

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **1Corinthians 4:3-6**.
- B. This can be a most difficult and "touchy" subject, so listen very carefully to my words.
- C. Passing judgment a serious matter. There is much in the NT about it. Therefore, if we should do, it is of extreme importance that we do it right.
- D. Our text deals with three "courts" of judgment:
 1. The court of public opinion.
 2. The court of personal conscience.
 3. The court of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. THE COURT OF PUBLIC OPINION.

- A. This is the lowest of the three courts. But it does have some merit:
 1. The public should not think the church is mad (1Cor. 14:23).
 2. Elders should have respect in the community (1Tim. 3:7).
 3. Jesus grew in favor of God and men (Lk. 2:52).
 4. The early church was well received by the people (Ac. 2:47).
- B. The reason that public opinion has but little merit is because the crowd is usually wrong:
 1. Israel wanted to make other gods in the absence of Moses (Ac. 7:40).
 2. People set up Paul and Barnabas as gods to offer sacrifice (Ac. 14:11-13).
 3. The crowds wanted Barabbas released and Jesus killed (Lk. 23:18).
- C. When our faithfulness to the Lord is concerned, there should be some discernment about the public opinion. But, their judgment is usually wrong and only in a few cases worth very much (Ac. 5:29).
- D. A warning--do not mistake this "human court" to be the government (as in a court of law). We are to respect the governmental authorities who rule over us (Rom. 13:1).

II. THE COURT OF PERSONAL CONSCIENCE.

- A. To violate our own conscience is to sin. If our own heart condemns us, so will God. If our heart is shaped by the truth, God will reward us (1Jn. 3:19-22).
- B. Paul respected the "court of conscience" due to his remarks in Ac. 23:1; 24:16.
- C. But our conscience is not an infallible guide. The NT says that our conscience can be:
 1. Evil (Heb. 10:22).
 2. Seared (1Tim. 4:2).
 3. Defiled (Titus 1:15).
 4. Ignorant (1Tim. 1:13).
 5. Choked with dead works (Heb. 9:14).
- D. Solomon said, "He that trusts his own heart is a fool" (Prov. 28:6).
- E. Our conscience, if it is to be a reliable guide, must shaped by the word of God. Just as we set and reset a watch to keep accurate time, we need to set and reset our conscience to be in tune with the Bible.

III. THE COURT OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

- A. Jesus is and will be the judge of all. God has given Him the authority to do so, and He will judge according to the ways of God (Jn. 5:26,27,30 esp. 30).
- B. No one shall escape this "court" of judgment, therefore, because it is divine and all encompassing it is the most important (2Cor. 5:10; Ac. 10:42; Rom. 2:16; 14:10-13).
- C. First, please God (in His judgment), second, please our own consciences (in its judgment), and third, please the public (in its judgment).

IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS.

- A. Jesus is the perfect judge, and He has given us instruction on how we are to judge others (Mt. 7:1-5).
- B. We need all the facts before we can judge, and even after that we must first judge ourselves. We "must walk a mile in their shoes" (Mt. 18:15-17). See Mt. 18:15 in light of Mt. 7:1-5 and Jn. 8:7,15,16).
- C. When elders have difficult decisions to make in shepherding the flock they must proceed carefully and slowly; so should we.
- D. Our scripture text says that Jesus has the advantage of seeing the motives of each man's heart. We do not have this gift; therefore let us be careful in our judgments.

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. Abraham gave God one of the greatest of compliments in Gen. 18:25 when he said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"
- B. Since He will, let us be careful how we judge, and not by public opinion, or by personal conscience, but according to the directives of Mt. 7:1-5; 18:15-17 and Rom. 14:10-13.
- C. Plan of salvation for non-Xians; erring Xians.