

The Three Tribunals

by

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1 Cor. 4:3-5

Among the many problems that existed in the church at Corinth...

There was the problem of division.

1 Cor. 1:10-11, *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.”*

Which involved “personality cults”.

1 Cor. 1:12, *“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.”*

In dealing with the problem, the apostle Paul...

Rebuked the spiritual immaturity of such division.

1 Cor. 3:1-4, *“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”*

Revealed how one should view the role of others.

- 1 Cor. 3:5-9, *“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.”*
- 1 Cor. 4:1-2, *“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”*

Remarked that in his own case he was more interested in what the Lord thought.

1 Cor. 4:3-5, “*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*”

In the text for this study (1 Cor. 4:3-5), we are introduced to three different types of judgments...

- The court of judgment by men.
- The court of judgment by one’s conscience.
- The court of judgment by Christ.

We might call these “The Three Tribunals”.

In our federal court system, we have...

- The local federal court.
- The federal district court of appeal.
- The federal supreme court (which the judgment is more final than the others).

So it is with “The Three Tribunals” of our text. There is a difference among them, and we do well to see what the Scriptures say about each one. We begin with the lowest “tribunal”...

The court of judgment by men

Paul’s view of this “tribunal”...

1 Cor. 4:3, “*But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment..*”

Note carefully that he said “*a very small thing*”, not “nothing”.

Paul was often concerned about what people thought in some matters.

About what his weak brother thought.

1 Cor. 8:13, “*Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*”

About what the lost thought.

- 1 Cor. 9:19-23, “*For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.*”
- 1 Cor. 10:31-33, “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*”

But what people thought of him personally was “a very small thing”...

The reason for Paul’s view...

He knew how fallible the opinions of others could be.

The world loves false teachers.

- Luke 6:26, “*Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*”
- Jer. 5:30-31, “*A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?*”

They hate those “not of the world”.

John 15:18-19, “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*”

He new their criteria for judging was wrong.

They often look at the outward appearance.

1 Sam. 16:7, “*But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*”

A problem Paul had to deal with.

- 2 Cor. 10:7, *“Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ’s, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ’s, even so are we Christ’s.”*
- 2 Cor. 10:10, *“For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.”*

Yet, he knew what the Lord had said.

John 7:24, *“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”*

While there are times we should be considerate of what others think, the final estimation needs to look to a higher court. Some would say “Let your conscience be your guide.” But let’s examine...

The court of judgment by one’s conscience

Paul’s view of this “tribunal”...

1 Cor. 4:3, *“...yea, I judge not mine own self.”*

Paul is not totally discounting the need to examine oneself.

We are to examine ourselves at the Lord’s Supper.

1 Cor. 11:28-31, *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.”*

We should periodically examine our own salvation.

2 Cor. 13:5, *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”*

He certainly stressed the importance of a “good” conscience.

- 1 Tim. 1:5, *“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”*
- 1 Tim. 1:19, *“Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.”*

- 1 Tim. 3:9, “*Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*”
- 1 Tim. 4:2, “*Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*”

But, in the matter at hand, Paul refused to depend on this “tribunal”.

The reason for Paul’s view...

He knew how fallible one’s conscience or self-estimation can be.

He had always served God with good conscience.

Acts 23:1, “*And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.*”

Even when he was persecuting Christians.

Acts 26:9-11, “*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*”

When misinformed, one can have a clear conscience and still be dead wrong!

Paul acknowledged this possibility.

1 Cor. 4:4, “*For I know nothing by myself;...*”

While his conscience was clear, he knew that it did not make him right.

Paul knew there remained a final and infallible judgment...

The court of judgment by Christ

Paul’s view of this “tribunal”.

1 Cor. 4:4-5, “*For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*”

Christ will judge men at His coming.

2 Cor. 5:10, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”*

He viewed the Lord’s judgment as superior, for He will:

“...bring to light the hidden things of darkness” (things a clear conscience might miss).

“...make manifest the counsels of the hearts” (reveal things often hidden from the view of others).

Thus, Paul viewed this “tribunal” as final, with no court of appeal!

The reason for Paul’s view.

He knew the judgment of Christ was certain.

For God provided proof through the resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 17:31, *“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”*

And so Paul often wrote of this judgment.

- Rom. 14:10, *“But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”*
- 2 Cor. 5:10, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”*
- 2 Tim. 4:1, *“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom,”*

He knew the judgment of Christ was superior.

He knew the Lord could know the secrets of men.

- John 2:24-25, *“But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.”*
- Matt. 9:4, *“And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?”*

Conclusion

And so we have “The Three Tribunals”...

- The court of judgment by men.
- The court of judgment by one’s conscience.
- The court of judgment by Christ.

To which “tribunal” are we appealing for the hope of salvation?

Is our hope based on what fallible men have said?

Is our trust based on what we feel in our hearts, or what our conscience tells us?

Or, do we place our trust and hope in the words of the Lord who will judge us?

- John 12:48, *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”*
- Mark 16:16, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”*
- Rev. 2:10, *“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”*

I trust that we have seen there is only one “tribunal” we should look to for the final answer to such questions, and that we might truly have the attitude of Paul...

2 Cor. 5:9, *“Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”*

