



Gospel Atmosphere
I CORINTHIANS

Presumptuous Judgment

I've bought a lot of used cars in my life. And over all those purchases, I've learned a few lessons.

- True good deals are rare.
- Never take the first price.
- The character of the owner more important than the condition of the car.

But the principle that really sticks out among other principles, "Never buy a used car at night." The two worst cars I ever owned were purchased at night where I could only inspect them with weak artificial light. And at night, the paint looks glossy and scratch free and brilliant. It looks amazing and you buy it and the next morning you wake up and go out and look at it and you think, what happened? Overnight the paint got scratched and dull. The tires somehow lost 1/2" of tread. The belts all dried up and cracked, overnight. I feel kind of like Jacob when Laben tricked him. And in

the morning he awoke and behold it was Leah!

And that little principle illustrates something about light. What is really there becomes less and less clear as the light decreases. Now let's think about that principle a little more sharply.

As the light decreases, which direction do your presumptions trend? Let's say it's predawn and there's just the faintest hint of light and then the sun begins to slowly rise. As the light increases, do you find that things look better than they did in the dark or as the light increases do you find that things look worse than they do in the dark.

The answer is, it depends. I kind of set you up. Because in my example, obviously the answer is as the light increases, flaws are revealed. But what if I showed you a piece of masterful art. In the dark you would be able to tell it was art, but the more you turned the light up, the more brilliant it would become. The more you magnified and inspected and scrutinized it the more impressed you would become, until at full light your breath would just be taken away.

Now Paul in our passage today is saying there are all sorts of people in the world who are doing ministry for all sorts of reasons. Some are like cheap pieces of imitation art with crude strokes of mimicry while others are absolutely brilliant masterpieces. But we can't know which are which because we lack the light to illuminate what's really there.

You have Paul, you have Apollos, you have this teacher over there and that guy over there. And given our current lighting conditions, they all look pretty much the same. We can compare them in the shadows but it's not a very fair comparison. What really matters is invisible in the current lighting. But there is coming a day of

judgment where each piece of art will be inspected and the reality will be revealed.

And what is that thing that is simultaneously the most important element of character in a person and yet is also that thing that is most shadowed and difficult to see?

Answer: motives. What motivates us to do what we do? Are we doing this thing for God or for man? And so because it's so hard to judge motives Paul warns us in this passage to be very, very slow in coming to conclusions.

Be very careful not to look at the external and think you can somehow know the internal. You can do all kinds of morally virtuous things out of a heart filled with fear, pride, and desire for power or out of a heart that has been actually changed at the root by the grace of God.

It's very, very difficult to tell the difference in most cases.

So that's what we are about to hear. But before we read the passage let's recall the big idea because Paul is about to wrap up his point he began clear back in chapter 1

- Given that it's not about eloquence or worldly wisdom or external power or technique or schemes....
- Given that true power comes from Jesus and true servants of God serve from an invisible motive

Here's what Paul says, "THEREFORE"

Paul is about to leverage everything he's said so far to make some great point. This whole deal about personality factions that began

clear back in chapter one is about to come to a conclusion. Therefore... he's about to make this giant point.

1 Corinthians 4:5-6, **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. I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

Essentially what Paul is saying, if you want to really roll up the issue into a single problem. You are having divisions because you are proud. PRIDE always creates division. Perhaps there is some exception out there, but in every case I know of, pride is the root sin of divisions.

It's the root sin of division in marriages It's the root sin of division in parenting It's the root sin of division in business It's the root sin of division in churches

And so that is why Paul is saying, "I'm saying all this so that you won't be puffed up in favor of one against another. He said back in chapter 3, your boasting is not good. In chapter 2 he says, let me tell you what to boast in, boast in your weakness." The root issue here is pride.

Now of course pride has always been a problem in history - of course, but we have a unique twist on the problem in our current day and age. I really think you can say that up until the twentieth century, the traditional cultures have always believed too high a view of yourself is the real root cause for most of the evil in the world. This is still true in many, many cultures of the world. Most of the crime, the violence, the war mindedness is a result of pride. Why do people abuse? Why are people cruel? Why do people do the bad things they do?

Traditionally, the answer was pride. It goes clear back to Aristotle in Paul's day. Aristotle used the Greek word hubris to describe the problem. Here's this total pagan, totally unbeliever, not trained at all in biblical principles and yet he comes to the conclusion that too high a view of yourself is the cause of all these problems.

So when Paul is speaking to the Corinthians who would have been just absolutely saturated with Greek culture, listen, you are being prideful. That would have connected with some currency. They would have said, man, no wonder we are having all these problems. We are thinking too highly of ourselves. The culture would have reinforced that point.

In the modern Western culture, particularly in the United States, we have an utterly opposite cultural consensus.

- The basis of our education, of
- The way in which we treat prisoners
- The basis of a lot of our legislation,
- Certainly the basis of our counseling

We come at this from exactly the opposite point of view than virtually all of the other societies that have ever lived.

Our belief today is people misbehave for lack of self-esteem, because they have too low a view of themselves. It's deeply rooted in everything. It's a cultural consensus. The reason husbands beat their wives, the reason why people are criminals is they have too low a view of themselves. Traditional cultures said the problem is you have too high a view, pride, and too much self-esteem. Now we say the problem is too little self-esteem.

And so we need to be doubly corrected here.

- We need to work against the impulses of our flesh which tell us that we need more self
- we need to work against the impulses of the culture which tell us that your fundamental problem is more self.

But it's not like the goal here is to return to Aristotle. Aristotle didn't have it right. How could he? He didn't know the Lord. What we need is a totally different picture of self.

So from verses 5-6 we are going to see elements of gospel humility that is nothing like our culture nor is it anything like Aristotle. It's a restorative freedom to live in humility. So here we go:

GOSPEL HUMILITY

1. Humility Does not Claim Motive Insight

Paul is saying, "Humble people don't presume they understand what they cannot see." The prideful person on the other hand goes way beyond what he knows or sees.

The word that is translated here "puffed up" is a really unique word. I'm telling you not to go beyond what is written so that you won't be puffed up. That word - it's actually a great translation. The NAS, which is supposed to be a literal translation, translates it arrogant which doesn't at all retain the metaphor. It also doesn't distinguish it from other words for pride - like Aristotle's hubris.

But this is a special word. It's not the normal word for pride, but it's a word Paul uses in this particular book six times. It's used by no one else in the Bible. He uses it one other times in Colossians. But here in Corinthians it's used six times. He is trying to help these Corinthians by teaching them something about the human ego by using this particular word.

This word for pride is a word that literally means to be overinflated,

swollen, bloated beyond its proper size. It's a word that actually is related to the word for bellows. It evokes the image of some organ of the human body that is distended because so much air has been pumped into it that it's ready to burst. It's very evocative and almost painful to think of your appendix blown up like this. It's overinflated, it's bloated, it's swollen, and it's inflamed because it supposed to be like this and it's just stretched to it's limit like a drum. That, he says, is what pride is. You take the human ego and you inflate it.

Pride has a view of self larger than God intends. *A prideful person thinks he's:

- more important than he is,
- more lovely than he is,
- more worthy of pity than he is,
- more worthy of admiration than he is.
- A prideful person thinks he deserves more, is owed more, should be paid more, should be worshiped more.

So it can take a thousand different forms, but in this passage the pride, the inflation, the bloating, is an arrogant presumption that merely my looking at the outside, I can make judgments about what's going on inside. I can understand motives. I can understand character. I can see the heart.

And I don't know about you, but I see this all the time both in others and myself. If you ask someone, "Do you think you are a good judge of character?" I've never met a single person that said, "You know, It scares me to make judgments about a person's character. I takes me a while to really understand a person and ask enough questions to really take them as an individual without caricaturing them or stereotyping. And even then, I'm regularly wrong." Everybody thinks they can look at person and in one second, they know exactly who

they are. In fact, I've only heard that comment in association with a person complimenting themselves, "Now, just so you know, I'm a pretty good judge of character."

I've said that exact comment to other people subconsciously trying to seed them with the thought that here's a guy that has unique insight into people so that my next comment can be heard with special force. Do you see how prideful that is?

And Paul here in the context is saying, "Don't assume you have some special insight into people that makes you a judge over God. Only God knows the heart. You don't have night vision so don't act like you do."

God says very clearly, right now the purposes of men's heart are in the dark. People are really, really good at hiding why they do what they do. Is there any motive sector of your heart that people would be surprised to discover? Well, don't you think that same condition exists in others? People are mysterious. He will bring to light what is hidden in the darkness and will expose...That's telling us that right now it's pitch black night. We can't see in those conditions. And you don't make judgments in the dark. You don't make judgments without the evidence. Why? Because you will make really bad mistakes.

We have all heard of court cases where the jury came to some conclusion. This guy is clearly guilty. We have the murder's hair. It matches. We have blood on the knife. It's the same blood type. His footprint is the same. But then years later, as the technology developed, they run a DNA test and even though his foot was the same size, his hair the same color, the DNA is different.

And here's what he's saying, "Actions can look really good that are actually motivated by things that are really bad. And there are other actions that look really bad that are actually motivated by things that look really good."

- Why is a husband being kind to his family? Because he loves them or because he's compensating for something he feels guilty about?
- Why does a wife serve her family? For God or because she desperately needs approval.
- Why am I preaching? Because I am serving the Lord or because I like being in a position where I can influence and control and feel important?
- Why does a student work hard? Because they are starving for identity and it's what they are good at it and the thought of poor grades terrifies them.

How will you answer this? First of all, the answer is, motives are always 100 percent mixed. And the second thing to say is you don't even know this about yourself. You can look in your own heart and deceive yourself as to why you are doing what you are doing. Now how in the world do you think you can look into someone else's heart and make some ultimate determination. Absolutely impossible.

Now the point of that is not to cast suspicion. Oh no, I never considered. Maybe there are bad motives motivating all this. I'd better start investigating. The point is you will never know, so leave it to God. Your job is to focus on your own heart and focus on purity in your motives. Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God. That is a verse directly addressing your motives. Why are you eating? Are you eating for yourself or are you eating for the glory of God? Why are you drinking? Why are you playing sports? Why are you studying? Why are you parenting? Are you doing it all for the glory of God?

It's hard enough to know if you are doing that, so how in the world could you know if someone else is doing that? So stop judging. Stop thinking you have insight that you don't. Stop being puffed up. You don't know the motives of men's hearts. That's God to decide and judge.

So the text encourages us not to pronounce judgment before it comes? Why? Because the criteria for judgment, the key piece of evidence, the key witness hasn't been revealed.

GOSPEL HUMILITY

1. Humility Does not Claim Motive Insight
2. Humility Does not Go Beyond What is Written

Now there is a very closely related point here but different enough and the reason to break it out is because it has its own set of applications here.

How are we puffed up against one another? There's two ways we do that:

We judge motives. I'm better than you because I have better motives. And so we've talked about not going beyond what you can

see in terms of motives, but another way puff ourselves is by pointing to achievements as evidence of my amazing motives, let me show you my resume of amazing things I've accomplished.

Paul says, "Stop right there. In your evaluation of yourself and others, don't go beyond what you can see in the Scripture. Paul says don't go beyond what is written. Don't go beyond what the Bible says in your judgment."

And there are just a thousand ways we do this. Ten thousand. Look at me. Look at how spiritual I am and then out comes the list:

1. Look at how much I care about life and kids. We clearly making our life about what matters because we have this bundle of kids. That poor family over there is all caught up in the world. They've chosen not to have kids. Look at that family. They spend all their time on their family. They get all their identity from their kids. Another sad case of family idolatry.
2. Look at how much time this person spends on social media. What a waste. Look at how spiritual I am for not wasting my time that way. And then that guy will say, "Look at how unengaged that person is in culture. They don't engage the culture in any way. He's going to make zero impact."
3. Look at that guy over there. He thinks he's all spiritual because he's raising his hands in worship. Look at that dead, passionless, block of wood over there who just puts his hand at his side and barely mouths the words.
4. Look at how smart I am. I've read all these theology books and this guy over here has never even heard the word "kenosis." What a simpleton. God - Theos, YHWH, Adoni, must really be proud of my knowledge - gnosis. Look at that arrogant punk who thinks he knows God because he knows what an aroist participle is.

We make snap judgments based on how a person dresses, their vocabulary, their background, what kind of job they hold, their

education, and we think we've done something meaningful.

But this is going WAY, WAY beyond the Scriptures. What does the Bible really say? It's not that we shouldn't make judgments of others. We have to do this all the time. But what's the criteria? What is written to help us in that judgment?

Everything in the list we just gave is irrelevant in God's mind. And yet, there are things that are written, things that are commanded over and over and over again to do, we casually disregard. We really don't assess people based on what is ACTUALLY said because, well that's a lot harder.

In other words, it's easy to care about something God doesn't care about and it's easy to not care about something God cares very much about. What does God care about? Well think about the commands of Jesus

- Love others as we love ourself,
- Confess Christ before men,
- Forgive others,
- Give to those who ask,
- Be joyful
- Care for the orphan, widow and refugee
- Don't fear
- Love your enemies
- Don't be anxious
- Store up treasure in heaven

These are the kinds of things that are given to us. This is what is written. And yet so often we go beyond what is written in our judgment of others.

GOSPEL HUMILITY

1. Humility Does not Claim Motive Insight
2. Humility Does not Go Beyond What is Written
3. Humility Does not Compare

Now this point comes from the last phrase of vs 6

1 Corinthians 4:5-6, 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. I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, **that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.**

The whole problem here in Corinth was comparison. Pride is all about comparison. Pride actually can't exist without comparison. C.S. Lewis has such a great quote in this regard.

"Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition is gone, pride is gone." C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Is this not true in your experience. What good is it to be the most beautiful person in the world on a desert island by yourself? What good is it to break the world record in the 100m if nobody knows about it. What really unfurls our pride like a peacock is to take the Olympic grand stage, which is engineered to objectively quantify and compare athletes one against another, and have the world cheer and say, compared to every other human, you are the best swimmer in the world.

I can relate to this. I don't care if I'm the best golfer. I just want to be better, than all the golfers I know, actually just better than one golfer I know.

You want to know why we have this insatiable appetite to compare? It's because something is wrong with us. Something is deeply injured inside of us.

Have you ever noticed that you don't perceive your body unless there's something wrong with it? I didn't wake up this morning thinking, "Man, my teeth feel great this morning. I just love the way

they feel." You'd only say that if you recently had suffered for months and then had a root canal or an extraction and now finally after all that time it feels so much better. The various parts of the body just sits their unnoticed unless there is something wrong with it.

Well, the ego has something incredibly wrong with it. Your self, your identity, has something unbelievably wrong with it, because it's always drawing attention to itself every single day, how you look, how you are treated.

If you just broke your foot, walking on it would cause you to just crumple in pain and you would shout out in agony. The foot would be calling attention to itself, in just normal activity! Why because it's hurt. Something is wrong with it.

Well, in the exact same way, your ego is incredibly wounded. Someone at work can come up to you and say, "You know I think I might have a better way to do that." And it's true. It is better way. But just that slight touch, that brush up against your wounded ego causes you to yelp in pain.

And so what do you say, "Man, I feel like you are always nitpicking at me. I feel like you don't appreciate my work. I feel like you are always trying to correct me and point out my failures. And then you end up saying, "You really hurt my feelings." But honestly, how can feelings be hurt? Feelings are things like happiness and sadness? How can happiness and sadness get hurt. No, it's your ego that's hurt. Your feelings are fine. You're having bad, bad, bad feelings about your ego. Do you see?

And because your ego is so wounded, so hurting, so injured, because you are starving for identity and validation, you can't go

through a day without feeling ignored, marginalized, feeling stupid, feeling unloved, unappreciated. And so a very innocent comment can really injure when the ego is injured. I had high conviction on this point this week, because this often times happens to me, which is just a straight shot to the heart. I have an inflated injured, swollen ego.

You see there's something wrong with our identity. There's something wrong with our ego. There's something wrong with our sense of self, because it's never happy. It's always drawing attention to itself.

Now how does a wounded ego try to heal itself? It does two things which are closely related. It compares and boasts.

I have this sense that I am not very worthy, not very lovely, not very valuable and so to prove that I am valuable, I will find some area I am good at and compare myself to others and then boast either externally or internally. That is the job of the wounded ego.

Our problem is dreadful insecurity, a dreadful, deadly identity crisis.

So what do we do about it? Now God has a solution for this:

The last three points are things you should not do; the last point is something you are supposed to do.

GOSPEL HUMILITY

1. Humility Does not Claim Motive Insight
2. Humility Does not Go Beyond What is Written
3. Humility Does not Compare
4. Humility Waits for God

Look at verse 5:

1 Corinthians 4:5, 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.....

Then what? Then terrifying judgment will fall when your motives, your true motives are revealed and your hypocrisy is seen and your double-mindedness is disclosed and your two-faced communication

is understood in all its deviousness.

That's not what it says, when the purposes of the heart are revealed what will happen?

1 Corinthians 4:5, 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.

This passage says that there is coming a day when you will receive commendation from God why? Because the purposes of your heart are revealed. God will actually commend you. How is this possible?

Every insecurity in you is screaming out, that's not right. I don't deserve commendation. Look at this evil pride. Look at this wicked comparison, this jealousy, this evil ambition! Look at how distracted and wandering my heart! How is commendation possible?

The NIV translates this, you will receive your praise from God. God will actually praise you for what you have done?!

Now the very fact that we are troubled with this shows how broken our ego is and how misplaced our identity is. The very fact that we

struggle with this shows that we are convinced that our commendation from God will be a function of our raw, unaided performance. We are convinced that when God brings to light the things now hidden what will be there is a pile of skeletons that will reveal our prideful, self-serving motives and that we will be frantically searching through this stack of bones trying to find something that is commendable. When we hear the words, "God will commend you" the only way we can interpret those words is reward based on performance. You cannot even conceive of any other arrangement. What else could those words mean?

What I want to invite you to do is allow the gospel to wash over those thoughts. To cleanse you from the fear of being evaluated in the flesh. How is this commendation or praise from God possible?

When Jesus turns on the light. When the light of judgment begins to dawn. For some all that will be there is bones. They will be the imitation art. The fakery will be seen. The cheap paints and the unskilled hand and the ugly plastic nature of it all will be seen. The entire thing is a fake and it is tossed into the fire.

But for you who are blood-bought children of the king. For you who are redeemed by God, whose motive sins have been nailed to the cross, whose identity is hidden in Christ, what will the light of judgment reveal? When the light of judgment begins to dawn on the believer, what is seen?

All that is seen is the beauty of Jesus Christ. Every deed you did with mixed motives has been purified. The wood, hay and stubble of chapter three has been burned away, and now all that is seen is Christ, the beauty of Christ, the glory of Christ, the gold silver and precious stones.

Why did Jesus die on the cross?

- Did he die to save you from the evil deeds themselves? No. There is no such thing. Did he not die to save you from the motives behind the evil deeds?
- Did Jesus not die to save you from the evil motives behind the good deeds you did in the flesh?
- Did he die to save you from what you did before you were a Christian but now that you are a Christian you are to be held accountable for your evil motives because you did not choose to walk by the Spirit. You snubbed the power available to you so now you will pay.
- Did he not die to save you from all sin, all motive sine of every form whether past, present, future?

Do you realize how free this can make you?

All of us, every on of us is born with this incredible desire to prove ourselves. We say all say in one form or another, "I get my identity and value from being a very good person and doing very valuable things." Okay, fair enough but what we really mean by that is, "IF I'm a good person, eventually I hope for some kind of verdict that I'm a good person." In other words, performance leads to the verdict. And the problem with this way of thinking is that the verdict never comes. Every day you worry.

Every religion of the world operates this way. If you perform, you can hope for a good verdict.

- Every day you're on trial. That's the problem.

The gospel is the opposite. The gospel says the verdict leads to performance. The performance does not lead to the verdict.

The very second the light of the gospel penetrates your heart God can say to you Romans 8:1, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The verdict is in, and now I perform on the basis of the verdict. He loves me. He accepts me. I don't have to do things to build my résumé. I'm not trying to get ready for judgment. Judgment already happened. It's the difference between cramming the night before for a test sweating that you know you'll do terribly because there are questions you know will judge you and bring to light your ignorance...it's the difference between that and walking in the joyful freedom of a 100% and just studying because you love your subject.

It changes everything. You don't walk into a room

- Who do I need to like me here.
- Does this activity make me look good? Do I want to be here?
- You just stop thinking about yourself. Because there's nothing to think about. You are safe. You are secure.
- And because you are safe, because you are secure and happy, because your ego is properly filled with security in Christ, all you think about is others.
- Think about how restful you would be if you just forgot about yourself. If your ego was like that healthy tooth. You wouldn't be puffed up. You'd just be perfectly filled.

Do you know how unprecedented this is? This is why the gospel has exploded on the pages of history. It's not high self-esteem. But it's really not low self-esteem either. You stopped playing the game. He just got disinterested and went on to something more interesting.

You can't crush a person like this. What happens when you criticize

a person who stopped playing the game, who doesn't get identity from what others think of him or what he thinks of himself?

When you criticize a person like this, wonder of wonder, he listens.

- We all know that feeling of being crushed by criticism - and the reason we are crushed is because we are putting too much value in what other people think. If your ego is bloated, inflamed, injured by the slightest touch, what's the only way to protect it. You got to get some thick skin. Which is another way of saying, "I don't listen to criticism. I don't care what anyone thinks. I only care what I think."
- In other words, the only way we know how to cure low self-esteem is with pride.

But the gospel gives you something completely new. A person who's completely confident because the verdict is in says, "Oh, criticism, an opportunity to change."

If you could do this, you be this crazy person. I don't care what you think. And I don't care what I think. I only care what God thinks and he has declared me perfectly redeemed. Isn't that an amazing thought?

- You would be a person who doesn't need honor and isn't afraid of it, doesn't lust for recognition or, on the other hand, be just frightened to death of it?
- You would be a person who could go by a mirror and you wouldn't admire what you see and you wouldn't cringe either?
- You wouldn't be the kind of person who fantasizes about being in positions of glory? "Oh, if I could do that! Oh, if I could do that!" Nor do you ever beat yourself up, do you ever sit around saying, "Boy, I was stupid. I was wrong. How could I have done something like that?" Wouldn't you like to be free?

This is off the map. This is gospel humility, what the ancients called, "blessed self-forgetfulness"

- not thinking more of yourself more like in modern cultures
- or thinking less of yourself like Aristotle
- But thinking of yourself less.

Closing Song

By one defense, my righteousness.