

1 Corinthians Chapter 4

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[0 : 00] Bless the Lord, O my soul, all my inmost being, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. When the psalmist thought about what God had done for him and who he was, he couldn't help but burst out in praise, blessing the Lord.

And our first song, a modern hymn, 625, but again, begins with that similar refrain, O my soul, arise and bless your maker, for he is your master and your friend.

Let us come and bring our praise. Let us come and bless the Lord, our maker, as we stand and sing 625. Well, let us pray.

Oh, we do want to bless your name, O Lord. We want to praise that name which is the name above every name, the name which is precious to us, the name that is dear to us, the name that is so lovely, that we would not exchange Jesus for all the riches in all the world, all the pleasures, all the delights, all the excitement, all the adventures, all the buildings, all the property.

[1 : 48] Lord, there's nothing that we would rather have or give up him for, for even if we were to gain the whole world, but lose our soul, how poor we would be.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are everything to us. We pray that this evening, as we come to bring you our worship and praise, as we come to meet with you and with your people, O Lord, we ask, may we be a blessing to you, and may your Lord bless us.

For we ask these things, our God and Father, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Well, we're back in 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians and chapter 4.

This time we've been looking together in the last few weeks at this letter, this large letter of the Apostle Paul, but we've been making brisk time through it, looking mostly at a chapter a week, trying not to get too bogged down, but hopefully covering the themes of the letter and its implications and applications to ourselves.

So we're going to read from 1 Corinthians and chapter 4 and read through from verse 1 all the way through to the end of the chapter, verse 21. Here is God's faithful word.

[3 : 15] This then is how you ought to regard us, as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

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 each time, sorry, at that time, each will receive their praise from God. 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 and against the other. For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive?

[4 : 30] 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 have begun to reign. And that without us. How I wish that you really had begun to reign, so that we also might reign with you. It seems to me that God has put the apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena.

We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ.

We are weak, but you are strong. You are honored. We are dishonored. 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.

[5 : 37] We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world, right up to this moment. I'm writing this not to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.

Even if you had 10,000 guardians in Christ, 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 have sent to 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.

Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing. Then I will find out, not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have.

The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline? Or shall I come to you in love, and with a gentle spirit?

[6 : 50] And we trust the Lord will help us as we seek to understand his word. Please, when you have your Bibles open to chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians.

And as you do, I'm going to read just the final three verses at the end of chapter 3, which we were closed with last week. Verse 21.

So then, no more boasting about human leaders. 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 of Christ. Christ is of God. If there's one subject that is especially relevant to the population of the UK at this precise moment in time, it is the subject of leaders.

From the resignation of the manager of the English football team after only 67 days in office, to the appointment of a new prime minister, the unprecedented fighting within the Labour Party over who should lead that, to even just this week, the new search for someone to take the reins of UKIP only 18 days after the last leader was selected.

[8 : 13] Leadership is a common, present, relevant problem. So it shouldn't surprise us, because we know that the Word of God is relevant, that when we turn to the book of 1 Corinthians, there it is.

Again, the thorny issue concerning who to follow, who to lead. As we read there in verse 6, then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.

In the church itself, the battle and infighting, the seeking after who to follow and who to lead was ever present.

But why? Why is this matter of leadership such a problem in the world and here in the church in Corinth as well? Because all of us are a part of one kingdom or another.

Christian is someone who once belonged to the kingdom of the world. Or Paul calls it elsewhere in Colossians 1, the dominion of darkness. But when Christ takes over the lordship of our lives, the leadership of our lives, then we are brought into a new, a better kingdom, the kingdom of God, of which Paul speaks at the very end here.

[9 : 35] The kingdom of God, verse 20, is not a matter of talk but of power. So Colossians 1, 13, he, that's God, has rescued us from the dominion or the kingdom of darkness, brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves.

All people, in every part of the world, whatever their political persuasion, whatever their age, race, color, or creed, every single person is in one or other of those kingdoms, those spiritual kingdoms.

But every single person alive is living in the kingdom of this age. Again, Paul in Galatians 1, verse 4, speaks about this present evil age.

Today, just as then. And the Corinthian church certainly lived in a present evil age in the time of the Roman Empire.

And they were surrounded by the most ungodly, corrupt, reprobate community in the whole of that empire. Corinth was renowned for immorality.

[10 : 46] In fact, the name Corinth was a byword for gross wickedness. If someone was said to have acted like Corinthians, it was a term of disgust at a vile action that they had been involved with.

Now, some of the church here in Corinth had really been very much a part of that present evil age. When we turn to chapter 6, we're told about those who are sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who have sex with men, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers.

What does he say? That is what some of you were. A rum lot indeed. Now, God had saved them.

They had been brought out of the kingdom of darkness, the domain of darkness, the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of God. But sadly, the church at Corinth had either slipped back in their actions and thinking to the attitudes of their present society, or they had never left those thoughts and ways of living behind completely.

For Paul has to write them in this letter and is moved to write this letter because of the sinful practices that show that they are still thinking, acting, and living as if they are in the old kingdom, the kingdom of the world.

[12 : 15] He says this, verse 3 of chapter 3, you are still worldly, for since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly?

Are you not acting like mere humans, like ordinary, unchanged, unconverted, unchurched people? And throughout this letter as we've been looking together, we've seen that Paul is building an argument against that way of thinking, that way of living, that attitude which is so contrary to God's will.

The world's attitudes, the world's thinking is in complete opposition, he says, to God's thinking. Even when it comes to the very simple message of the cross, chapter 1, verse 18, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

That's what the world thinks of it. And in chapter 2, in verse 12, he says this, what we have received is not the spirit of this world, the thoughts of this world, the attitudes of this world, but the spirit who is from God so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

And so the church in Corinth, sadly, by treating its leaders in the same way that the world looks upon its leaders, had descended into argument, division, infighting, and all sorts of wicked attitudes.

[13 : 46] Each person boasted about their favorite leader, chapter 3, verse 21. So no more boasting about human leaders, because we can tell what was going on there.

They believed that by being a follower of a certain leader made them better, wiser, more godly, more spiritual than everybody else who followed another leader.

But as we saw last week, the truth, Paul says, is that they deceiving themselves. Verse 18 of chapter 3, do not deceive yourselves if you think you are wise by the standards of this age.

That's where we left off last week, seeing the foolishness of this attitude. The foolishness of thinking, acting, behaving, conforming to the thinking, attitude, and lifestyle of the world around about us.

I said this is contemporary, and it certainly is, because the church of Jesus Christ in 2016 is still in grave danger of slipping into the thinking and attitudes of the society in which it is ministering.

[15 : 01] More than that, the church in the UK has in varying degrees done just that. Parts of the church have actually embraced the thinking of the world and its standards and its practices, so that in some places there is really no discernible difference between the church and the world, the world and the church.

Actions, their thoughts, their practices are one and the same. The church, instead of changing and transforming the world, has itself conformed to the world.

The truth, whether we like it or not, is true for us here in this local church and the local churches we represent. We have also, in various ways, thought and acted as if we were not Christ's people.

We have thought and acted and been shaped by the attitudes of the people of Whitby, people of Yorkshire, people of the UK and of the world.

That's hard for us to accept, but we have to start there by recognising that we are all under that pressure, that temptation to be like our neighbours, our friends, our work colleagues and so on.

[16 : 26] In fact, if we don't think that way, if we think that we are wise, if we think that we have managed to get away with it and that we are in every way exactly what Christ would have us to be, then surely we are the ones that Paul has to say are being deceived by ourselves and perhaps even more strongly as he has to say to some in chapter 4 verse 18, some of you become arrogant.

That isn't easy as I say, but whenever we come to God's word, we are facing a mirror. Whenever we come to God's word, it is showing us what we are like.

These letters to churches in the early first century are letters to churches made up of people like me and you. people like you.

So how do we remedy this? How does Paul start to repair that mindset within the church at Corinth that believes that it's okay, that it's right to act and live and to follow the pattern of the world?

How does he, under the Holy Spirit's inspiration and help, begin to put things in their right place and in their right way of thinking?

[17 : 50] Well, Romans in chapter 12, verse 2, is a very well-known passage to us and it tells us this, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, and perfect will. There is a difference.

Do you see those two things being held up in opposition to one another? The pattern of the world and the will of God. One is what we have around about us pressing in upon us.

One we have to seek after and know the transforming power of that we might be able to approve and test what is good. So our thinking must be renewed.

Something has to happen to the way that we think. our thought processes, our view, our understanding. It must not be any longer shaped by the things we see on TV or read or the conversations we have with those who are unconverted.

[18 : 57] It has to be biblical truth as it is revealed to us by God himself. And so looking at this passage I think there are three things that we have to review.

Now Paul uses the word judge quite a lot here and I'm going to use it in a slightly different way the way he uses it but there are three things that we have to judge. That is test or as Paul puts it here test and approve.

And the first is this we are to judge ourselves verses one to five. This is where Paul has much to say about this matter. Paul we're told or tells the Corinthians that he is not concerned about what they think of him.

He says verse three I care very little if I am judged by you or by human court. In fact he tells us he doesn't even give too much attention to what he thinks of himself.

Now isn't that different to us? Isn't that different to the general way of thinking, the accepted wisdom of our day? What matters is what people think of me.

[20 : 04] What matters is what I think of me. My self appreciation, my self image. What matters is how I look and how I appear and whether people think well of me.

Paul says that is not the case with him. He repeats his judgment of himself and in fact not just of himself but Apollos and the other apostles.

He says verse one this then is how you ought to regard us as servants of Christ. Not masters, not leaders, not people of great importance in the world but servants.

Servants entrusted with a message from the only leader, the only master, the only man of importance, God himself. It's God's judgment of us that alone matters.

It's God's judgment of us that actually counts for anything. For he says there, my conscience is clear but that doesn't make me innocent. Even though as far as I know I'm walking with the Lord as I should, that doesn't mean I'm doing everything right or that I shouldn't be judged but he says it is the Lord who judges me.

[21 : 20] Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time. Wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and expose the motives of the heart. When our Lord Jesus Christ comes again then there will be judgment passed upon every single human being.

Judgment passed upon all the things that we have done, the decisions that we've made. And he says at that time each will receive their praise from God, their reward from God, whether that be honour or dishonour.

The only thing that matters, says Paul, is God's judgment. But we are to judge ourselves, in that sense, test ourselves, to look at ourselves in a right way.

In fact, as we go on later on, Paul speaks of himself and Apollos, these so-called leaders in the church, in the most surprising way, doesn't he? Look at what he says there later on from verses 10.

What people think is special, people think are important, he says we are fools for Christ. Later on, he says in verse 13, rather, we have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world.

[22 : 37] What a thing to say about yourselves and others. But of course, what he's saying is that is how the world judges us, that is how the world looks at us, as fools, as unimportant, as scum.

And he says there, doesn't he, this lovely, not lovely in one sense, but this interesting illusion where he speaks about God has put us, apostles, verse 9, on display at the end of the procession like those condemned to die in the arena.

What's he talking about? When a Roman general had been at battle and conquered a people, he would bring treasures and prizes from that land, he would bring important prisoners, and at the back of the procession would be some of the soldiers that fought who would then be taken off to fight in the arena with the gladiators.

They were the disposable ones. Paul says as apostles that's how the world views us. It seems in one sense that's how God has set us before the world, as those that are just disposable and important.

But what does he mean? What does he mean about his own view of himself in that sense? What does he mean when he speaks of himself as a fool for Christ? Surely he means this.

[23 : 53] He's someone who acknowledges his own limitations. He's someone who recognizes that he needs wisdom. He's someone who's willing to be thought of as garbage or whatever the world wants to call him.

He's willing to be called names for loving Christ, for living by Christ's standards, by following Christ's wisdom. As a fool for Christ, of course, he's not somebody who goes with the trend.

He's not somebody who follows the crowd, who swims with the fishes, as it were. He's someone who stands up for biblical truth, not just new truth that is brought out day after day.

He's someone whose stand involves him being counted as a minority. If all the world is against him, then he will still remain faithful to the Lord.

That's very different, isn't it, to how the Corinthians judged themselves, didn't they? Paul uses it sarcastically, but he's really using their own words.

[25 : 01] They were those who boasted about the leaders that they followed. In fact, of course, they were boasting about themselves, weren't they? They were wise in their own eyes. They were rich in their own understanding.

They were kings who reigned over their own small kingdoms. they thought that they were very clever. They thought that they were very spiritual.

They thought that they were very godly. Paul reminds them that humility is the beginning of knowledge. If we want to know ourselves, we've got to begin with understanding really what we are like, judging ourselves as we truly are.

We are sinners. sinners. We are fools. We are unwise. We are ungodly. We need to get rid of that self-contentment which trusts in our own understanding, trusts in our own learning, or even in the learning of others.

We need to be those who get rid of the attitude that somehow we've arrived. even if it's only we've arrived on the first step of the ladder.

[26 : 16] Never mind whether we've arrived at the top. This was the Corinthians thinking. In fact, their thinking of being wise and of knowing it all and of having all the answers to their problems was the real cause of the problems we see later, isn't it?

When we get to chapter six, them taking one another to court. Why? Because one thought they were right and the other thought they were right. Of this immorality which they accepted. within their church.

Because it was okay in their sight and in their judgment. We see their insensitivity to one another's consciences. We see the way that they behaved badly at the Lord's Supper and so on.

What's the problem? The problem is their pride. And the only antidote to pride is humility. humility. So what else does Paul have to say here?

Judge yourselves aright. See yourselves as you should see yourselves, not as you would think you would like yourselves to be revealed. Well, he says, secondly, we are to judge our gifts, to test the gifts and think and consider and have a right view of the gifts.

[27 : 27] Verse eight, sorry, verse six rather. Brothers and sisters, I've 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.

In other words, do not go beyond the boundaries of scripture. Do not go beyond what God has revealed. Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.

And here's the important phrase, 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?

They thought that the gifts that they had, the understanding they had, and as we see later on, the spiritual gifts that they had, were things which were theirs by right, were theirs because they deserved them, were theirs because they had earned them or worked for them.

Instead of acknowledging what Paul says rightly here, everything that you have, everything that you are, God has given you. You've got nothing to boast of in yourself. You've got no reason to pat one another on the back and say, what a good boy am I.

[28 : 37] In fact, 2 Peter in chapter 1 tells us, God's divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. That's a wonderful encouragement for us as we seek to live for Christ, but also it's a wonderful humbling truth.

Everything has come from God. It's all of his grace, all of his goodness, all of his faithfulness, not ours. As he reminded them there in chapter 3 verse 21, all things are yours.

How are they ours? They are yours because you are of Christ. Remember that wonderful entrance to Ephesians in chapter 1? every good and every spiritual blessing.

Sorry, God has blessed us with every blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. So Paul and Apollos are just servants.

They're not the source of the blessing. They're the carriers of the message which brings the blessing. They're the signposts that point to Jesus, the blessing giver.

[29 : 45] Isn't that again something which is so very different to the world in which we live? Isn't the world's view of people who are success, they are self-made men, self-made women.

They have done so well to pull themselves up from their bootstraps, pull themselves up from the gutter or the working class circumstances of their birth. They've bettered themselves with education.

Isn't that sometimes how Christians may look, think of themselves? Perhaps even we may think of that as some of the places and positions in the church. Well, of course, you've got to rise up the ladder, haven't you?

You start as just a lowly nobody in the church, then you become a member. Well, that's sort of a big badge, shouldn't we? I'm a member of the church. And then you become a deacon. Well, that's really good.

But then you want to become an elder. Well, that's another step up the ladder. And, well, pastor, he's at the top, isn't he? No, that's what Paul says. You've got it all the wrong way around. It's all a downward staircase, not an upwards staircase.

[30 : 56] But that's how we may think, isn't it? That's how we think perhaps of ourselves, perhaps not just in the case of where we are as Christians, but in our own homes, in our own lifestyles.

Do we give God all the glory? Do we give him all the praise? Do we recognize that every good gift that has been poured out upon us is because of his grace?

Yes, they thought that they were rich. Already you've become rich, verse 8. You've begun to reign, and that without us. Oh, you're so impressive, the church at Corinth.

So impressive. Everybody thinks you're the bee's knees. But actually everything that you've got, everything that you've achieved, everything that you are, is by God's grace.

Do we feel that way? Do we think that way? You see, that makes a wonderful leveller in the life of the church, because once we recognize that everything we have is God's grace, then there is no place for us to look down upon ourselves when comparing ourselves with somebody else, is there?

[32 : 06] And there's no place, of course, for us to look down on somebody else, because we think that they are beneath us. Grace says that every gift, every ability, every skill, everything that we are and have is all of God.

It's been received. It's been given, not earned. And God may have in his wisdom, in our thinking, elevated one above another, but he hasn't done that, as Paul says, he are the apostles, he says.

The apostles were number one supremo in the church. Paul says, no, that's not it. God, it seems, has placed us on display at the end of the procession.

We're the ones bringing up the rear. We're the servants. We're the ones who go hungry, verse 11, thirsty. We're the ones in rags.

We're the ones who are brutally treated. We are homeless. Why on earth would you want to envy being a leader in the church of Jesus Christ, or anywhere else for that matter?

[33 : 14] For what we realize is this, if God, where God places us and puts us, he does so according to his sovereign grace and will. We're not to look up to one another, we're not to look down upon one another, but we're to give God all the glory.

And then thirdly here, we see that we are to not only judge ourselves aright and judge our gifts aright, but we are to judge our results aright.

This is verses 14, really, to the end of the chapter. Now we've seen, haven't we, that the Corinthians were very quick to judge or pass judgment upon themselves as being something pretty special, and it seems that they pass judgment upon Paul as being something pretty unimportant, or unimpressive.

And of course we've seen that their judgments of themselves and of others have been inaccurate because their judgments have been based upon the world's standards, upon the way that the world looks at and views people and itself.

But Paul in one sense then gets to the end of the chapter here, and he begins to talk about the fact that the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In other words, these arrogant boasts, these great claims to be rich and wise and all these things, well where's the evidence of them?

[34 : 38] Where's the proof of such boasting? Where's the solid ground? What can you point to to show me that you really are those who reign and those who are rich and those who are wise?

Where's the tangible results of your pride, of your boastful talking? thing? But it seems that that is the concern, isn't it there?

For he says, I will come to you, verse 19, very soon, if the Lord is willing, then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have.

In other words, the results. Let's compare Paul's life to these believers. Let's compare Paul's life.

We find that his life was one which was marked by ridicule, by being counted as a fool by the world around about him. But what about the outcome?

[35 : 37] What about the results of his life? No matter what people said, or even what he said, what about him? Well, as he reminds them even here in verse 15, that by God's grace, he was a father to them through the gospel.

It was God who used this fool, this scum of the earth, this garbage of the world, to found the church in Corinth. It's in Acts 18.

We read about it some weeks ago. God used and worked through him to plant a church and through the gospel to save many souls.

And then, let's see as well, there's Timothy. Timothy has something to say about the life of Paul. not only is Timothy another son of Paul, in other words, someone through whom the gospel came and is now a faithful servant of God, so there's fruit and evidence.

He's passed on the gospel to someone else, but he says when he comes, he'll show that my way of life agrees with what I teach everywhere in the church. In other words, I'm not simply one who says, talks the talk, I'm somebody who walks the walk.

[36 : 48] my life and my words come together. They aren't separated by a huge gap of lots of boasting and little fruit, but really one and the same together.

And Paul was now going to pay them a visit. He was going to pay them a visit so that he could see their lives, the fruit, the results of what they had to talk about and to speak about.

You see, as Paul recognizes here in verse 20, the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power. The kingdom of God, of which the church of Jesus Christ is a part and a visible representation, of which you and I are members, the kingdom of God is not just a lot of hot air, promising to do great things in the future, but actually a kingdom of power that has real, on the ground effects and transformation.

Yes, the kingdoms, or rather the leaders of the kingdoms of this world, go about boasting about the great things they will do when they have power, how they will save the NHS, how they will sort out the deficit, how they will give everyone a job.

The kingdom of God is not like the world. Every believer is part of being feet on the ground. Every believer is living Christ-like lives today.

[38 : 28] The proof that we truly are wise with God's wisdom, the proof that we truly have been made rich by the gifts he's given us, is seen by the way that we live and act and the impact that we have upon our society.

And that only happens as we are moulded and shaped and empowered by the unpopular truth of God's word revealed to us in the scriptures.

We're to judge the results. That doesn't mean that we're to say, well, I must be a good Christian if this, that, and the other happens, or I am a terrible Christian if nobody has become a Christian through my testimony or witness, but it does mean this, does my life accord with my words?

Is there real change, real fruit, real difference, or is it really only with my mouth, only with my talking, that I speak of Jesus as my Saviour?

God. Just listen again, or I'll read these words of Paul in Romans 12 as we close. I'm going to read through our largest passage, eight verses. Just listen to what he says, and let us take on board his truth.

[39 : 55] Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

This is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing, perfect will. For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has given to each of you.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith.

[41 : 07] If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach. If it is encouraging, then encouragement. If it is giving, then give generously. If it is to lead, do it diligently.

If it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Well, let's pray together. Let's pray. Lord our God, you have placed us in this day and generation.

You've placed us in this community, in this country, ministry at this time. And you, Lord, know how we struggle with the pressures that are upon us to conform and to think and act and speak like the world.

You know how we have given in to those pressures. you know how we've, rather than stand out for you, gone along with the crowd.

How rather than be called fools or scam or garbage, we have acquiesced and we have agreed with the world's thinking and conversation.

[42 : 32] We ask you to forgive us, Lord. We ask you to forgive us, Lord, in this church where we have gone about things in our own way, with our own wisdom, rather than yours.

Where in our lives, oh Lord, we have put what people think of us first, rather than what you judge. We ask, oh Lord, that as your word has been preached this evening and as your word continues to have an effect in our lives, that by your Holy Spirit you would indeed conform us and transform us to your own mind and will.

That you would help us to judge and to test with discernment, not with arrogance, but with humility. Our selves and our gifts and our fruit so that, oh Lord, in all things we might give you the glory that you deserve.

We ask these things now that you would continue that work that you are doing in us by transforming us into the likeness of your Son.

For we ask it in his name. Amen. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

[44 : 07] May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, the one who calls you, is faithful and he will do it.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.