

# "Image"

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-7

Grace, mercy and peace be your continuing possession from our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Bumper stickers have always sort of fascinated me. Some make a statement, others are just meant to brighten your day, like the one I saw that was written in Latin and translated read, "If you can read this you are **WAY over-educated.**" Not to be outdone, some good ol' boys down South had the same one on their pick-ups, only in English. That just has to bring a smile to your face. Or: "Athens, Georgia High School: the best 5 or 6 or so years of your life" or "Honk if you love peace and quiet" or "The Lord moves in mysterious ways, but you should use your turn signals."

Have you ever seen a bumper sticker on a state or federal vehicle? The answer is no – at least not one that in any way makes a statement or could be considered offensive or objectionable. Why? Government officials recognize that such things would be improper because they so obviously create an image. And that's the point here. Whether intentional or not, the message you put on your vehicle creates an image, which should teach us something. Lots of things do that – how you dress, your hair style, piercings, tattoos, jewelry – all say something about who you are, whether true and accurate or not. They create an impression, an image.

In 1989, a then virtually unknown 19-year-old tennis player named Andre Agassi appeared in a commercial where he stepped out of a white Lamborghini, in a white suit, pulled down his shades and said, "Image is everything." He was ridiculed mercilessly for a decade for those three silly words. I'm guessing he wouldn't be today. We live in a very image-conscious society.

Carry all of this forward into the realm of our walk as Christians. Like it or not, everyone has an image. Everyone presents themselves in a certain way to those around them. What is your image? The Bible identifies us as ambassadors for their Jesus Christ, but how does the world see us? The general rule for how the world should see us was summed up by Paul when he said in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33: "**So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please**

**everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."**

Our text for this morning draws us into the area of image. With this introduction give attention now to that text, found in the Fourth Chapter of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians:

*ESV* **1 Corinthians 4:1-7 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. <sup>3</sup> But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. <sup>4</sup> For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <sup>5</sup> Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. <sup>6</sup> ¶ I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. <sup>7</sup> For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?**

So far the verbally inspired words of our God. Here God himself speaks to us with words of infallible truth and wisdom. We therefore prepare to give these truths our undivided attention as we pray: "**Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.**" Amen.

I believe this to be a fair and rather frightening statement describing perhaps even a majority of Christians in our society today: *Christians today want God to regard them as men or women of God, but they would rather not have that fact be obvious to the world around them.* In other words, it seems to be more and more fashionable for those who call themselves Christians to want to blend with the world, rather than stand out as individuals who are different.

This stands in direct conflict with the opening words of our text: **This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.**

Many of you will recall a visitor that attended a church service here some time ago. His style was something of a cross between a Barbary pirate and a Muslim extremist. I noted with satisfaction that, despite his appearance, he was warmly welcomed by a number of members – right up until his words and actions revealed that he was a rather angry and disturbed individual. In visiting with him, I recall that one of his greatest complaints was that we were all judging him by his exterior appearance. We weren't, but evidently lost on the young man was the fact that by his appearance he created an image in the minds of *everyone* that met him. It's a pretty simple formula really. If you walk about in public in a baseball or softball uniform, most naturally assume you are a player. If you prance about in a tutu and ballet slippers, they will assume you are either a dancer or like to hang out in Walmart. You appear regularly in public in studded black leather, chains, and a dog collar, and folks are naturally going to assume you are into some kind of spooky stuff. Nevertheless, in the case of this particular visitor everyone was more than willing to give him the benefit of the doubt until his words and actions identified him as pretty much what his image portrayed.

Consider this morning what is the image *you* project to the world around you. In our text Paul identified exactly what he wanted the world to see when they looked at him. He wanted those around him to regard him as a **"servant of Christ and steward of the mysteries of God."** But that wasn't the end of it as far as Paul was concerned, was it? It wasn't and isn't just about something as superficial as image when it comes to true Christianity. So also Paul went on in our text to say: **"The Lord... will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God."** Image is supposed to be an open and accurate reflection of what is in the heart – what it is that the individual is really all about.

Again then the question – two of them really: *What is it you are all about, and is that what others see when they look at you?*

Part of the reason most of us tend to love the Midwest (despite the long winters) is the fact that people tend to portray exactly what they are – to a certain extent anyway. We read of other areas of the country where publicity and image experts are in high demand and we scratch our heads. The job of people in those professions is not so much to help individuals appear to be what they really are on the inside but to create a false façade that masks from the public eye all of the evil that lies within. So it is that movie stars, TV personalities, professional athletes and the like hire entire firms and pay them extravagant salaries to create a respectable and lovable persona. Unfortunately, that false exterior in turns gives the client what he or she regards as freedom to live as a horrible person - with

impunity. Again, we scratch our heads because – as we learn from our text – God is not fooled by image crafters, and God is the One that matters. In the end, the *only* one.

So then are those that project a rather unchristian image right when they claim that we should not judge them by outward appearances? Yes and no. We read again in our text: ***It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.*** That means that you and I have neither the call, nor the right, nor the tools needed to judge whether or not an individual has saving faith in his heart, based solely on attire, hair-style, or other outward means. Yet Jesus also said in Matthew 7:16-20: ***"You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Thus you will recognize them by their fruits."***

So then what's the big deal? Who cares about image if all that matters to God is what is in the heart and if we bear the fruits of faith in harmony with our Christian faith?

The simple answer is that God cares about how we present ourselves, therefore so should we. You recall how Jesus said Matthew 5:16: ***"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*** As ambassadors for Christ, everything about us reflects back upon our God and the Christian faith. Obviously then everything about us is important because Christianity – the one path to heaven – is important. The devil and the world already do a good job of disguising that path and of confusing mankind as to just how human beings can be saved. Christians certainly don't need or want to add to the confusion.

Yet all of this talk of image really hasn't yet gotten to the heart of the issue, has it? The heart of the issue, the core truth that really is the most important thing here, is the understanding of just *why* Christians want to be all about Jesus Christ in every way – why there is no better or more important or socially relevant image we could want to project or life's obsession in which we would want to immerse ourselves.

Paul laid this out in the verses immediately prior to our text: **"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 Christ's, and Christ is God's."** Stop and think about those words for a moment and the profound truth that they convey. Reread them and contemplate the magnitude of what Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is here telling us about the Christian faith that you and I share. The bottom line is that there simply is nothing better, grander, or more important in life. Nothing. As "causes" go, how could you ever find one more worthy of your dedication and passion than that which revolves around our Creator-Savior-God and the rescue of human souls from eternal destruction?

Hard times and good times on earth will always come and go. Eternity is forever. You and I will therefore always want to take the longer, broader view, and that always and only comes back to Jesus Christ and him crucified.

No life that is lived to glorify God and in his service could ever be considered a failure or somehow incomplete. Nor could we ever fall into the depressing trap of imagining that our best days are all behind us. Such things could never be true from the perspective of Judgment Day and the eternity that will follow. Again Paul's words prior to our text: **"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 Christ's, and Christ is God's."** Consider also Jesus' words: **"I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."** If all else in life is lost; if all else fails and is disappointing, we have lost absolutely nothing if we have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ, and there can be no more worthwhile time of grace than those who made his Great Commission their life's work and delight. There simply is no greater service that can be rendered to humanity than to share with all who will hear the message of forgiveness and life through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12: **"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."** What more noble life's work and passion than to share with other human beings the fact that God the Father has punished Jesus Christ in their place and that he now, for Jesus' sake, has declared their sin-debt to have been paid in full?

God the Holy Spirit grant us the vision, the wisdom, and the passion to make Jesus Christ and the Christian faith the core and focus of all that we do, all that we are, and all that we project – **"being conformed to his image."** There simply is and can never be any more noble, lasting, God-pleasing focus in any life. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 3:1-9** But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. <sup>2</sup> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, <sup>3</sup> for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? <sup>4</sup> For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? <sup>5</sup> ¶ What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. <sup>8</sup> He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. <sup>9</sup> For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 5:21-30** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. <sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. <sup>25</sup> Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. <sup>26</sup> Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny. <sup>27</sup> ¶ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany – February 16, 2020**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 344 (Red Hymnal)

"Come Let Us Join Our Cheerful Songs"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Epistle Lesson:** (1 Corinthians 3:1-9) There were obviously very serious problems in the Christian congregation in Corinth. Yet note how Paul does not pretend that the problems don't exist; he addresses them honestly, openly, and with Christian love and frankness. This should serve as a model for each of us today. God grant us all the grace not only to live in harmony, but to deal kindly with each other, according to our shared love for our Savior. No good ever results when sin is ignored, tolerated, or accepted.

## Psalm of the Day – Psalm 84 (Supplement page 38) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Gospel Lesson:** (Matthew 5:21-30) We continue our Gospel readings from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Note again how firm and unyielding God's Law really is. Mankind has no right to diminish God's law or to try to soften the pronouncement of punishment that is promised for all who disobey. Sin begins in the heart, and since our hearts are thoroughly corrupt, we could never hope to earn our own salvation. What a comfort then to know that Jesus won our battle for us by satisfying the demands of the Law in our place.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 324 (Stanzas 1-3, 5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"

## The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-7 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Image"

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post-Sermon Hymn – 324 (Stanzas 6-8) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 50 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance – Sunday (28) Average (40)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship hour
	<b>-11:20 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School (No Bible Class)
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and coffee hour

## CLC News – Berea of Sioux Falls has called Pastor Michael Gurath.

Teacher Andrew Roehl has returned the call to Faith Lutheran School of Markesan, WI. Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich have called Pastor Terrel Kesterson.

## Church Council Meeting – The Church Council of St Paul is scheduled to meet this morning during the fellowship hour.

## CLC Board Meetings – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend CLC Board of Trustees meetings next weekend in Minneapolis. As a result, there will be no Bible Class or Holy Communion next Sunday.

## Care Packages – The care packages that St Paul is sending to our out-of-town students are scheduled to be assembled this morning during the fellowship hour.

## Easter Flowers – There is a sign-up sheet on the mailbox table for those who wish to order Easter Flowers. For more information, see Sandy Roehl.

## CLC Events Calendar – An Events Calendar is compiled each year by Messiah of Eau Claire, which includes all CLC events for both youth and adults. Copies are available on the mailbox table. Please let Pastor Roehl know if you would like a pdf copy emailed to you.