

1 Corinthians 4

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Date: 07 May 2023

[0 : 00] of the book of 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 4, 1 Corinthians chapter 4, as we continue to make our way through the book of 1 Corinthians, Paul's letter to the church at Corinth.

As we have said, the church at Corinth is probably a church that many of us would not join. It was a church with great and grand problems. It was a church that we see as we make our way through the book that had a lot of major moral issues, but yet Paul refers to them as the saints at Corinth. He refers to them as brothers in Christ and reminds us that they are believers, true believers who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. That rather than impacting the world, they have allowed the world to impact the church.

And it is those issues which Paul is addressing. The first of those major issues were the divisions that were taking place within the body of believers. And unfortunately, those divisions were taking place not as a result of your standing in the public forum, but rather as your standing among the servants that God had used.

They had used the servants of Christ, the preachers and the proclaimers of the gospel, to be a cause of division among one another. Some had united themselves with Paul, others with Apollos, some with Cephas, which is Peter.

[1 : 23] We don't know if Peter ever went there. And some claimed affiliation with Jesus Christ only. And therefore, there began to be schisms within the body. People were separating themselves and promoting themselves based upon who it is they identified with and the personality.

And who it is that they got along with more. And there began to be such a sharp division that Paul used the very first part of the letter to the church at Corinth and 1 Corinthians to address that. Because make no mistake about it, until the body is unified, it will never be glorified. And the body cannot be glorified as long as it is not sanctified. That is, if it is filled with sin. But until you get the people together, you cannot deal with the issue that's affecting them.

It is the unity of the body, which is of particular importance. So therefore, that which is causing disunity had to be dealt with first. And then he could get to the root of the sin so that then the body could become who it should be.

The letter of 1 Corinthians resonates with me personally because I believe that the ministry that God has given me, that he called me to from the very beginning, when he called me into the pastoral ministry, which was not something that I necessarily sought, but something that I could not run away from, though I didn't really try to run, I just knew God was calling me, was to call the church to be the church.

[2 : 41] To look at the truth of scripture and just for the church to be the church. And that's exactly what Paul is doing throughout the letter of 1 Corinthians. He expects the church to be the church.

And one of the first things he addresses is the leadership within the body of the church. So if you are physically able and desire to do so, I'm going to ask if you would join with me as we stand together and we read the word of God in 1 Corinthians chapter 4.

We will read the entire chapter. It is not a long chapter, but we will see it in its entirety. And then we will pray. Paul says,

Let's pray.

Lord, I thank you for this day. I thank you for your word. And I thank you for the opportunity which we have to read it with one another. Lord, we pray as we have read your word now that you would speak to our hearts and minds.

[6 : 26] We pray that it would be the word of God which speaks to us not the thoughts or the opinions of man. That it would move beyond every distraction, every hindrance, and every encumbrance. Lord, that by the power and presence of your spirit that you would speak to each and every one of us and that you would do a great work according to your desires.

And we ask it all in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. In the text before us, we see the grand danger of exalted personalities.

The grand danger of exalted personalities. What was going on in the church of Corinth was that people were identifying with particular personalities.

And they were using these personalities as a platform to exalt themselves. The personality with which they resonated the most, the people which they got along with or they thought that they learned from the most, were the very platforms they were using to promote themselves and to try to attain a better position within the church and therefore within the community.

But there is a grand danger in exalting personalities. In our own day and time, we have seen it. We do not have to go very far. You can turn your television on and watch documentaries, very multi-part documentaries of the tragedy and the rise and fall of personalities that have the name church around them.

[7 : 54] We have seen the great harm that it has done in people's lives and in individuals' lives and even in the church life. We have seen the detriment that it has been for the sake of the gospel.

We have seen the grand danger. There was a day in time when the pastor was a respected individual in the community. He wasn't exalted much. He wasn't lifted up on high much.

He wasn't put on a pedestal much. But he was respected. That day is no longer present. In today's world, in our own society, if you rank, and I've seen it, I mean, this is my job, so I've kind of seen it a little bit.

A pastor normally falls on the spectrum of trustworthiness and respect somewhere under car salesmen. And that's no lie. In most of your research polls, they fall a little bit below a car salesman. And should it be surprising that the more exalting of the personalities, the more degrading of the position? Because we live in a day where more popular pastors and more popular personalities and more popular individuals, yet we have so little trust in them.

[9 : 06] But see, the danger here, this isn't a message to the pastor, though Paul says a lot about the pastor. This is a letter written to the church.

Because the promoting and the lifting up and the exalting of the personalities always takes place in the corporate body.

And the danger is to the body of Christ. And we see it here. Because there's a reasoning behind it, which we'll get to in just a moment.

But there's a great tragedy that always follows it. Paul wants us to rightly understand the servants which God uses. Paul wants us to rightly understand them so that we can understand who we are in Christ.

And so that as we understand who we are in Christ, Christ does his great work through us. This is a message to the church. The first thing that we see when we look at this, S.M. Lockridge, I love S.M. Lockridge.

[10 : 10] Shadrach, Meshach, Lockridge. He's since gone to glory. And if you ever want to hear good preaching, just Google S.M. Lockridge. He is the gentleman that preached, That's My King.

He's the one that preached, Sunday's Coming. But if you ever want to hear a good message and you've got some time and you're willing to listen to about an hour, 15 minutes worth of good preaching, just look up S.M. Lockridge, the greatest message ever preached.

It's a good one. Oh, I don't know how many times I've listened to it. But I love how he introduces it. He says, in this world, man is forever chasing bubbles. They're chasing bubbles.

We're chasing the bubble of pleasure. We're chasing the bubble of prosperity. And we're chasing the bubble of performance. Man is forever chasing bubbles.

But inevitably, those bubbles will bust. Just last night, grandkids were over. Had people over to the house. Mellie walks up to me with bubbles.

[11 : 13] Oh, what a joy it is. Blow some bubbles. Get so excited about bubbles. And then they go away and you have to blow more bubbles, right? Because you always have to have some form of entertainment to keep them going.

And I like how S.M. says that man is forever chasing bubbles. And one of the bubbles that man is chasing is the bubble of personality, of promoting individuals that would excite them for entertainment purposes, for spiritual purposes, in order to use that personality for their own benefit. But there's grand danger there. The first danger that we see, according to Scripture, is that it leads to a misunderstood role of the person.

When we promote a personality, it leads to a misunderstanding of the role of the person. The believers in Corinth were lifting up Apollos.

They were lifting up Paul. They were lifting up Cephas. They were lifting up all of these personalities. Now, those are three individuals that could not have been more different. Paul was one of weak eyes, of physical deformities.

[12 : 23] Paul was one who was scarred in his body. Most people believe, most Bible scholars believe, he was kind of hunchbacked a little bit. Not much to look at, but he was a man of words and power. And he had authority in his writing, but he was humble in his presence.

And he was kind of calm in his speaking. Apollos was more eloquent and could wax philosophical with you. He would have been well-trained in the world. And so had Paul, but Paul had cast that aside. Peter, now he was a man of action.

He's walking on water, cutting off ears and denying, right? He's doing things. And Peter is so different. The personalities are so different, but there's a resonating among the people. Some of us could really get along with this one more than we can get along with this one.

And I'll go ahead and tell you as a pastor, one of the hardest things you ever find is how do you speak and appeal to such a vast array of people and individuals? Because when you look around a room, even in this side, so much of it, we're so different from one another.

But the grand danger in finding someone that we connect to that is a personality that we lift up, and they were exalting them and lifting them up and saying, Now I like Paul. Well, I like Paul. And well, I like Peter.

[13 : 25] And they were conflicting with one another and saying, Well, Paul is so much better than Peter. Well, Paul is so much better than Peter and all these different things. One of the great dangers in that is it leads to a misunderstanding of the role of the person.

And the person being the people that God uses. Now listen to this. This speaks to the pastor, and I'll take this. Paul says it this way. Let each one regard us in this manner.

These people who are promoting Paul, and some are promoting Apollos, and some are promoting Peter. Paul says, I'll tell you what to think of me. Let each one regard us in this way.

As servants of Christ. And stewards of the mysteries of God. Paul says, when you think of me, I want you to think of me this way.

As a servant of Christ. And as a steward of the mystery. Now the mystery is that Christ died on the cross at Calvary. That he bore the sin of mankind, not just for the Jewish people, but for all people.

[14 : 32] That God had designed a plan of salvation before the foundations of the world were laid. That the redemption of man was for all mankind, not just a particular people. That that particular people were people that were lifted up and put on display.

So that that one man could come and pay the price of redemption for all men. The mystery of the gospel is that Christ died not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well. That whosoever believes in Jesus Christ shall be saved.

That the gift of eternal life is offered to all people. There is the mystery of God. And Paul wrote to this before. He said, and we're stewards of this. Now pay particular attention to that. Because that word steward is a very, really a peculiar word.

It's not used very often in scripture, but Paul uses it. And it has something to do with an understanding of the times. Now the city of Corinth, let's put it in its right setting. Remember I told you the city of Corinth was a very popular city.

It was a very big city and it was on an isthmus, right? And you remember it was a trade town. But do you remember what kind of trade it was? It was a ship trade town because what they would do when they brought the ships into port.

[15 : 32] They would literally drag the ship across the isthmus of Corinth. They had these canals built and actually these logs that were laid out. And they would drag the ship across to get to the other side.

Because it was considered safer to go across Corinth than to go around it in the sea. So they saw these ships coming through all the time, right? And it brought all this prosperity. It brought all this promiscuity as well.

All these other things that shouldn't be there. So Paul uses a ship reference here. Because the word steward means an under rower in a ship. Okay, let me put you a visual context.

For those of you that have seen Ben-Hur. And you realize I like the movie Ben-Hur. I like the long version that gives you the intermission more than I like the new version. But that's okay.

It gives you a little bit of a break. And you remember in the movie Ben-Hur, those under rowers in the Roman ships. There was the top deck and then there was a middle deck. And then there was that lower deck. The under rowers were the people that were on the under deck that was rowing and rowing and rowing and rowing.

[16:30] And their feet were usually shackled to one another. What Paul is saying is I want you to regard me as this way. I am an under rower of the ship. He puts it in such a visual picture. He said, I'm the guy that's under the water rowing the oar.

I'm not the captain of the boat. Because, see, by exalting Paul, they were trying to make him the captain of the ship. And Paul says, I'm not that. I'm just one guy chained to a bunch of other guys who's paddling at an oar.

I'm an under rower. The under rowers were seldom seen. They were never promoted. They were never exalted. They were never even known by name. They did a job.

They did a task. And see, when we begin to promote personalities, we misunderstand the role. The role is not to be the leader of a particular group of people or church or not to be the head of.

What Paul says is we are servants and stewards. And we have a job. We have a responsibility.

Remember recently, we've looked at in the chapters that preceded this, that God has called each of us to labor in the church for his glory.

[17:34] That we have responsibilities. By the way, as the book of Ephesians says, the body is built up and loved by what every joint and ligament supplies according to the proper working of each part. Right? That we have a part.

And Paul says, this is my part. This is my part. This is Apollos' part. We're just at the oars. Right? We're just paddling. And when we exalt those personalities, we forget the role that they have. And the role is just to work at the oar. The role is not to be standing on the deck telling it where to go. Because the church has but one head. Right? There is one captain of the ship called the church.

And that captain is Jesus Christ. And when we exalt any other, we neglect or we misunderstand the role of others.

And we see this. Paul says, in this case, moreover, it is required of the stewards that one be found trustworthy. Paul said, it's not my job to tell you where we're going.

[18:31] It's just my job to do what God has called me to do. This is why Paul said, when I came, I did not come baptizing. He baptized a few and he named who those few were. He said, but I came proclaiming Jesus Christ crucified.

Right? I came for a purpose. The oar that my hands were on was proclaiming of the gospel. That's my job. My whole responsibility was to proclaim the gospel. Apollos' oar that he had his hand on was to edify the saints.

To build them up. Peter's job was to open the door to the gospel to the Gentiles. Each of us have a different oar, but we're all the same part. We're all on this equal ground. We're just rowing underneath the ship.

We are to be found trustworthy in what we do. And then he goes a little bit further. He says, so no man should judge us or promote us. He says, but to me it's a very small thing that I may be examined by you.

Because there were some people in the church saying, well, I don't really like Paul. Apollos speaks better to me. And then there were other people saying, well, I kind of like Paul. What Paul is saying is, I don't care if you like me. And that sounds harsh, right?

[19:31] He said, I'm not concerned if you like me. I'm not concerned if you don't like me. Because man's judgment, the word there is man's day. The day of man's judgment is of little concern to me.

And he goes on a little bit further. Yet I am not by this acquitted. Because he said, I'm not even conscious of anything. I don't even judge myself. He says, as far as I know, when I do self-examination, I don't even know of anything that's in me.

He says, yet I am not by this acquitted. He says, your judgment doesn't make me right. My personal judgment doesn't make me right. He says, I'm to be found trustworthy. Then he goes on. He says, because there's one thing.

He says, but the one who examines me is the Lord. And he goes into this reference. Therefore, do not keep on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes.

That's the day of the Lord, right? He said, right now we sit in the day of man where man is judging and promoting and, you know, demoting each individual. He said, but that's not the main thing. He said, even some people are examining themselves.

[20 : 29] Well, look at me. I'm doing a good job. He said, that's not even the main thing. He said, the main thing is the day of the Lord that's coming, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts.

See, the reality is, is that even in our day and time, and it's not, there's nothing new under the sun. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us. So what we see going on in our time is plastered across the screens of our television.

Just because we know of it more in today's time doesn't mean that it's new. I mean, Paul is addressing it in the church at Corinth, right? This is something, as we are told in scripture, there's nothing new under the sun.

What has been or what is has already been and what will be has already taken place. He says, when we do this, we get it twisted as a church and even as servants of the church, we get it twisted. We misunderstand the role of that person. But there's one judgment that comes that will not misunderstand. And that is the day of the Lord will come and he will, I love this, here's the examination we stand before.

[21 : 31] He will bring to light the things hidden and he will disclose the motives of men's hearts.

So let me, let me preach to the pastor for just a moment. Preach to the pastor. What this says to the pastor is that there will be a day coming where I stand before the captain of the ship that I have been trying to row at, that he's put me as an under rower at, there will be a day coming where he will determine what my motivation for paddling at the oar is.

There will be a day where I stand before my Lord and Savior and he will tell me what my motivation for preaching is. He will disclose it. He will reveal the motives of my heart.

Not just for mine alone, but for every servant of the church. It really doesn't matter. Paul says in that day, how much men have spoke well of you or how much men have spoke bad of you.

It doesn't matter how much you think you've done a good job yourself. What will matter is the things that were hidden will be brought to light and the motives of the heart will be disclosed. There will be a day where the servants of Christ will have their motivations revealed.

And you say, well, I'm glad I'm not a pastor. Well, you know, if you open up the book of 1 Peter, you'll find that the priesthood of the believers. We sang a couple songs this morning that talked about walking.

[22 : 49] That second one was a little new to us and we haven't sang it much, but it disclosed this great truth. There are people watching you, right? And they're going to know your motives, by the way, for your walk will be disclosed as well.

Because if the motives of the under rowers will be disclosed, the motives of everyone on the ship is going to be disclosed. But when we exalt personalities, we misunderstand that.

Because this is what happens. As we exalt individuals, we diminish Christ. Because popularity of personalities becomes more important than the examination of the Savior.

And when we exalt the people and we lift them up, only one person can stand on a pedestal. And when we lift up and exalt them, then we are diminishing Christ.

You say, well, why would we do that? Why is it so prevalent? Why has it been so prevalent throughout church history? Why does it seem to be such this plague of sin? Why would man want to do that? When the Savior has paid the price, when Jesus Christ alone has died for us, when he is our only hope for eternal salvation, then why would we have this tendency to exalt personalities and put them in a place which they should never be?

[24 : 07] Why do we as a church, and I include myself in that because I'm part of the church too, why do we as a church tend to lift up personalities? Why do we exalt them? Why do we stand in awe of them?

Why are we so amazed at them? Why is there such this tendency among mankind? Well, because it leads to the second truth. And by the way, this starts getting into the pew. This leaves the pulpit and gets into the pew. The reason behind this exalted personality, which is a misunderstanding of the role of the person, it leads to this, the self-exalted position among the people.

We raise them up in hopes that we may raise ourselves up as well. It is the natural tendency of the heart, self-promotion. The self-exaltation among the people.

Because look at what Paul says. Paul comes down a little bit further after he speaks of his own examination.

He said, now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sake. So Paul says, what I'm saying is I'm putting this application on me and Apollos. I'm kind of picking on us. But I'm doing it for your sake so that you would understand.

[25 : 18] So that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written. Now he's writing to some people who were creating divisions within the body. And this person thought they were better than that person based upon who they connected with.

And this person will assume that they were better than that person. And there are these divisions. We call that pride. We can call that whatever you want to. But it's self-exaltation is essentially what it is. And he writes to them.

Now I like this in verse 7. It says, for who regards you as superior? I read this account. A young pastor asked this older pastor one time. He was at a conference. And this young pastor walked up to this older pastor and said, brother, would you pray for me that I would stay humble?

Now that seems good on the surface until the older pastor looked at him and said, well, what right do you have to be prideful? Why should I have to pray for you to stay humble?

Because what is in you that would cause you to be prideful? Paul asked the same question. Who regards you as exalted? Ever thought about that?

[26 : 20] Most people's honest answer in the church of Corinth, well, I am better than what Paul says in whose eyes. And then he reminds them.

He says, what have you that you have not received? So if you are exalted, he says, if you are superior, what do you have that you did not receive?

He says, what is it that you possess that was not given to you in Christ? Now, the answer to that would be nothing because Paul has already told them that they have everything in Christ. So he reminds them of this reality.

Who regards you as superior? Well, I mean, I think I'm better than them. Well, okay. So if you're better than that person, then what do you have that is your own that you did not receive? Well, the answer to that is nothing. So if you don't have anything that you did not receive, and if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

It's essentially saying, why are you going around with an arrogant spirit as if your own works have exalted your position there? Now, we need to be careful here because the reality is it still happens in the church today.

[27 : 25] We see church members and even denominations and even individuals who walk around with this self-exaltation, and they believe they're superior than others, and we have to ask ourselves, well, who regards us as superior?

Well, we are. I mean, but who thinks so? Well, I do. Well, why? What do I have that I have not received? Well, nothing. Well, so how does that differentiate me from that individual over there who has everything that he's received as well?

None. But we like that. We want it, right? Because then Paul reminds them. He starts speaking of their position. He says, you're already filled.

You've promoted yourself and lifted yourself up so much you're already filled. You've already become rich. You've become kings without us. And he begins to contrast their standing in their own eyes and the standing of the apostles.

It's amazing to me when you read this list, and I won't go over it again, but Paul reminds them of this. He says, you have so exalted the personalities that you have lifted yourselves up above the very people you claim to be following.

[28 : 26] The divisions within your church are a reality that you are promoting yourself, and you have become better off than Apollos, than Paul, and then Peter. I mean, we don't know what happened to Paul.

I mean, Apollos, but Paul got his head cut off. Peter was crucified upside down. Because when it came time for crucifixion, he told them he did not deserve to die in the manner that his Lord does, so they crucified him upside down.

We don't read any of the believers at Corinth saying, oh, that's what I want. No, they're saying, I like Paul, and I like Peter so much, and I like Apollos. I'm going to become rich. I'm going to become better because I know these people. Paul says, the reason you're lifting us up is because, essentially, it's a matter of your own heart.

You want to lift yourself up. Oh, well, I sit at the feet of so-and-so. Paul says so. Have you ever considered the life of so-and-so? We can take this real crash course.

You know, one of the things I love reading more than anything is biographies. And I love autobiographies. A.W. Tozer is one of my favorite authors. He's kind of different.

[29 : 30] A.W. Tozer would not let anyone write a biography of himself. He was used in the Christian Missionary Alliance Association. He wrote all kinds of biographies for other individuals. Posthumously, a number of books have been published.

There are still books coming out. Posthumously, with A.W. Tozer's name on Daniel Snyder, he's the one who kind of compiles them. It's all his sermons and things. A.W. Tozer would not let another individual write a biography about himself. And the reason so, he said, because biographers have a right to over-promote and over-emphasize the individual they're writing about.

He said, so when I write my story, I'm going to write everything about my story, and I'm going to let you know who I am in actuality. And the reason I like that is because throughout church history, we have a way of lifting up individuals.

But when you read the reality of who they are, right? Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers. Oh, he's such an amazing individual.

So many books have been written on Charles Spurgeon, and it was astounding most people to realize that Spurgeon once told a young lady that he would smoke two cigars at a time if he thought it would fit in his mouth. Right?

[30 : 35] Had a bitter spirit at times. D.L. Moody, using her own language, was a glutton. Ate everything he could put in front of him. I mean, we could go on. Each and every one of A.W. Tozer, I love his writing.

And then one time I messed up and listened to a recording of him preach. Don't do it. Okay? His voice doesn't match his writing. Poor thing.

He had such a whiny, nasally-sounding voice that I was like, I'd rather read his writing than listen to him preach. But there's power there. Right? Because they're all men.

But Paul says the reason you promote them and the reason you love them is because you want to exalt yourself. And when you do that, you're putting yourself higher than they are because it's really self-focused, not personality-focused.

You want them to be popular. You want them to be successful because it makes you feel better in society. He said, you've already become rich. You've already filled all these things. And he begins to contrast. He said, you're rich, but we're poor.

[31 : 35] You're well-clothed, but I'm naked. You know, you're well-fed, but I'm hungry. He says that Paul, Paul makes this declaration that he thinks that God has exhibited the apostles' last of all.

Again, we go back to entertainment because the church at Corinth would understand this. The Roman Empire had all this entertainment to keep people busy, and they would put people in the Coliseum, and there would be all these great things, great spectacles that you could go to, and you could watch these beasts fight with one another.

But the very last item on the list, the very last thing, was usually when they would bring prisoners in, the last things. This is what Paul's referring to here, when the last things. And the last things is they would bring in these prisoners who were really just hungry and starving, and they really hadn't been fed in a long time.

They'd been malnourished and maltreated or mistreated, and they were just so well-beaten, and they would throw them out to the lions, and everybody would cheer because they said there was no hope.

This man's going to die. And they were entertained by it. And Paul says, that's who we are. And you're trying to exalt us? And you're doing it just to promote yourself? He said, I'm the last man on the bill.

[32 : 38] I'm the one God is allowing to be thrown out to the lions. I'm the one who has no hope. Who am I? He said, you misunderstand my position.

And therefore, you're exalting yourself. And the reason you're doing it, you make yourself feel better. And then Paul comes home as a dad and says, this isn't right. He said, I'm not doing this to debase you.

I'm doing this to admonish you. Quit trying to become something in this world. Because the reality is this. Too often in the church, the church is full of members, and I'm a member too.

The church is full of members who are trying to attain a better position in the world than the Savior ever did. The Savior was a suffering servant washing the feet of the disciples.

One of our Awanas verses, the children in Awanas memorize it, right? It's the theme of the book of Mark, Mark 10, 45. That Jesus came into the world not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.

[33 : 39] Yet, so many who follow that servant, this is going to hurt, don't like serving.

You know why that hurts? It's because that isn't what we thought we signed up for. Jesus says, be not deceived if they've mistreated me, and mistreated me, they're going to do this to you as well. No, that's not right. I can find a personality who's successful in doing it right, and I'm going to follow that guy. You're right, you can. There's great danger there. My third and final one, and I know this is kind of long, but my third and final one, this is the great danger.

A misunderstood role of the person, the self-exalted position among the people, and this is the detriment, this is the danger. A powerless gospel presence in the church. You know what happens when you have exalted personalities?

You have a powerless gospel presence in the church. And we see it there in the close of this chapter. Paul essentially says, I'm coming to you.

[34 : 55] Oh, I'm coming. If the Lord wills, I'm coming. I like how Paul put that in there. Paul knew that he couldn't make his own plans. But he says, if the Lord wills, I'm coming. Now this is the second letter. We don't know what happened to the first letter, but this is the second letter.

He said, oh, this is 1 Corinthians. This is the first one that's in the canon of Scripture, but it's the second one that he had wrote to the church already. We see that later on in the letter. 2 Corinthians would have been the third.

This is 1 Corinthians. Paul says, I am coming. If the Lord wills, I'm coming. And when I come, I love this about Paul. Paul is a man of action. Paul was also a man of confrontation.

He didn't mind it. He says, and when I come, I will find not the words of the individuals, but the power. He says, I don't want to hear what they have to say.

I don't want to hear all this arrogance that they're promoting themselves. I don't want to hear about how great and grand they are. I want to see their power. Because the kingdom of God does not exist in words, but in power.

[36 : 00] What did he tell them? 1 Corinthians 2, verse 4. When I came to you, I came to you in the demonstration of spirit and power. He said, when I came to you, I did not come baptizing.

I came proclaiming the gospel. And when I came proclaiming Christ crucified, I came in the demonstration of the spirit. With the capital S, that'd be the Holy Spirit. You know, the other person in the Trinity that kind of scares us a little bit.

I came in the demonstration of the spirit and in power. Paul said, when I came, it wasn't my words that changed you. It was the power that was evident because of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. And that when I was present, the Holy Spirit was present and the spirit was doing an amazing work. And therefore there was power on display. Friend, listen to me. The church's existence is not an existence of words.

Unfortunately, the church has a lot to say today. But the church doesn't always have a lot to be seen. There was a day when the church was relying upon power.

[37 : 12] Silver and gold, we have none, but in the name of Jesus Christ, get up and walk. They depended upon the power of the Holy Spirit. When they gathered together and prayed, the power of the Holy Spirit came and the walls of the place were shaken.

We've neglected the power and we've learned the words. We have great doctrine. We have great theology. We have pretty good anthropology, which is a study of man.

We know sociology, the study of salvation. We know eschatology. We have more books written about the end times than the book of Revelations as recorded, okay? It's amazing.

You can go to the smallest book in the Bible and go look up, just look up any resources on that book and you will find volumes and volumes.

I mean, I literally, in my office right now, I have volumes this thick that comprises and talks about a book that has a page and a half in scripture on it. We have words galore.

[38 : 12] We know all the words, but the problem that we see is that there is a powerless gospel displayed in the church. You say, what do you mean?

What ails the broken heart? Not your words. What gives hope to the, you know, the wondering sinner? Not your words.

What gives the hope of an everlasting security? The hope of salvation, the grandeur of heaven? Not the words. You may convince me by your words, but you cannot change my heart by them.

You can change my mind until someone has better words. And in this world where the church is full of words, so too is the world. Because for every word that the church has proclaimed, the world has about two or three for it.

There are volumes upon volumes upon volumes telling us that our words are wrong. There are people whose whole job and whole occupation is to take the word of God and to display the word of God as being errant, to being wrong, not inerrant.

[39 : 15] Their whole job and their whole occupation is to pick apart the words which we proclaim. But one thing they cannot argue with is when the Spirit shows up and there's power. You may try to convince me that I'm wrong.

You may try to tell me that my theology is wrong. You may try to tell me that I misunderstand the Scripture. And you may try to tell me that the things I read were written in an age that is long gone and it is outdated. But when I look at you and say, but He changed my heart.

That He took a heart of stone and made it a heart of flesh. You explain that to me. That He took a self-concedent and self-focused man and made him concerned about others. You explain that to me.

When He took one who was full of hatred and animosity and bitterness and made him full of love. You explain that to me. See, there's power for the fruit of the flesh. We know what it is.

It's natural. You do not have to train your flesh to do that, but the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Friend, listen to me. You do not have self-control within yourself.

[40 : 18] You have self-control because of the power of the Holy Spirit. There's no argument for that. The problem is is the church has tried to argue its truths with words rather than displaying its truths with power.

And the reason we've done it is because we've exalted personalities and in exalting the personality, we forgot about the person of the Holy Spirit and we forget about the person of the Holy Spirit. We forget about the person of Jesus Christ and we forget about the person of Jesus Christ and we forgot about the whole trinity of God.

Now what's more important is man than God himself. There's a grand danger there because when people are the most important thing, power is absent. The one person that matters is often absent from the church and therefore the power is not on display.

The question is not who's the man behind the pulpit. The question is what power is on display? We live in a sad day. The reality is that sad day has always been present as long as the church has been in existence.

So rather than hanging our heads and getting all upset about it, why don't we fall on our faces and call out to God and say, God manifest your power. What a powerless gospel present in the church.

[41 : 33] Lord, we need you. I'm not anybody, you're not anybody. I say, well, I'm somebody. Well, yeah, you're somebody in Christ. On our own, we're not anybody. But he's all we ever need.

There's power there. Here's the grand danger of exalted personalities. Let's pray and then we'll sing. Lord, I thank you for your word.

Thank you, God, that you speak to us through it. Lord, I know that these truths can be hard or they can be difficult. It's not difficult and penetrating. Lord, we trust that by the power and presence of your spirit, you would show us what it is we need to know.

Help us as individuals Lord, to rightfully understand who we are in Christ, to rightfully understand what it is you've called us to do for your glory, not man's glory, but your glory. We ask that you have your way during this time of invitation.

Lord, if you need to break our hearts, break them. If you need to mend our hearts, mend them.

Lord, whatever it is that you want to do, we give you the freedom and the opportunity to do it, and

we ask it all in Christ's name.
[42 : 40] Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen.