

# 1 Corinthians 3:16-23

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[0:00] It might just look like being open to receive criticism from people who know you well and love you deeply, like your spouse, or a roommate, or a close friend, or a trusted co-worker.

But once a year, the elders normally conduct a review of the pastors. And so we go through each of our list of ministry responsibilities, we give each other feedback, we do a self-evaluation and give each other feedback about how things are going, what are our strengths and weaknesses, how we can grow.

I remember the first time that I was reviewed, about six months after I became a pastor at Trinity. This is what one of the elders wrote to me. By and large, he wrote, I think Greg is humble and committed to growing.

But I have noticed a pattern of him responding defensively when open-minded questions would make more sense. Like, why do you see it that way? Or, am I missing something?

I'd like to see you relax a little in terms of proving yourself, and instead have the attitude that you'll never know less about how to pastor well than you do now.

[1:06] So you should have tons of questions, and really be working hard to find believable people who can help you grow. Now, I didn't particularly want to hear that.

I wouldn't have been able to identify those patterns all by myself, but I really needed to hear that. It was absolutely right.

And I still need to hear things that I don't want to hear. In fact, I can't even tell you all of those things what they are. That's part of the process of becoming a fool so we can become wise.

Embracing the humbling way of life under the cross as it's lived out in Christian community. In honest and loving speech to one another.

That's an ongoing process. So that's the first confining framework that we can easily get stuck in. We can become self-deceived by measuring ourselves either against ourselves or just against the prevailing standards of this twisted world.

[2:15] The second confining framework we can get stuck in is idolizing someone else. Paul says, let no one boast in men, verse 21. Now, the problem in Corinth was the Corinthians were dividing themselves into factions.

They were attaching themselves to one Christian leader at the expense of others. We've already talked about this theme quite a bit in the last few weeks. Matt and I preached on it in chapter 1. Nick preached on it at the beginning of chapter 3.

So I'm not going to repeat what's already been said. You can listen to the other sermons on the website. But if the problem in verse 18 through 20 is having an inflated sense of our own wisdom or our own spiritual maturity, the problem in verse 21 is having an inflated sense of somebody else's wisdom or spiritual maturity.

In other words, putting them on a pedestal. Paul says, don't put another individual on a pedestal. Don't make one other person the source of your fulfillment and joy and security.

Whether it's a particular Christian leader or a boyfriend or girlfriend or even a husband or wife. If you idolize them and they disappoint you, which they inevitably will, then you will either demonize them and hate them or you will be driven to despair.

[3:37] Or you will just repeat the same cycle all over again and find someone else. And Paul says, don't do that. That's another confining, enslaving framework.

And God wants us to break free and never return to that. Now Paul goes on in verse 21 to 23 to give a reason for his warning against boasting in other people.

And you know, if you're reading this passage, you might think, okay, don't deceive yourself. You know, don't think you're too wise in this age. God catches the wise in their craftiness.

The self-deceptive thoughts are futile. Don't boast in people. Boasting's foolish. People can't bear the weight of your boasting. It's futile.

It's empty. But actually, Paul takes a different tack. This passage takes a bit of a surprising turn in the middle of verse 21. Let me sort of set it up this way.

[ 4 : 39 ] You know, if you're trying to help someone who is strongly tempted toward a particular sin, say alcohol abuse and drunkenness, you can talk about how dangerous it is, how it's against God's law, how it harms your liver, how it hurts other people, how it makes you do stupid things, how it makes you more vulnerable, how it may result in God's judgment, and all of that is true.

But if you really want to help someone break free from a deeply entrenched self-destructive pattern, they also need to see a compelling vision of a better life.

A better way to spend a lonely Saturday night. A better way to cope with anxiety about the future and stress in the present. A better way to blow off steam after a long and hard week.

And this is what Paul does in verse 21 to 23. He doesn't just talk about how bad and futile boasting is. He rips the blinders off our eyes. He opens the doors of our prison and says, Look at the freedom you have in Jesus Christ.

You've lived in the narrow and twisted confines of deceiving yourself and idolizing other people and conforming to the twisted patterns of this world. Look at the glorious eternal inheritance which belongs to you in Jesus Christ.

[ 6 : 05 ] All things are yours. Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future all are yours.

And you are Christ's. And Christ is God's. He says, Stop competing with each other over which Christian teacher is the best.

He says, You know, you're getting worked up about all these little things. It's sort of like sitting in a restaurant where you know the cook. And you know that the cook makes the best food in the world. And he's making a special meal just for you. And you're arguing with each other about which waiter is going to bring that meal to the table and put the little garnish on the plate.

He says, That's what it's like when you're arguing about Christian leaders. Who's going to serve me the bread of life? You've got the bread of life! Or you're like two children fighting with each other over a matchbox car when their parents own the toy store.

[ 7 : 22 ] They can have any of them. They all belong to you, Paul says. Paul doesn't just stop with naming Christian leaders. He says, The world belongs to you.

Life, death, the present, the future. Gordon Fee writes, These five items are the ultimate tyrannies of human existence to which people are in lifelong bondage.

To the demands of the world. To the uncertainty of the future. To the inevitability of death. These are the things that can cause us the greatest anxiety.

And that we can respond by clinging to one of these confining frameworks. But as Paul says in Romans 8, as we heard earlier in the service, none of these things can separate us from the love of God and Jesus Christ, our Lord.

For those in Christ Jesus, the things that were formerly tyrannies are now your new birthright. This is the glorious freedom of the children of God.

[ 8 : 31 ] We are not bound to the whims of chance. The future is no cause for panic. It is already ours in Christ. You see, in Jesus Christ, in his coming to earth and taking on human flesh, in his death for us on the cross, in his resurrection, in his ascension to glory, God has decisively begun what he will one day complete.

Ephesians 1.10 says, he will bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. Jesus Christ has entered this world in person.

He has taken on human nature. He didn't just appear to be human. He wasn't just temporarily human.

He became human. And he still is fully human and fully God, our brother in heaven, who is preparing a place for us in his eternal kingdom.

He came and lived a perfect life on this earth. He went through all the different stages of life and has faced every kind of temptation.

[ 9 : 47 ] He understands what we're going through. And he's with us in the midst of it. The world is his. There's nowhere you can go in the world that is too far for Jesus to be with you and for him to sustain you.

And in his resurrection, we have a promise of life that will triumph over even death itself. What Paul calls the last enemy. So life and death are ours in Christ.

And in Christ, we have a glorious future. And we begin to experience that future glory spilling over into the present by the work of the Holy Spirit. When he brings the future into the present.

So the present and the future are ours. You see, in Jesus Christ, all that we are is his and all that is his is now ours. And Christ, the Messiah, is God's.

Jesus is carrying out the one eternal purpose of God the Father in perfect union. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

[ 11 : 01 ] perfect union in their one purpose. So Paul says, don't be confined to a short-sighted vision.

Thinking that you're wise by comparing yourself to others or boasting in some other person and idolizing them. Look to the glorious inheritance that is yours in Christ.

And that is ours in Christ together. When Paul says, all things are yours, it's a plural yours. It's like when, in verse 16 and 17, when he says, you are God's temple. You together are God's dwelling place.

And all things belong to you as God has called you to belong to him in Christ. I want to end by quoting from an old Christian catechism, the Heidelberg catechism, written in the 16th century.

The first question is as follows, and it expresses this truth that Paul ends with in this passage. It says, what is your only comfort in life and death?

[ 12 : 11 ] And the answer is this, that I am not my own, but belong body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and He has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head.

Indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

Let us pray. Father, we thank You for Your Word, and we especially thank You for the greatness of what You have done for us in Christ Jesus.

We thank You that through faith in Him, we belong to Him. We thank You that You have bestowed upon us Your very self.

[ 13 : 29 ] and ultimately that all things belong to us because they belong to You and because we will one day share in Your reign, Your kingdom, and Your glory.

Lord, help us to live. Help us to live humbly in light of the cross. Help us to live confidently in light of Your grace and the glorious inheritance that we have in Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen.