

*The Architecture of Community*  
**1 Corinthians 3:21-4:7**

What do you see here?



Are You in the Courtroom Today?



What's Going On?

- Every day we are on trial.
- Some days we are winning.
- And others we are losing.
  - Regardless, we are always on trial, always obsessed with the verdict given by ourselves or by others.

## 1 Corinthians 3:21-4:3

**21** So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, **22** whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future--all are yours, **23** and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

**1** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. **3** 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.

## 1 Corinthians 4:4-7

**4** For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. **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.

**6** 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. **7** For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

## Context



Before doctrinal interpretations divided the church, they argued over who to follow... Paul or Apollos. 1 Cor. 3:4-9

- Paul shows that the root cause for the division in the church is *pride* and *boasting*.
- It is the same reason that we cannot get along today—in the world or church. Take a look:
  - **3:21**: “*let no one boast...*”
  - **4:7**: “*why do you boast...?*”
  - **4:6**: do not “*take pride in one man over against another.*”

## Paul says, “Not pride, nor boasting, but humility.”

- That means we are once again talking about self-esteem.
- Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional cultures believed that too high a view of oneself was the root cause of evil, crime, abuse, and cruelty.
- Why do people do bad things?
  - **Hubris**
  - Which is a Greek word that means either *pride* or *too high a view of oneself*.



## In Our Modern Western Culture However...



- We have developed an opposite cultural consensus.
  - Today, we believe that *people misbehave due to a lack of self-esteem* and because they have too low a view of themselves.
  - This is the cause behind *husbands beating wives*, *crime*, and *other misbehavior*.

## Psychologist Lauren Slater

- There is no evidence that low self-esteem is a big problem in society.
- **She cites 3 studies that all conclude:**
  - “People with high self-esteem pose a greater threat to those around them than people with low self-esteem, and feeling bad about yourself is not the source of our country’s biggest problems.”



## So which is it?

- Are our social ills a result of our *low self-esteem (modern view)*?
- Or as a result of *too high a view of ourselves (traditional view)*?
- Paul takes a completely different tact and reveals the true source behind our misbehavior.

## Outline

1. The Natural Condition of the Human Ego.
2. The Transformed Sense of Self.
3. How to Get that Transformed Sense of Self.



## 1) The Natural Condition of the Human Ego.

- In **4:6**, Paul urges the Corinthians to have no more pride in one person over another.
- The Greek word Paul uses is not the normal *hubris* word for pride, but *physioo*.
- Paul uses it 5 times in this book, and only one other time in **Colossians 2**.
- By using this particular word, Paul is trying to teach us something about the human ego.



## Physioo Means Overinflated, Swollen, & Distended Beyond its Proper Size



- It is related to the word for bellows.
- It brings to mind a rather painful image of an organ in the human body that is distended because so much air has been pumped into it.
- It's ready to burst. It's swollen, inflamed, and extended past its proper size.
- That, Paul says, is the condition of the natural human ego.

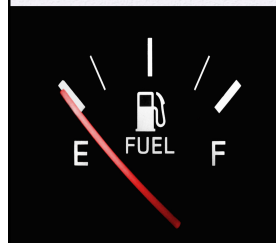
## This Image Shows us 4 Things

### The natural condition of the human ego is:

1. Empty
2. Painful
3. Busy
4. Fragile



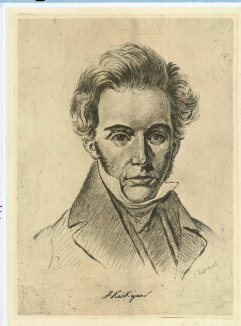
## Firstly, Empty



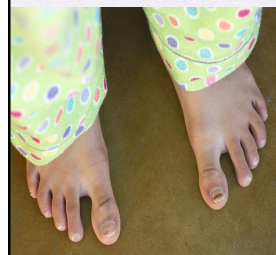
- There is emptiness at the center of the human ego.
- It is puffed up and overinflated with nothing in the middle.

## What Foundation are We to Build Our Life Upon?

- In his book *Sickness Unto Death*, **Soren Kierkegaard** says, it is the normal state of the human heart to try to build its identity around something besides God.
- The normal human ego searches for something that will give it a sense of worth, specialness, and purpose and builds itself on that.
- Of course, we quickly find out that if we try to replace the God-Sized hole in side of us, with something else, it is going to be too small!!
  - It will leave us feeling empty.



## Secondly, it is also Painful



- Have you ever thought about the fact that you do not notice your body until there is something wrong with it?
- When we are walking around, we are not usually thinking how fantastic our toes are feeling.
- That's because the parts of our body only draw attention to themselves if there is something wrong with them.

## The Ego Hurts All the Time!

- That is because it has something incredibly wrong with it.
- It is always drawing attention to itself.
- It is always making us think about how we look and how we are treated.
- People sometimes say their feeling's hurt.
  - But our feelings can't be hurt! It is the ego that hurts; namely, our sense of identity.



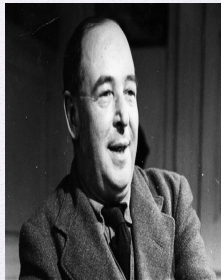
## Thirdly, it is Busy



- Busy trying to *fill the emptiness*, and constantly *comparing* and *boasting*.
- The way the ego tries to fill its emptiness and deal with its discomfort is by comparing itself to other people.
  - And it does so all the time!

## C.S. Lewis: Competitiveness is at the Very Heart of Pride

- "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something only out of having more of it than the next person. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about."*
- In other words, we are only proud of being more successful, more intelligent, or more good-looking than the next person.
  - And when we come into the presence of someone who is more anything than we are, we lose all pleasure in what we had.



## Fourthly, the Ego is Fragile



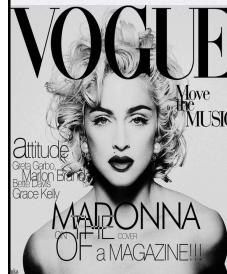
- Because anything that is overinflated is in imminent danger of being deflated — *like an overinflated balloon*.
- If we are filled up by air and not filled up by something solid, then to be overinflated or deflated comes down to the same thing.
- A superiority complex and an inferiority complex are basically the same.

## Superiority vs. Inferiority Complex

- They are both the results of being overinflated.
- The person with the superiority **complex is overinflated and in danger of being deflated**; the person with an inferiority complex **is deflated already**.
- Being deflated or the threat of being deflated make the ego fragile.



## Here's A Good Example

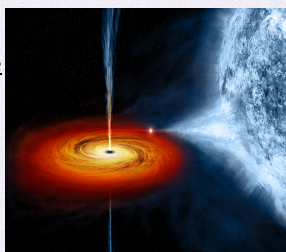


- Madonna in Vogue Magazine:  
*"My drive in life comes from a fear of being mediocre. That is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being but then I feel I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will."*



## Madonna Knows Herself Better than Most of Us

- Every time she accomplishes something, she has these thoughts: *'Now I have the verdict that I am somebody. But the next day, I realize that unless I keep going, I am not. My ego cannot be satisfied.'*
  - It's like a black hole.



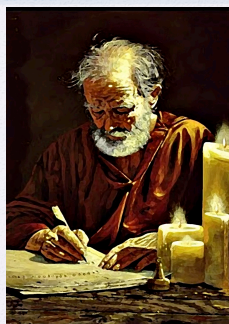
## This is the Normal State of the Human Heart



Before doctrinal interpretations divided the church, they argued over who to follow... Paul or Apollos. 1 Cor. 3:4-9

- This is what Paul is talking about to the Corinthians.
- All these people who are fighting over him and claiming a special relationship are showing tremendous amounts of pride.
- They are unable to enjoy the fact that they know Paul.
- They have to use their relationship with him to one-up others in the church.
- Paul goes on to show them how the Gospel can transform them though.

## 2) The Transformed View of Self



- In regard's to Paul's role as a minister, he tells the Corinthians that he cares very little if he is judged by them or by man.
- That is, he doesn't care what other people think of him as the verdict.
- This is the thing that Madonna senses — the elusive stamp of approval.
- Paul says that he does not look to them — or any human court — for the verdict that he is a somebody.



## How do We Get to Where Paul is?

- Any counselor will tell you not to worry about what other's think of you.
  - Or try to live by their standards.
  - The only thing that should concern us is what I think about ourselves.
- In other words, *decide who you want to be and be it.*



## Our Culture's One Remedy

- If you have low self-esteem then you need to know how great you are.
- Look at all the great things that you have accomplished.
- Don't worry about what others say about you.
- Paul's approach could not be more different!
  - He not only doesn't care about the judgment of any human court, he will not even judge himself (v. 3).

## Living Up to Your Own Standards is a Trap



- Even though boosting our self-esteem by living up to our own standards or someone else's sounds like a great solution, it cannot deliver.
- Whether I try to live up to my parents', society's, or my own standards I always fail and feel terrible.
- So what are we to do?

## How does Paul have both Confidence & Humility?

- When Paul says that he does not let the Corinthians judge him nor will he judge himself, he is saying that he knows about his sins but he does not connect them to himself or to his identity.
  - He does not see a sin and let it destroy his sense of identity.
  - Neither does he see an accomplishment and congratulate himself.
  - He sees all kinds of sins in himself—and all kinds of accomplishments too—but he refuses to connect them with himself or his identity.



## Paul is Taking us to Uncharted Territory

- His ego is not puffed up, it is filled up.
- Paul is saying that he has reached a place where his ego draws no more attention to itself than any other part of his body.
- He has reached a place where he is not thinking about himself anymore.
- When he does something wrong or something good, he does not connect it to himself any more.



## C.S. Lewis & Gospel Humility

- If you were to meet a truly humble person, you wouldn't even realize it.
- They would not say that they were a somebody or a nobody.
- The thing we would remember about them is how much they were interested in us.
- The essence of Gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or think less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.



## The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness

- Gospel transformation allows us to stop connecting every experience and every conversation with ourselves.
- In self-forgetfulness we experience rest.
- Our ego is filled up instead of puffed up.
- A person transformed by the Gospel is neither self-hating or self-loving.
  - Rather, the Gospel-humble person is a self-forgetful person whose ego is just like his or her toes.
  - It just works and does not draw attention to itself.

## 3) How To Get That Transformed View of Self



- How did Paul get this blessed self-forgetfulness?
- In v. 3 he says in effect, "*I don't care what you think, and nor do I care what I think.*"
- Then he says, "*My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent.*"
- The word translated 'innocent' comes from the word 'justify'.
- Paul is using a word that evokes imagery of the courtroom.

## What are We All Looking For?

- An ultimate verdict.
- We look for it every day in every situation.
- That means that every single day we are on trial.
- That is the problem with self-esteem. Every day, it puts us back in the courtroom.
- Some days we feel like we are winning, and other days like we are losing.





## But Paul Says that He has Found the Secret

- The trial is over for him.
  - He is out of the courtroom.
  - It is finished.
  - Because the ultimate verdict is in.
- He says that the Corinthians cannot justify him, nor can he; rather, **it is the Lord who justifies him**.
  - And it is only His opinion that matters.

## It is Only The Gospel Where We Get the Verdict Before the Performance.



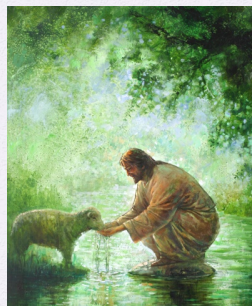
- An *atheist* might hope that others will judge him to be good by their contribution to society.
  - But they are on trial, and performance leads to the verdict.
- The same is true for the *Buddhist* or *Muslim*.
- What it means for them is that every day they are in the courtroom.
- But Paul is saying that in Christianity, the verdict leads to performance—not the other way around.

## At the Moment We Believe, God says:

- “Behold, this is my well beloved son in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).*
- “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).*



## The Verdict is In!



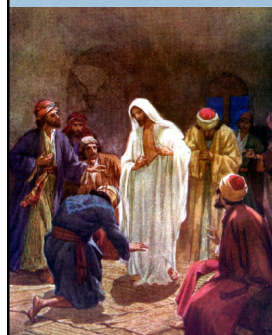
- And now I perform on the basis of the verdict.
- Put another way, I live out of response to Christ's life, death, and resurrection.
- Now I can help people without trying to make myself look better or fill up the emptiness.
- I help people because God first helped me!

## How Can this Be?

- Because Jesus went on trial instead.
- He was struck, beaten, and put to death.
- Why?**
  - To be our substitute.
  - To take the condemnation that we deserved.
- Now, when anyone asks God to accept them because of what Jesus did, then the only person whose opinion counts looks at them **and He finds them more valuable than all the jewels on earth.**



## Are You Back in the Courtroom Today?



- Remember the Gospel!
  - Court has been Adjourned!
- Like Paul we can say, I don't care what you think.
  - I don't even care about what I think.
  - I only care about what the Lord thinks.
- And He has said, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).*
- Let us live out of this truth today!

## October 25th Study



**1 Corinthians 4:8-21**: *The Ministry of Apostles*