

Series: "Corona...Corona"

Sermon: "Expectations"

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

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- As Fellowship Bible Church we are not very "traditional," but we have our "traditions."
- We *expected* to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord on Easter Sunday a few weeks ago. It is a tradition of ours to celebrate that day. We *expected*, the Sunday before that, Palm Sunday, to celebrate the "triumphal entry" of Jesus into Jerusalem. Traditionally, we celebrate that with our kids waving and poking each other with palm branches that I'm not sure are actually palm branches at all.
- One of our FBC traditions, like many churches, is to celebrate mothers on "Mother's Day." We *expected* to do that today on Sunday May 10th perhaps with passing out some flowers and candy tied to a little note of appreciation—certainly with a prayer of thanksgiving and dedication for mothers.
- We can't fulfill all of our *traditional expectations* for this FBC tradition because we are still not meeting together. There is a sadness in me for missing each of these *expected* traditions as the weeks of "social distancing" continue. I sadly miss other FBC traditions as well such as sharing the Lord's Supper together each week remembering who Jesus is and all he has done for us to give us LIFE.
- Happily, one *expected* Mother's tradition can continue even as we are separated. We can pray together, with thanksgiving, for mothers as an integral part of God's plan for us humans to fill the earth with his glory by imaging him and also as an integral part of God's plan of redemption after humans chose autonomy and death over faith in God and LIFE.
- Our studies in *Genesis*, so far, have permeated, enlightened, expanded and refined even my "*theology of mothers!*"

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- A Prayer of Thanksgiving for Mothers (through the eyes of faith)

Dear Lord,

We come to you today thankful first, and above all else, for who you are.

We are also filled with gratitude for what you have created even as we are struggling with an acute reminder of the chaos that is within that creation today.

We are humbly thankful for what you have done, the wisdom and the sacrifice you have shown, in offering our Lord Jesus Christ as the gracious means of returning to the connection of LIFE from you rather than death from going our own way trying to prove a lie about who we might be on our own.

This day especially, we are thankful for the wisdom you have created in giving every one of us mothers.

Father, some may not even know who their birth mother is, but in spite of that brokenness, you, and only because of your power to give life, have still have brought forth that life as part of your eternal plan for this creation and now for its redemption.

Some, may have experienced a brokenness of relationship with their mothers. Some may be experiencing that even now. Perhaps this is the result of unwise and even unloving "mothering." Still, Father, I give thanks because even in the midst of what feels so much like failure to our *expectations*, it is not failure to your plan. WE can praise you for that even in "broken" mothers.

I praise you for the great sustaining strength to love that you have provided our mothers and you are still providing mothers in our body. Thank you for the glimpse that testimony gives us of what you are like—your image. Thank you for those mothers that do trust you

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and draw from you their "mothering" even if they feel they do that imperfectly.

Please, today especially, bestow upon mothers, "eyes of faith" so even if they sense "failure" in the moment, they will know you are bigger and your work is greater than what they can see with the mere "eyes of flesh."

Please lift the hearts of any mothers who are sad today. Please encourage mothers who are tenaciously mothering by faith in you. Above all these requests, thank you for your creative purpose for **all** of us, including mothers, even if we can't always detect it in the details!

In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen!

- I've been talking with you about some deep truths related to the uncorrupted, undistorted meaning of "faith in God." Today, I want to shift gears to a topic that may seem to be less "deep" theologically but that ultimately relies, as all aspects of our lives do, on "faith in God."
- As I have been living this strange life we are all living, I find it has made me, or maybe allowed me, some opportunities to think about my motivations and actions in relationships of all depths. I'm not saying this opportunity to think has necessarily made me act "better" but it has at least made me think about it.
- Take for example my relationship with Mary. We naturally are spending more time in closer proximity than usual since neither of us is jetting-off to the store or FBC or somewhere with the grandkids as we would have been doing.
- With more time in closer proximity we naturally have more interactions throughout the day. Before, when I was working in my office, I rarely had my train of thought interrupted because I was

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alone in the house in my office. These days, this is not the case and I am sometimes not happy about having the privacy I have come to *expect* interrupted.

- Sometimes, I feel a sense of frustration because my *expectation* is that Mary can read my mind and thus, "this conversation is unnecessary right now!" I really do get a strange feeling, much more often these days that she ought to be able to read my mind!
- As I have considered why I feel this way and react as I do I have realized that Mary reading my mind has become an *expectation* that is often disappointed.
- Move from my relationship with my wife to relationship over the phone with perfect strangers. I've admitted to you before that I do not always "image God" when dealing with customer service folks while being hidden behind a phone or a computer screen. But something has changed with that during this time as well.
- A few days ago I had to deal with Comcast about our expensive internet service being down when we are working from home and my daughter is teaching an entire class of fourth graders one-by-one each day over our internet connection. (District 11 owes me some money!)
- I found myself getting frustrated and quite angry as chat's revealed themselves to be "bots" not humans; 5-step phone-trees always led me back to the "main menu" where I had started; people on the otherside of the world that had taken me an hour to finally connect with told me, "no sir, you are wrong! I show your internet is working perfectly!" when even plugging different devices directly into the cable modem shoed it was clearly not up.
- Why the anger I asked myself? Could it be because my *expectations* of the service I should be getting were not fulfilled?

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- Friday, the whole story of why is too long to take time to explain, but I found myself speaking with a homeowners association management company, the state's attorney's office in Florida, and an official elder abuse line for Pasco County in Florida after finding out about some threats that had been made to my 90 year-old parents if they didn't paint the water stains around the bottom of their newly painted house put there by the iron in the water from the required sprinkling of the grass.
- As I explained I could send my mom out to do it and she could conveniently hang the paint bucket on her walker that she uses after not healing well from a broken hip, I began to get angry again—even faster than in normal times.
- I had *expectations* of what should happen and they were not going to be fulfilled and that made me angry.
- It also confirmed for me that what seemed, at first, to be a silly little topic to talk about with you might be important enough to raise.
- We all have *expectations*. I submit to you that in times when we feel like we are losing control (even if that control was actually an illusion) our *expectations* come even closer to the surface and can become an even greater source of growing anger when they go unmet.
- We probably all know what I mean by expectations but if you want a technical definition of what I am thinking about, here it is:
"*expectations* are a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future. *Expectations* can be a belief that someone will or should achieve or do something."
- Our expectations are what we believe an outcome will be—or maybe most importantly—**SHOULD** be.

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- I'm interested in a narrow slice of this idea today—the expectations we have of others in relationships and the expectations others have of us. My frustration with both my wife and a number of strangers is because they did not always meet the expectations I had for them in our relationship and that made me get angry.
- I should start by saying what might be obvious to you. We can always trust the expectations we have of God meeting expected outcomes in our relationship with him. In fact this the basis of what the Bible denotes as true "hope" for humans to have.
- We can always trust the expectations we have for God, that is, if the expectations we have come from God. He has revealed them. We have not made them up. Of course, we probably do that sometimes and we can get angry with God for failing our expectations when he never told us to expect what we were expecting from him.
- That is an obvious truth when I write it down or speak it aloud in a sermon but, I recognize, It is not always true when we are in the midst of life and especially life that seems out of control.
- This is why I keep insisting it is imperative for us to base our foundational understanding of who our God is on what he has revealed to us in his Word—the Bible. We far too easily will create a designer God, made to meet our *expectations*, if we allow who we think God *should* be in our feelings and in our sense of need to shape who we believe God is.
- That's an obvious truth but not always an easy truth to apply all the time. Today I am focusing more on expectations we humans have for one another.
- As I cogitated upon this for a couple of weeks, one passage came to mind over and over that I thought might address this helpfully—at least at a more principle level if not specifically. That can be a

dangerous way to do "application" of Scripture so I "*beseech*" you to compare this with other Scripture and validate or invalidate my application. You should always be doing that any way.

- In the letter we call "*1st Corinthians*" the Apostle Paul was writing to a church of people with whom he had had a direct teaching relationship.
- The Corinthian believers like many believers today were stuck in the ways of their culture. They could not see through or beyond the "water in which they swam" even when it came to what they might think of as spiritual or church things of life.
- So, they struggled, for example with making the sharing of the Lord's Supper in their meetings a ceremony of pointing out their own personal significance rather than demonstrating the unity of the body of Christ in Corinth.
- Paul begins the letter with a less obvious example of the same mixing of culture and cultural expectations. Paul was not the only well-known teacher to teach the Corinthians. They had also heard from Apollos and from Cephas who we know better as Peter.
- As was normal for their culture, many of the Corinthian believers had ranked these teachers as to their worthiness to be heard and followed in their teaching. To do this ranking of whose teaching was best and really mattered, they used the cultural expectations for a "good teacher."
- The Apostle Paul's way of teaching did not measure up to these expectations very well as he describes it in **1 Corinthians 2:1-5**. He says: **2:1 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness**

and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

- Because Paul did not meet their *expectations* as a teacher, many Corinthians were rejecting his authority to teach and, even worse, rejecting the authority of God's Word he was teaching to them.
- The Apostle explained that they were rejecting him and the Word he brought because their *expectations* for him were based not on truth from "eyes of faith" but cultural norms from "eyes of flesh."
- This is what he is getting at with them when he writes in **2: 14-16** :
^{2: 14} The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment: ¹⁶"For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.
- *"We don't see and judge these things—we don't form our expectations of how things and people should be based upon mere human eyes with their human cultural expectations. We see them based on the truth that God has given us that illuminates reality."*
- Much of chapter 3 is given over to asking what the Corinthians should *expect* of teachers like Paul and Apollos. They should expect only that they will be ***servants of the Lord*** not servants to the expectations of being a great Corinthian orators.
- Then comes the verses I want us especially to think about today in **4:1-5** where Paul tells them how he thinks about and deals with their expectations and his failure to meet them in their relationship.

4:1 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 3 I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

- The passage gets into eschatological or end time rewards. It is about a teacher and a church not a husband and a wife or relationships with customer service agents over the phone. It is about much more than I am addressing today but I still find it interesting and helpful to me when it comes to thinking about *expectations* that believers have for one another and for other humans.
- The words translated "*judge, judges and judgement*" here in verses 3 and 5 and back there in 2: 14 and 15 come from words that may be a little different than what we think when we first read them in English here.
- "Judge, Judgement," and words like that make me first think of "condemnation." The words here can certainly lead to condemnation but they actually emphasize the idea of interrogating or examining. It could be the *questioning* of a witness in the witness box in our courts. It is the *examining* we do to come to our judgements.
- So what Paul is saying to the Corinthians is that he doesn't trust their examination of him based on their criteria of the world—based on his failure to meet their worldly *expectations* of him as a teacher.

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- In fact, he says, "*I don't even trust my own ability to judge myself on the basis of my own expectations!*" I would add even if they seem to be pretty good expectations for me.
- This raises at least a couple if not more questions that I want to think about before I finish.
- First: It can be very difficult for us to get our heads around the idea here because of our cultural norms of seeking approval and finding significance in what others think of us and especially—especially what they think of us living up to or failing to meet their expectations. ***But, is what Paul is saying here is that it doesn't matter what others think of him?***
- If we are talking about what others think of him based on their expectations for him, I would say the answer is that Paul doesn't care at all what they think!
- The only one whose *expectations* Paul cares about are those *expectations* Christ has for him. Why? He has been using the "servant" imagery to describe himself, Apollos and Peter because the Corinthians would be able to understand that. A servant doesn't care about meeting the expectations of anyone else but their master. Even a servant's own expectations for himself do not matter. Their master's expectations mean everything to them!
- Does this mean we don't have to care that our wife has an expectation of kindness and love from us? In one sense, yes. But it doesn't mean we can be unloving and unkind to our wife because we don't have to live up to her expectations.
- Why? Because, as servants, our master has told us plainly he expects us to be kind and loving to our wife and we can safely long to live up to any expectation our master has for us.

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- A wife's expectation of kindness and love made be the same as the master's expectation of kindness and love but the problem is, as a human, a wife's expectations may be mixed with selfish measures by which she examines the love she expects.
- In a broader sense, this why some truly loving things we do for people in general because the master expects us to love, judged as failures by those we are trying to love. We don't meet up to their worldly or even sinful expectations by which they have "judged" or, as Paul put it, by which they have "examined" us and our actions.
- Do you see the difference? If we live only to please Christ by meeting his expectations for us we will not be destroyed or tempted to find acceptance in wrong ways when we fail to meet the expectations of others—or even fail to meet our own self-imposed expectations for ourselves.
- This raises another question for me. How do I keep from being depressed and feeling rejection nearly all the time because I so often fail to meet what I know are my Master's expectations clearly given to me in Scripture?
- To say the answer to human expectations is to meet God's expectations leaves me feeling a bit like I feel when I read "Be holy because I am holy! *"OK, I'll just do that, Lord! Ok, maybe tomorrow."*
- Ah!!! That's why it is so important again that we know God's Word instead of deciding this master/servant relationship works as we think or feel it works.
- First: Over and over again, God's Word tells us, even if we can't see it with "flesh eyes" he never does anything—never expects anything from us that does not come out of the perfect love of a perfect Father. He never expects things from us selfishly as we all do

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sometimes from others. His expectations give LIFE not a burden.

Remember some of those passages?

- Then Second: We know for sure that by faith alone in Christ alone we not only have a certain eternal destiny but we also live LIFE in a very different sphere already—right now—the sphere of GRACE!
- When we fail the Master's expectations he never uses that for selfish purposes like we sometimes do to make ourselves look or feel more significant by pointing out the failures of others. The Master uses those failures to offer his grace again and again if we will accept it by the eyes of faith rather than by the eyes of flesh which make it so difficult to come back from failing expectations including our own expectations for ourselves.
- And finally, what about our expectations for others? Me expecting Mary to read my mind and her failing? Me expecting good customer service and attention to fix my problems by customer service agents online or on the phone?
- It is often very difficult to know if the expectations by which we are "judging" others are the expectations of the Master for them in that moment or not. Do you think that is maybe why in the passage we read in 1 Corinthians Paul said he just didn't judge others based on his own expectations???
- I am not suggesting that we can never have expectations for others that align with biblical expectations. Maybe we are supposed to have these from time-to-time. There are certainly clear texts in Scripture that would lead us to have good expectations.
- But, I think Paul is saying our human expectations are so tricky we ought to defer to the expectations of the Master—let him do the expecting.

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- He knows the time the place the degree the heart—he knows things we cannot know about each other. He knows only the perfectly best expectations for each of us.
- So what should I do if in my humanness my expectations keep rising for others that often fail them and maybe even make me angry?
- To make a long story shorter than it would be, my young friend Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book "Life Together" has helped me see something that I would do well to remember more often than I do.
- Do you see? You'll need to use "eyes of faith." But do you see now, there is Jesus in our relationship. He is right there standing between you and me. Actually it is more like we are the bread and he is the peanut butter and jelly he is so close to each of us as we are close to one another. "**Jesus between us**" as I call it, in the language of "**cheap**" Bonhoeffer.
- In this imagery I have to reach around Jesus to touch you directly in our relationship. He is actually in the way a bit. That's because I am never to touch you directly in our relationship one human directly to another. Why? Because I can never do that without importing my expectations for you—my goal of *fixing* you as I think you ought to be fixed.
- Well, then can I never help another human being with ideas and expectations in me for them? Although he doesn't say this exactly, I think Dietrich would agree with me that we should only ever attempt to do so with the greatest of care to make sure we are indeed going through Jesus and not reaching around him.
- But how will I know? Dietrich has a great, very practical solution he calls "intercessory prayer." If we have not agonized in prayer for someone in our heart before we attempt to fix them with our

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expectations, it is almost certain we are reaching around Jesus not reaching through Jesus to the other person.

- In this case blurting out our expectations or how they have failed them will be a weapon of destruction not a source of LIFE as we tell ourselves we want them to be.
- Here is a secret. This even changes the way one sees unhelpful telephone customer service agents because they are now seen through the eyes of faith rather than the expectations of only the eyes of flesh.