

1 CORINTHIANS
Destroying Self-Deception
1 Corinthians 3:18 – 4:7

Illustration: Stories of old people being scammed. We all feel sorry for these people, and we would love to get our hands on those that DECEIVED and STOLE from them in this way. **But there is ANOTHER kind of deceit that is even more common than that.** Why does a teenage girl choose to keep dating that sorry jerk she calls her boyfriend even though he cheats on her and mistreats her? Why does that middle-age man keep looking at those websites and ordering those magazines even though it is killing his marriage? Why does that businessman choose to “borrow” (embezzle) that money from his work account, even though it in no way belongs to him and could send him to jail? Here are the first words from Paul in our passage today: **1 Corinthians 3:18a NIV**

18 Do not deceive yourselves.

Self-deceit is the practice of deciding to do something that is foolish and harmful by convincing yourself that it is NOT foolish and harmful. This warning is given to BELIEVERS! It is given to people in the church who consider themselves to be followers of Jesus Christ. It is given to US! Hear this: You and I are more than capable of deceiving ourselves and falling into the worst kinds of sin! It is how the Corinthians got to the place where they were fighting over everything and living in sinful, shameful disunity. **They were self-deceived.** Here is the warning and correction that Paul gave to them.

1 Corinthians 3:18-23 NIV

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become “fools” so that you may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: “He catches the wise in their craftiness”^[a]; ²⁰ and again, “The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile.”^[b] ²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas^[c] or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Self-Deceit = To beguile, seduce (oneself). Self-deceit happens when we allow our DESIRES and our personal OPINIONS to override conviction and counsel. In fact, self-deceit chooses to IGNORE conviction and fails to seek counsel (except from those that we already know will agree with us!). Self-deceit is a very PERSONAL sin. It is internal. It is HIDDEN. And it is DEADLY! Paul makes it clear that it is driven by PRIDE. This was the great sin of the Corinthian church. They were very proud. Pride divided them. But Paul challenged them to reconsider and repent of their prideful perspective. He called them to exchange what they incorrectly valued, and trade it for something of infinite value.

“If you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become ‘fools’ so that you can become (truly) wise!” (Vs. 18)

KEY THOUGHT: **Do you consider yourself “worldly-wise?”**

The wisdom of this world . . .

- . . . EXALTS the counsel of the powerful, wealthy, etc. of this world.
- . . . ACKNOWLEDGES ONLY the value of HUMAN strength and self-effort.
- . . . IGNORES the counsel of God.

BUT GOD SAYS, “He catches the wise in their Craftiness” = All-working; Doing all things; Human EFFORT; Unscrupulous [unguided] conduct; and, “The thoughts of the wise are FUTILE” = Devoid of force, truth, success; useless; of no purpose; an IDOL.

In these verses, Paul is warning us that the WISDOM that we value and listen to is the very thing that can lead us into self-deception. It is the basis for my first question to us:

WHAT RESOURCES ARE YOU LOOKING TO FOR HELP?

- for problems you face?
- for pathways you seek?
- for priorities you set?

The Corinthians went to their philosophers when they wanted to know what to do. **Where do you go when you need answers? Horoscopes? Oprah? Google?** For many, Google is the most common answer. It is amazing how many people will search google for help finding financial, mental, relational, and even spiritual help. **And many do this without any type of FILTER to weed out resources that have a vastly different WORLDVIEW than believers (should) have.** It is why we have tried to offer resources to our PARENTS for help with issues they face with their children, or resources for COUPLES who need help with their marriage. **Google is not the ENEMY. It is just a PANTHEON of human wisdom that must be carefully DISCERNED, just like all other resources.** [Financial wizards, Celebrity spokesmen, popular magazines/books, etc.]

Where do you go when you need HELP? **Paul quotes verses from Job and from Psalms to downplay human “wisdom,” so that we will remember that God has supplied us with all that we need in his WORD and by his SPIRIT. We have everything that we need!** The Word of God is filled with heavenly WISDOM that has infinite earthly VALUE, and the Spirit of God will lead us to the answers we need when we seek him. **The question is, will we seek that wisdom as our primary source?** Proverbs says this over and over! **Proverbs 3:5-7 NIV**

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.

There is a very tragic story in the O.T. about a king named ASA who at first was a very godly king. He sought God’s help in several crisis’s in ways that gave God great glory and brought great deliverance to Asa’s kingdom. But that changed over time. His sad slide into self-deceit was seen at the very end of his life. **2 Chronicles 16:11-13 NIV**

11 The events of Asa's reign, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 12 In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not

seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians. 13 Then in the forty-first year of his reign Asa died and rested with his ancestors.

He had a disease in his feet for 3 YEARS, but “he sought the physicians rather than the Lord.” **This is not an indictment against going to a DOCTOR, but is condemnation for applying counsel found APART FROM seeking the will, wisdom, and power of God! It is so telling that Asa’s sin and failure stemmed from his earlier practice of ALWAYS trusting in God. Note the words of the prophet to him just before the mention of his disease. 2 Chronicles 16:9-10 NIV**

9 For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war." 10 Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa brutally oppressed some of the people.

Oh, that we would wake up to the ways in which we are seeking help APART FROM GOD. He loves to give the wisdom that you need (**James 1 and James 2**), but we have to SEEK and then APPLY it. **The truth is, you have everything you need in Christ!**

Again, Paul was rebuking the Corinthians for fighting over who was the best spiritual leader, because they ALL belonged to EVERY member of that body. No one had to “pick a leader!” These leaders were GIFTS from Christ to his people so that could have all the help they needed for a healthy life of faith.

²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! **All things are yours,** ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas^(a) or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Paul went on to describe another area that can lead to self-deception, and it can be addressed by answering the following question:

WHOSE JUDGMENTS DO YOU VALUE? 1 Corinthians 4:1-5 NIV

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. ² Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. ³ **I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself.** ⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. **It is the Lord who judges me.** ⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.

Whose APPROVAL are you looking to gain? In this passage, Paul describes 3 KINDS of judgment: Self-Judgment, Human Judgment, and God’s Judgment. Paul began this segment by again describing what the Apostles and Pastors were: Servants. He uses another word for servant this time [**Under-rower**]. It describes the slave in relation to his master’s commands. He says that the servant is a STEWARD that must

prove faithful to his master's every command, **but he knows that his own view of his faithfulness in fulfilling his role is incomplete!** God alone knows perfectly.

***Self-Judgment?**

You may have a clear conscience. That is a good thing! You want to do your best to keep a clear conscience by not doing those things you know are wrong. But a clear conscience is not enough. You may still be guilty of impure motives or selfish goals without knowing it. [The heart is deceitful above all things . . .](#)

***Human Judgment?**

Human judgment is often WRONG. These people in Corinth were actually JUDGING PAUL as a leader, and Paul was rebuking them for the way in which they were doing this. Their judgment was out of line! Paul, however, was not AFRAID of human judgment. He had already learned how to ["become a fool . . . to become wise."](#) **He was not afraid to appear foolish to worldly people. He was not driven by the FEAR OF MAN.**

The truth is, the FEAR of human judgment is often the very thing that drives us to live in foolish and misguided ways! The fear of man is a TRAP. Human judgment often presses people to DISOBEY GOD in order to gain human approval. Furthermore, faith often flies in the face of human wisdom and common sense.

***God's Judgment?**

There is no lack for those who seek judgment from God! He offers wisdom for today, and perfect judgment on that FINAL DAY. One day, each of us will stand before God to be fully judged for every word, thought, and deed in our lives. He will REBUKE what needs to be rebuked, and he will REWARD what needs to be rewarded. He will "bring to light" that which had been hidden in the darkness, and those who deserve his PRAISE will receive it before all men. What a day that will be!

Our FINAL judgment will come at the Judgment Seat of Christ in heaven. **But we do not have to wait until that day to benefit from God's judgment.** [We can invite God to examine our MOTIVES each day through his Word.](#) **Hebrews 4:12-13 NIV**

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

The Bible is the only book that reads you! It is a mirror that reveals our true motives and attitudes. [You and I need to experience that kind of divine SCRUTINY each day in order to be found faithful! When you do this, you do not have to fear God's judgment on that final day.](#) Your highest praise will (and should!) come from him alone! **But until that day, we should be looking to God for his help, trusting his judgment for our holiness, and . . . BOASTING in his power as our hope.**

WHAT ARE YOU BOASTING ABOUT? 1 Corinthians 4:6-7 NIV

⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. 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?**

Do not be deceived, everything you and I have, we received from someone else. God is our Creator, and he poured his creative power and wisdom into us for his glory and for our good. Do you not see this? Why would anyone brag on themselves more than on the One who made them and gifted them? This is why John the Baptist gave the following answer when some people thought he should be jealous of Jesus: **John 3:27-28, 30 NIV**

²⁷ To this John replied, **“A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. ²⁸ You yourselves can testify that I said, ‘I am not the Messiah but am sent ahead of him.’ ...³⁰ He must become greater; I must become less.”**

Those are the words of a humble man who knew that his greatest boast was his relationship to Jesus Christ! He was a simple “voice crying in the wilderness,” that made way for the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Like Paul, he knew that his worth was not found in his own skills or abilities, but in the approval of the Lord. **So, whose name are you celebrating, whose GLORY are you promoting, and who is getting CREDIT for the good in your life?** There is no greater boast than having God on your side as your Defender and your Rewarder! Boast in him!

2 Corinthians 10:17 NIV

¹⁷ But, “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”^[a] ¹⁸ For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.

What resources are you looking to for help? Whose judgments do you value? And what are you boasting about? If your answer to all of these questions is truly, “The LORD GOD ALMIGHTY,” then you will not walk through life foolishly deceiving your own self! Instead, you will be walking in the wisdom of God.

Let’s pray.

FACILITATION GUIDE
1 CORINTHIANS – Week 6
Self-Deception

START TALKING:

What is the worst you have ever been tricked?

START THINKING:

Why is it so easy for us to deceive ourselves? How do we do it?

START SHARING:

Read [1 Corinthians 3:18-23](#). Why does the wisdom of God appear foolish to the worldly-wise? What are some resources that you sought help from before coming to Christ?

Read [Proverbs 3:5-7](#) and [2 Chronicles 16:9-13](#). What does it mean to “trust in the Lord,” rather than to “lean on your own understanding?” What was Asa’s sin? How do you balance seeking help from God and help from other people?

Read [1 Corinthians 4:1-5](#) and [Hebrews 4:12-13](#). Why did Paul say that he did not judge himself, or trust the judgement of others? How does God’s Word help to prepare us for the judgment of God?

Read [1 Corinthians 4:6-7](#) and [2 Corinthians 10:17](#). What are you most proud of? How did it come to be in your life? How can you boast in the Lord?

START PRAYING:

As you read the Word, ask God to show you any areas of self-deceit in your life.

START DOING:

This week, make it a point to give God the glory out loud for any good thing in your life!