

**Women's Bible Study – Autumn Ridge Church**  
**1 Corinthians 4 – The Unity of Doctrine**  
**February 8, 2017 – Angie Pankratz**



It was April, 1997 – just 5 months after my wedding. My mom told me that my Grandma had called and said she had a gift for me. I knew she was coming the next day and so I asked my grandma about the gift she had for me. She pulled off a diamond ring on her finger and told me that she wanted to give it to me. She told me that instead of waiting until she died she wanted to do this while her memory was good and while she could enjoy seeing this beautiful heirloom on my finger.

Needless, to say I was speechless. As you can see, I still wear it today on the ring finger of my right hand. (Before today) I didn't really tell a lot of people about this gift my grandma had given me unless they ask me about it. I hope to some day pass it along to one of my kids but not sure how I will do that.

Now sometimes I even get embarrassed about this diamond ring. You see, I'm not really a "two diamond gal." I have my wedding ring on one hand and my "inheritance ring" on my other hand. In fact there was a time earlier in our marriage when I was pregnant with our second child and Tom was laid off from work. We had some savings but were hoping to use that to finish out the basement of our two bedroom home. (Needless to say, as bills piled up our basement never got finished – our two girls shared a room and that was just fine.) During that tough economical time in our marriage, dear friends from our small group planned a baby shower for us in which everyone gave us diapers. They knew we did not need pretty pink clothes but rather just the essentials. That was one of those times I was almost embarrassed of this ring... How could I have an extra diamond on my hand and yet be in such dire need of such basic items!?

Now I used to think that being a Christian was a lot like receiving my Grandma's diamond ring. My Grandma called me stating she had a gift for me. I responded, seeking out her gift. I now have this precious gift sitting on my finger for all to see. When people ask me about this diamond ring, I tell them my story. I even assure them that I had nothing to do with this diamond ring. It was just a gift... an undeserved, unmerited gift. That all may sound good but you must know I rarely tell anyone about this beautiful gift I've been given but would rather wait for someone to come to me and ask me about it.... Just so often like my faith. See the similarities?

However, I have since learned that in spite of all its analogies, being a Christian is not like receiving a diamond ring; rather it's more like receiving a Yubari King Melon vine.

Did you know that a Yubari King Melon is one of the most expensive fruits there is? They are normally grown in Yubari, Japan. A standard Yubari melon costs between \$50-100. That's just for one melon! Last year in Japan, two Yubari

melons sold for \$27,000!

<http://www.gourmet.com/food/gourmetlive/2012/041112/expensive/most-expensive-fruit-yubari-king-melons.html>) Can you even imagine if you were given a vine, which could easily produce 5-10 melons!?! Great story right... But I am sure you are wondering what all this melon talk has to do with our salvation in Jesus Christ...

A couple weeks ago Pastor Steer talked about the difference between salvation and sanctification. Salvation is receiving God's gift of grace – his forgiveness of our sins – as a gift. It's not anything I deserve. It's not anything I could have done on my own. It's like when my grandma called me and offered me that gift of the diamond ring. I would have never asked for such a gift on my own. However, once she pursued me and I became aware that I was being offered such a gift, I gladly received it. That is salvation. However, here at Autumn Ridge, at Women's Bible study we don't just want you to receive salvation, we desire that all of us become disciples of Jesus Christ and that requires all of us to go through a process of sanctification.

Sanctification is the process by which we grow and through the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God our thoughts and actions become more like those of Jesus Christ. It's how we become disciples, or students of Jesus Christ. Before Jesus left this earth in Matthew 28:19 he told his followers to..."Go and make disciples of all nations. He did not tell his followers to just make converts but to make disciples – to become a disciple of Jesus Christ is the process of sanctification.

In this entire letter to the Church of Corinth, Paul desires to see this church spiritually mature – grow up! This chapter is no exception and we will go through it seeing what points he makes defining what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ. (And yes, I will be referring back often to the Yubari Melon.)

So what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? First, **we are servants**. Right in the first verse of 1 Corinthians 4 Paul tells us *"This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed."* Both in this chapter and in chapter 3 Paul has been trying to get the Corinthians to view him and Apollos as just servants of God. It is God who deserves worship and glory... not Paul.

John MacArthur explains more about the Greek word Paul uses for servant in verse 1. *"The word that is used here is the lowest level of slavery. It is the word huperetes. And huperetes literally referred to the person who rode on the lowest level of the galley. They were called trireens. And they had three levels of oars, and the bottom group of guys who moved the oars that pushed that big hulk through the sea were called huperetes. Huperetes guys were the bottom people. The word became synonymous with subordinate, with low, with the most menial person doing the most simple manual task, very common (servant)...."* <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/1820/examining-the-servants-of-christ> This is not the first time that apostles refer to themselves as servants but here we see

the word picture yet again. Clearly, we are subordinate to Jesus Christ. The only reason we would ever be useful is because the Lord chooses to use us!

Just because so many get this wrong, let me first clarify. We are servants and we must work hard with what we've been entrusted but we are not saved BASED on our hard work. We have been given a gift that none of us deserve. But now that we have this undeserved gift of salvation – part of this process of sanctification is that we are called to be servants. We have been entrusted with a very special gift.... Just like the Yubari King Melon vine.

It is a precious gift that we have been entrusted with but it is our responsibility to see that it grows and flourishes. It is also important that we don't just sit and admire our melon vines like I did with my diamond ring... we must prune our vines and give it away to others. But we are willing to do that because that helps our vine grow and flourish and then it helps our dearest friends and family enjoy the benefits of the fruit that they will one day harvest. We are servants of the Most High God and he notices every time you work unto Him.

That leads me to my next point – **We are rewarded**. Let's start reading in verse 3.

*"I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 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."*

Even if no one else is noticing, the Lord is paying attention to how you are living your life. In verse 2 it says that we have been given a trust and we must prove ourselves faithful. So not only have you been given this "Yubari King Melon," you are going to be rewarded with how faithful you are with this precious gift!

Now, many will tell you that your melon vine looks ugly, that it's a waste of time, that it's not producing enough fruit... God is telling us here that it does not matter what others think. What matters is how God judges your efforts. Maybe there are tiny buds hidden in the darkness and some day God will bring those areas to light for all to see. Maybe others criticize you because you do not have a very public spiritual gift. Maybe you are a fervent prayer warrior or you are discipling a new believer. Maybe you're in a season of life where you are just pouring into your children's lives. That's such a great investment but can seem very unrewarding! (I know!) We must remember that God notices. He sees the motives of your heart and he will reward you greatly – more than if you were in a public role.

Again I want to give a little caveat about judgment here. It says in verses 3, *"I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes."*

So People often throw around that term... Don't judge! They'll say Christians shouldn't judge others. Yes, it's true that there are verses that warn us to look at the "telephone pole" in our own eyes before we consider the speck in someone else's. However there are times as we'll find out next week when we will need to confront the sins of others in order to protect those desiring to live in obedience to God's Word.

We are called to hate what is evil and cling to what is good, we must be discerning individuals who speak for truth and occasionally "judge" or expose that which is wrong. However when we do that we must make sure we do not do it in a hypocritical way. We must first make sure our hearts are pure before God. If we are eager to confront a sin we are probably not in the right frame of mind and have not closely examined our own heart. It is important that we consider our actions within the Body of Christ but if each of us considers – as Paul did – his actions before the Most Holy God then we will never have to wonder what would people think because we live for an audience of One.

**Thirdly, we (as disciples) are humble.** (Or at least we should be.) In verse 7 Paul asks, *"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? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You are becoming kings –"* 1 Cor. 4:7-8.

We have no reason for pride. All we have or do or are becoming is only because of the rich grace of God. I wish we could be able to talk about our strengths or gifts in our culture that would not sound arrogant. In a few weeks we will be talking about spiritual gifts and how they are gifts bestowed upon us when we become believers of Jesus Christ. If we viewed our spiritual gifts as if they were a melon vine given to us, we would be eager to use them but would help people understand that it was just a gift given to us by our creator God. We didn't receive it because we had any experience with melons, we just got this amazing gift and must be good stewards of it!

Now there are times that I'm reading an epistle of Paul's and I will read Paul's words of how we should imitate him. To be honest, it bugs me. It makes me wonder if Paul is really all that humble. However then I think about Paul's testimony. He was the equivalent of an Ivy League trained Jew. Any Jewish father in his day could only dream of his son having the education and training that Paul had. Paul was of the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day and trained under Gamaliel, known as one of the greatest teachers in all of Judaism. He was the son of the Pharisee and most likely the grandson of a Pharisee as well. Yet right on his way to most likely carrying out murderous threats he saw the glory of the Lord, which temporarily blinded and very likely caused him eyesight problems for the rest of his life. Then the Lord tells Saul soon to be Paul he will be an instrument for him. In 2 Cor. 12 we are told that Paul also received revelations and visions from the Lord. He considered his impressive Jewish background a loss – almost an

embarrassment – compared to knowing Christ. He spoke often about boasting in his weakness so that the Lord could be more glorified.

When Paul says imitate me or to copy the behavior he portrayed when he was with them, we should not read it as arrogance but rather as a parent teaching a child how to do a task. The picture on the screen is one of me teaching my older girls how to garden. I'm sure as I was doing that (9 months pregnant) I told them to do it exactly as I was doing it. Not because I was arrogant but because I didn't want my flowers planted bloom side down! In the next slide I am teaching my kids how to cook. I'm sure I told them to imitate me in the way I crack eggs, pour in the milk and stir the soup. It's not that I was prideful but I wanted them to learn from me since I have made cookie bars and soup hundreds of times so I know best what to do. That last slide is of Tom teaching Danny how to mow. We are hoping some day our kids will not be children anymore and they will be independent adults who can garden, cook and mow all on their own. The only way they will be able to do that is if we lead by example and imitate the way in which we've trained them.

That's a reminder to us that as disciples, **we are examples**. In verse 9 Paul says, "For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of a procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men."

He goes on beginning in the middle of verses 15 to tell the Corinthians, "...you do not have many fathers for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending you, Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church."

We are examples – or as Paul writes "on display" to those who do not know what Christ is about. There are times when we have all been on display... probably none of us like Paul where we have felt condemned to die...but there are times when suddenly you may feel "on display." When was the last time for you? Was it a job change that you put you in front of others more, maybe you're a mom of young kids and you always feel on display, etc. For me it was when we were dealing with my daughter's health and I would pass people at church or even at the hospital and they would know about us and our situation. It really does not matter what the reason is behind your time in the spotlight... what matters is how you use it. People are watching you. God has placed you in this position to bring Him glory so be sure to let your light shine so that others may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven. (And by the way – letting your light shine does not mean that you act like everything is fine... It just means you are always acknowledging Christ's work in you.)

It's frightening and convicting when you consider the verse, Matthew 10:32-33 *"Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also*

*deny before my Father in heaven.*" Unlike Paul I will have to say, 'Don't imitate me here because I can be such a coward.'

Let's commit to challenging each other to speak the truth at all times. Remember we are on display for those who do not know about their Savior. Again, not to always bring it back to our melon vine but if someone asked me about it I would want to tell them the truth about how where I got it and how they could get one too. I might even explain how mine is producing fruit... how I try to water it daily, make sure I'm pulling out the weeds. I would want them to know that so they can enjoy a great harvest as well.

**Lastly, we, as disciples, are perseverers!** Paul states beginning in verse 11, *"To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world."*

No wonder Paul was able to say "learn from me" or "Therefore, I urge you to imitate me" as he says in verse 16. Anyone there who saw he or Apollos or anyone not doing what they said they were doing would speak up immediately. We can tell that the Corinthians had no problem accusing Paul of things, if he truly wasn't working hard, blessing when cursed, responding kindly, etc., then surely they would have made mention of it.

We are not promised an easy life but if we can respond to the hardships of this world in a very real way but also with overlooking an offense, feeding our enemies and blessing those who persecute us, then we will be showing the world how with God's strength we can persevere even when it's hard. Paul reminds us in verse 20 that the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. Our new life in Christ shows itself in a humble life dedicated to Christ and his mission... not with empty talk.

Now back to my Grandma Bettie and that gift she gave me. The most important thing that you must know about my Grandma is not that she gave me a diamond ring. You see, my Grandma, from what I understand spent much of her life living a fairly worldly life. She rarely attended church and would even criticize my parents when they were dabbling in Christianity in the early years of their marriage.

So you can imagine our family's shock when I remember her making a decision to follow Christ when she was with us one day at church. (I'm not even sure why she was there but she decided to come with us.) Back then in our church the pastor made the rare decision to have an altar call. He asked if anyone would want to make a public statement for Christ and I remember seeing my "fancy" Grandma get out of the pew and walk towards the front.

That was when my grandma received the gift of salvation but I do remember seeing a changed life after that in which my grandma's priorities changed. It was

that process of sanctification working out in her life. She not only attended church but also found areas where she and my grandpa could serve. Instead of playing bridge 4 times a week, my grandma attended Bible study several times each week. I remember her telling me stories of how she challenged some of her friends to think more about the Lord and obedience to Him.

In the few years my Grandma had between becoming a follower of Jesus Christ and becoming a victim of advanced stages of Alzheimer's, she showed me that the most important gift she gave me was not the ring but rather a living, growing relationship with Jesus Christ that dramatically changed every aspect of her world! That is exactly what Paul is persuading the people of Corinth to do and what God is asking of all of us. He gives us everything we need but we just first must accept this incredible gift of salvation and then see it as an amazing gift that we have been entrusted with so that we, too, can become disciples of Jesus Christ spiritually mature in our faith journey... Because there is nothing worse than seeing an adult drink milk from a bottle!

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