some Peter (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:3-9, 22).

The church developed opinions on who was better—not just who was a better church leader, but who in the church was better because they had a connection to them. This lead to conflict. In chapter 1, verse 12, Paul states that there are fights among the church members because “...Each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul’, or ‘I follow Apollos’, or ‘I follow Peter’, or ‘I follow Christ.’” This is such a human thing to do...we find personal value in the group we identify with. In chapter 3, verse 3 and 4, Paul says, “...Are you not of the flesh and only behaving in a human way? For when one says, ‘I follow Paul’ and another, ‘I follow Apollos’, are you not being merely human?”

I believe we can see this today as well.

- When I was in high school we identified ourselves with groups of people: athletes, nerds, prep, gothic, etc.
- In today's high school, the students identify themselves with groups of people who connect with a cause: global warming, socialism, capitalism
- In college there is often an identity found in fraternities or sororities
- Adults we do the same type of thing...Politically we identify with a candidate: Biden or Trump—or other leaders who are: liberal or conservative, democrat or republican...

Who we associate with defines us.

- Our connections
- Our colleagues
- Our companions

They give us a sense of belonging, purpose, and value. Our identity is often wrapped up in them...

While Paul understands that this is a natural part of being human. He also implies that there is much more to our life than these groups of people—it is merely human. He wants us to go beyond the simple, fleshly things, and think in a spiritual way—even as it relates to our feelings of personal worth/self esteem.

Paul has already applied this to himself (1 Cor. 4:6). He is thinking in a spiritual manner and is urging us to be imitators of him (1 Cor. 4:16)

Illustration: Photo of Dad and I mowing lawn. “I wanted to be like my daddy”

Paul, a spiritual father is a good person to look up to as well...Let' imitate him

So therefore the first way you can be like Paul is...

1) **VIEW** yourself as a servant (vs. 1, 2)

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy...

Faithfully serve God and others...

Paul viewed himself as

- a) A **SERVANT** of Christ (vs. 1a)
- b) A **STEWARD** of truth (vs. 1b, 2)

He is asking the Corinthians to regard him, esteem him, view him this way as well.

This is very interesting because Paul had opposite sides to his life: Paul the failure and Paul the success...

Paul the failure was a blasphemer, persecutor of the church, and insolent opponent—the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:13).

Paul the success could have easily identified himself by his intelligence, his training as a Pharisee, or being key influential figure in the world's history. Who wrote 13 of the NT's books. Who stood before Caesar to share the gospel. He healed the sick and possessed. Who suffered much for Christ.

He could have pitied himself and been useless for God's Kingdom or he could have chosen to be very arrogant and boastful. Instead, he cherishes a much more humble perspective. He identified with his role as a servant and steward of Christ.

A servant is not typically of high regard. His call is to please his master in all things—at all cost. In fact, the servant didn't really have an identity. Their identity is wrapped up in that of their Master.

A steward has a fiduciary responsibility to manage another's resources righteously. They are personal agents of the One whose resources they manage. Their job is to increase the personal worth and reputation of the one they represent. A steward is to be trustworthy with these resources—not managing for their own gain but for the gain of their master.

For both the servant and steward it is more important how their master thinks of them rather than the esteem of other people.

Key principle: It's most important how my Master thinks of me.

Paul's personal value was God-given

- Not driven by man's approval

Paul's personal value was unpretentious

- Not driven by pride but by humility

Paul's personal value was found in his faithfulness

- Not in his popularity

Paul's personal value was found in the One he represented

- Therefore, whether he failed or had ministry success, he was confident

Paul allowed man's opinion to be **SMALL** and God's be **BIG**

Let's do the same...

2) **MINIMIZE** Man's Perspective (vs. 3a)

But with me it is a very small thing...

Paul expresses that it is not consequential to him what the Corinthians or anyone else thinks—his self esteem is not driven by the opinions of man.

Man doesn't have the right to judge whether he is a trustworthy steward of God's truth. Only God has that right. Paul knew that it was his faithfulness that made him matter in God's Kingdom and only God could determine if he was truly faithful.

For some of us though, it might be a temptation to regularly ask ourselves, "Do I matter?" The natural human way to answer this question is to find our value in "the voices" around us:

a) Individual Judgments of Others (vs. 3a)

- a. ...that I should be judged by you
- b. What do you think I bring?

b) Court of Public Opinion (vs. 3b)

- a. ...or by any human court
- b. What does the group think I bring?

c) Self-Judgment (vs. 3c)

- a. ..in fact, I don't even judge myself
- b. What do I think that I bring?

Sadly, many fall into the trap of listening to these three "voices" and allow them to inform their self-image. This self-image can fall on a spectrum from COMPLETELY INSECURE to COMPLETELY NARCISSISTIC. This creates a very self-focused person who either pities or exalts themselves. This self-focus is pride.

Many mistake pride as arrogance. However, pride is simply being self-focused.

Illustration: www.inspiringtips.com lists the top 11 signs you are prideful. What is the one word in all of them? YOU...

God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

This passage is clear that Paul did not display pride by diminishing or exalting himself as others were talking about him.

You see...it seems from this passage that Paul didn't allow his mind to be dominated by both the "good" and "bad" judgments of those around him. He didn't seem to boost his ego by replaying people's positive comments over and over in his mind. It also appears that he didn't focus on the criticism of others by replaying it in his mind. Instead, he didn't make it all about Paul.

It also seems evident that Paul chose not to compare himself to Apollos or Peter. This is really amazing because in western culture today, competition is the vehicle of success. This vehicle is often fueled by our pride. Pride by nature is competitive. C.S. Lewis writes, "Lust may drive a man to have sexual relations with a beautiful woman, but pride drives a man to have sexual relations with a woman over other men." It is amazing to watch Paul choose humility.

Another key component to competition is boasting. Boasting creates conflict and division. As a former teacher and school principal, I have seen this in action...Have you ever watched smack talk between elementary children? It is so funny! I remember one situation that was escalating and one boy said to the other, "Your house is so old that when you ring the doorbell, the toilet flushes!" Smack talk takes place in churches today. Paul squashes prideful boasting by making it small in his own mind. He also chooses not to boast in any man except for Jesus.

You see, Paul knows who he is. He knows that his identity comes from his Savior. He is who God says he is...

This leads us to our next point. Like Paul, we should...

3) **MAXIMIZE** God's Perspective (vs. 3b, 4)

... It is the Lord who judges me. (vs 4)

Again, Paul emphasizes the importance of a small perspective of man and a big perspective of God. This is going beyond the simple, humanistic thoughts of self esteem and glorifies God by maximizing Him.

So for Paul, he found his value in:

a) **Self-Forgetfulness (vs. 3, 4)**

- a. ...In fact, I do not even judge myself.
- b. It's not about me...blessed self forgetfulness (Tim Keller)
- c. In essence Paul is saying, "I don't care about what you think...I don't even care about what I think..."
- d. Dynamically different than ancient or western cultures' beliefs
- e. Its about trusting what God says about me
- f. It's not about my glory but God's glory

b) **God's Justifies (1 Corinthians 3:15; 4:4)**

- a. ...but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.
- b. Declared righteous (**Romans 4:2, 7, 8**)
 - i. The righteous judge speaks and I am declared righteous
- c. Imputed righteousness (**2 Corinthians 5:21**)
 - i. Jesus, the completely righteous One, credits righteousness to my account
- d. Adopted into God's family (**Romans 8:12-17**)

c) **Jesus rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:10-16)**

- a. ...For we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil
- b. We receive reward
- c. This is a public demonstration presenting evidence of our genuine faith.

This all may sound very theological and lofty—maybe even "churchy". Let me bring this down to earth by offering five practical suggestions:

a) **Confess sins daily**

- a. Removes pride and cultivates humility
- b. Paul said, "**I'm not aware of anything against myself.**"
- c. Keep a short sin list

b) **Trust God forgives you**

- a. Not self-forgiveness
- b. Your lack of faith doesn't violate you, it violates God
- c. By definition—forgiveness releases debt. You don't release your own debt—Jesus does this for you
- d. The struggle to trust God's forgiveness is real
- e. Difference between guilt and shame

c) **Put your shame into words**

- a. Cast these feelings/thoughts on your Savior who cares for you
- b. Paul sees himself as very sinful, yet he also sees his own accomplishments
- c. Neither keeps Him from doing what he is called to do
- d. Doing so develops confidence

d) Tell others about Jesus

- a. Steward of truth
- b. Don't use hypocrisy as a crutch
- c. Don't let sinfulness/shame keep you from doing what you are called to do

e) Find ways to serve others

- a. Develops humility and pure heart

As you cultivate genuine faithfulness today...

4) **WAIT** for God's approval (vs. 5)

Don't 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.

We don't gain righteousness from a relationship or connection with men. God declares our righteousness. Paul was being judged by the Corinthian church.

So he responds, "Stop being so judgy!" Why? Because the Lord will judge at the appropriate time. He will "Disclose the purposes of the heart".

So wait.

We are not a culture that is good at waiting. Instant oatmeal. Overnight mail. Fast Food.

I was standing in line at a local department store and the sign read, "You are 2 minutes from checkout". I was impatient.

We want to feel good about ourselves and we want it now. We certainly don't want to feel like we are being judged by others—especially as we related it to our own self esteem. I would feel so much better about myself if I can just defend myself. This would surely increase my self-esteem.

But Paul isn't really arguing for low self esteem or high self esteem. He isn't arguing for passively allowing someone to judge us. Nor is he allowing us to be defensive. Rather He is encouraging us to **Minimize Man's perspective** and **Maximize God's perspective** by waiting for the honor that comes from God—His commendation—His approval, and it is His praise that matters.

So...

Be humble while waiting, like Paul who didn't care about what you think or even about what he thinks. He cares about what God thinks.

Remember A truly humble person will not:

- a) Downplay his own abilities nor will he exalt his abilities.
- b) Will not hate himself or love himself

Wait for God's praise...

Let's pray—Lord God thank you for giving us eternal life that in hope we know will come if we have repented of our sins and believe in Jesus. Also Lord, thank you that will will command faithfulness. We can wait on You and You will not disappoint. We don't have to let the opinions of others discourage us. Rather we can have confidence in You and Your approval. Not only will we be approved one day at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but right now You have given us Jesus Christ's righteousness. You have already spoken Your approval of us. Now we don't have to let failure or success drive our self-worth. Our confidence is found in Your approval.