

Family resemblances

Who's opinion matters most?

I remember a few years ago reading a study about how people's knowledge of your job affected how they viewed you. They got a number of people from a variety of jobs, they didn't know what the study was looking at and asked them to solve some group puzzles without talking to each other about themselves. Certain people ended up taking the lead on solving the problems. Then they had a break and got people to introduce who they were and what they did for a job. Then they got them to solve another similar group problem. This time different people got made leaders. For the first problem an unemployed person and a retail manager naturally ended up leading, the second time, with the same group and a similar problem. The lawyer and doctor were differed to. It's interesting isn't it how our perceptions change how we view our leaders isn't it?

Over the last few weeks in the first 3 chapters of Paul's letter to the church in Corinth we have seen Paul raise the issue that the Corinthian Christians have been divided as they associate themselves with different leaders in the church. Here in chapter 4 Paul starts by saying how the Corinthians should view their leaders. He says the Corinthians should regard leaders as servants of Christ. This of course reflects the shakeup that Jesus caused where he said leaders should serve. In the first century being a leader wasn't about being humble, humility was not seen as a virtue it was seen as a weakness. So when Paul says that the leaders should be servants it would have been as radical as Jesus saying it. For us today humility has become more accepted as a virtue, although many leaders still struggle to have a servant attitude. So Paul is saying we can view our leaders as our servants right, after all we pay Martys wages, we can expect him to be there to serve us. Not quite. If you look again that's not what Paul says, he says the Corinthians are to view their leaders as servants of Christ. Not Servants of them. Our leaders are there to serve and their priority is Jesus.

And what does being a servant of Jesus look like? Paul says it means being entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. This mystery is the gospel. The good news that Gentiles, that is non Jews along with Jews can be saved. The apostles are entrusted with this good news and their job is to share it with others and to help teach others what it means. That is how they prove they are faithful. Then Paul starts talking about who's opinion should matter most for a servant of Jesus.

How much do you care about what others think about you? I think We tend to differ in this don't we? I definitely lean towards caring too much about what others think. You can see it in how people curate their social media accounts. Showing only positive or complementary things. But it's More than just social media, young people and peer pressure. Adults feel this too. We worry people judge us about our clothes, our house, our jobs, our kids, we worry about being judged by non Christians ironically as judgmental Christians, we worry about being judged by fellow Christians as not being good enough. I think most of us have worries in some aspect of our life of being judged by others.

Well Paul says that he cares very little if he is judged by others. This is a good thing, we are told by many psychologists we shouldn't care too much what others think. But Paul also goes on to say that he doesn't even judge himself. So if we shouldn't care if others judge us or even judge ourselves are we to live lives care free with no expectation of judgement? Paul then points to the fact that the most important thing for him is God. He waits for God to judge him. He waits to hear God's praise. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart.

This gives me mixed feelings, on one hand it can seem scary that you don't just have the pressure of judgement from others or yourself, but you now have judgement from God as well. And it's not just what we decide to let others around us see, no God sees everything, he sees right into our hearts and knows what motivates us. That challenges us doesn't it. Why do we do what we do? God can see right into our hearts, we can't deceive him.

Knowing God is judging us can be very intimidating. But on the other hand, we know that if we believe that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour that we will be saved and therefore do not need to fear judgement at all. From last weeks passage we can have confidence that if we trust in Jesus, we will survive through the flames. I find that knowing its only Gods judgement that I should worry about to be a freeing thought. To only care about the praise you receive from God. No longer do we need to be chasing praise from others or even ourselves. One of the problems with worrying about being judged by others is that often we don't even know what criteria others are judging us by or if they are judging us at all, is it all in our heads. With God it's freeing to know clearly the expectations he has for us. Paul is reminding the Corinthians and all who read this passage, that we live for Christ, we don't live to receive praise from the people around us.

Why boast?

And this is how Paul and Apollos have been living. Paul wants the Corinthians to be aware that this is how the apostles live so that it teaches them to have humility and not be boastful. If their leaders are focused on God's praise then how much more should they be. The Corinthians shouldn't be going beyond what they are being taught and adding extra privilege based on who they follow. Their belief is in the same God, they have been given the same gifts by God. As Paul says in verse 7 "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" Its very hard to boast if everything you have comes from someone else, isn't it?

Now I don't think we are necessarily in danger of being puffed up in being a follower of one particular leader over another, but are we sometimes puffed up that we are Anglican and not Baptist or Presbyterian. Or maybe instead of being puffed up by who we are, maybe we are puffed up by who we aren't? I don't go to Hillsong or I don't need robes and hymns to enjoy a Sunday service. This is just as puffed up and boasting as saying you are

something as well. It all comes back to the fact that we receive everything from God, so there is no room for boasting. Consider how you view your money and your possessions. I grew up being encouraged to give 10% of what I earned. So I would ask myself questions like is that before or after tax? Does it include any interest or rent I earn? Does giving to other charities get included in that 10%. But all of this misses the point. We shouldn't be thinking God can have 10% of what I get, the better way to think of it, is how much of what God has given me should I keep? Remember God gives you everything. I have found that to revolutionise the way I think about what I have. Its no longer budgeting what can I give to God, its budgeting what I need and the rest can be used for Gods ministry.

Knowing when you've finished the race – a wrong type of contentment

Judging what we need vs what we want can be hard though cant it. How many comforts should we have? Part of that is understanding how we should be living. Should we expect to be comfortable? Should we expect to be rich? And that's what Paul addresses in his next section from verse 8.

Before looking at what he says in verse 8 to 13, I want to briefly address how he says it. Often when we read the bible we read it as purely descriptive or instructive. We don't necessarily read it with personality. And most of the time that is reasonable, a lot of the bible is instructive. But there are times when big emotions come through or different tones of voice. And here is one of them. Paul in saying in verse 8, Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! Paul Is not affirming them here, he is critical in saying these things. You could almost say its sarcastic. You can see the NIV translators trying to convey that through all the exclamation marks. But the key with this tone is that unlike most peoples sarcastic comments Paul says in verse 14 that he is not doing it to shame the Corinthians, he is speaking with exaggeration to correct them, to warn them. So having explained the

tone, lets look at what Paul is saying in this section. Lets watch a quick video.

Have you ever watched a race where someone starts celebrating too early? Your heart goes onto him doesn't it, but I have seen it before in races either they celebrate crossing the finished line but they still have one lap to go, or they celebrate because they think they will win because they have enough of a lead, but then they get caught because they were celebrating. It's embarrassing, its a bit ridiculous. Well, that's sort of what Paul is saying here from verse 8. He is saying that the Corinthians are living like they have reached the goal already. They live like they are rich and are reigning and have all they want, instead of realising that the struggle is still to come before we reach heaven and the end goal and truly reign. They are celebrating too early. They are looking at leaders like Paul who are suffering and poor and thinking he can't be a good leader because we know that being Christian means receiving all these things from God. But they are mistaken, God has promised amazing things yes, but not all of them now before Jesus comes again. Only when Jesus comes again will we have reached the final goal and can celebrate and expect to receive the totality of Gods promises.

Now you might be thinking, wait a minute earlier Paul was saying they were rich, and you would be right do you remember chapter 1 verse 4 that I preached on a few weeks ago, Paul said "I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 For in him you have been enriched in every way—with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge." How is Paul saying they are enriched in every way yet criticizing them for saying they are rich? The answer is they are rich because of all the things they have received from God, especially the spiritual gifts which Paul is focused on in this letter, but the problem is that these gifts are intended for the Corinthians to serve, instead they are now content that they have been blessed and act like they have no more to grow, that they can do what they want because they have these gifts. It doesn't leave space to be

persecuted, to be shamed, to be homeless, to be slandered when these things are still very much a part of a Christians life.

We need to be aware of this today as well. Just because we are enriched by being saved by believing in Jesus does it mean that our job is done and life is about living in comfort. By being saved we are now called to be servants, perhaps not as a leader like Paul, but we are all called to serve and obey Jesus. Whether that is telling others about him, helping the poor or just trying to live the way God wants us to live. And we need to be aware that this can lead to persecution, to mocking. For me too often my highest priority seems to be about my or Emily's comfort, not following God. Are we willing to make ourselves uncomfortable for God, to open ourselves up to ridicule for God? Or are we like the Corinthians living as though we reign already.

Family resemblances – a transformed attitude to life

Now this is hard. Its hard to live a life open to the challenges Paul faced. Its hard to live like God has given you everything. Its hard living as though Gods praise is the most important thing in life. Paul realises this too and for the Corinthians he reminds them that they have examples to follow. He says in verse 16 to imitate him. You might be thinking Does this counter what he has been saying for the last 4 chapters? Hasn't he been saying don't focus on following leaders. Maybe all this time he just wants them to follow him and not Apollos or Peter? But Look closer at what he says following verse 16. First of all he gets Timothy to come, he entrusts Timothy to help the Corinthians and secondly the whole point of imitating Paul, the whole point of what Timothy will remind them of is the way of life in Christ Jesus. Once again it is Jesus who is the centre of what Paul is teaching. When Paul asks them to imitate him, it's because he's reflecting how Jesus lived.

It can be hard to know how to live life as a Christian, so it is helpful to have examples of how to live a way of life in Christ Jesus. That's what Paul is

showing them, its what his letter is telling them. Its what we have looked at today. Living a way of life in Christ Jesus means living as servants to him, it means caring most about Gods praise rather than other peoples or ourselves. It means realising that everything we have comes from God and therefore we shouldn't boast. It means realising that although we are rich with what God has given us but that we have not yet reached our final resting place. It means we realise that we might face persecution and ridicule for doing these things. All these things can apply to us as much as the Corinthians that Paul was speaking to. And we have not only Paul and Timothy as examples, we have each other and the other leaders at our church who are living examples of the way of life in Christ Jesus. That's why we encourage everyone to get to church on Sunday and also to join a growth group, so that we can spend time learning from Gods word and each other. It helps to remind us we're servants of Jesus.

Let us support each other with a transformed attitude to life so as Paul says in verse 5 we can look forward to receiving our praise from God.