

During World War II, Hitler commanded all religious groups to unite so that he could control them. Among the Brethren assemblies, half complied and half refused. Those who went along with the order had a much easier time. Those who did not, faced harsh persecution. In almost every family of those who resisted, someone died in a concentration camp.

When the war was over, feelings of bitterness ran deep between the groups and there was much tension. Finally they decided that the situation had to be healed. Leaders from each group met at a quiet retreat. For several days, each person spent time in prayer, examining his own heart in the light of Christ's commands. Then they came together.

Francis Schaeffer, who told of the incident, asked a friend who was there, "What did you do then?" "We were just one," he replied. As they confessed their hostility and bitterness to God and yielded to His control, the Holy Spirit created a spirit of unity among them. Love filled their hearts and dissolved their hatred. When love prevails among believers, especially in times of strong disagreement, it presents to the world an indisputable mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ.¹

The Corinthian church struggled with divisions, as we've been seeing. One key piece of the problem had to do with their attitude towards leadership, namely church leadership. Specifically, some were undermining Paul and his leadership.

This is not an isolated case. The attack on church leadership is one of Satan's most effective tactics to hinder churches. What he did in Corinth he has repeated countless times to this very day.

A Great Need Today: We need to work hard at developing a biblical view of church leadership. 1 Corinthians 4 can certainly help us...

Review from Last Time: 1 Corinthians 4:8-13

I. Paul confronts wrong thinking about leadership (8-13).

He begins by talking about how the Corinthians viewed themselves. He uses sarcasm to open their eyes...

A. He exposes the "truth" about the Corinthians (8).

1. *You have all you want.*
2. *You think you are rich.*
3. *You act like you are kings.*

B. He clarifies the truth about the apostles (9-13).

Paul gives a list of 16 or so things that were true of them...

1. *We're at the end of the line (9).*
2. *We're treated like condemned criminals.*
3. *We've been made a spectacle.*
4. *Unlike you, we are fools for Christ (10).*
5. *Unlike you, we are weak.*
6. *Unlike you, we are dishonored.*
7. *We go hungry and thirsty (11).*
8. *We are in rags.*
9. *We are brutally treated.*
10. *We are homeless.*

¹ [Our Daily Bread, October 4, 1992.](#)

11. *We work hard to support ourselves (12).*
12. *We bless when we are cursed.*
13. *We endure when we are persecuted.*
14. *We answer kindly when we are slandered (13).*
15. *We are the scum of the earth.*
16. *We are the refuse of the world.*

New material...

There's where we left off last time. Paul confronted wrong thinking about leadership head on. Next...

II. Paul calls for change (14-17).

Paul didn't write this to "shame" the Corinthians, but to "warn" them. He had earned the right to speak so bluntly to them because they were his "children."

Notice that part of discipleship is "warning" (from *noutheteo*). Just like a parent warns his or her children when they perceive impending danger, so we must "warn" those under our care. Our children don't just "turn out." They need our strategic involvement and input. So our spiritual children.

A. The Corinthians needed to change their view of him (14-15).

Apparently, some had developed the view, "We don't need Paul. We've got new teachers now, better ones." To which Paul responded...

1. You may have many spiritual caretakers.

"Guardians" -- *Paidagogas* = "a tutor i.e. a guardian and guide of boys. Among the Greeks and the Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood.²

2. You have only one spiritual father.

Paul says he literally "begot" them.

Q: How did he do it? "Through the gospel"

Q: Why does Paul remind them of this truth?

Think about it: Who is the person(s) that God used to birth you into His family, and help you grow as His child? What attitude should we have towards them? Worship? Certainly not. Should we always do what they say? No. But we ought to express thankfulness for them (and to them if possible). We should respect them for in God's providence they are our spiritual "fathers."

B. The Corinthians needed to change their view of the Christian life (16-17).

Q: What did Paul ask the Corinthians to do in v 16?

1. Choose to imitate Paul (16).

The Greek term is *mimatai*.

²*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995.

Discuss: From the lips of some people, this could sound like a very self-inflated request. Why is it not so coming from Paul?

What is he really inviting them to do? He's inviting them to join him in experiencing the 16 things he just listed. That's what *real* Christianity is all about. That's what should be *normal*.

Discuss: Our view of Christianity today in America is very skewed. What are some ways this is true?

2. *Be willing to receive instruction on how to do it (17).*

Q: What did Paul say he was going to do to help the church?

Q: What would Timothy do upon arrival?

Think about why Paul forewarned the church of Timothy's coming. They weren't going to change merely by "praying about it." They needed help. They needed a teachable spirit so that when Timothy came and taught them about true servanthood—about how to imitate Paul—they wouldn't resist the teaching but receive it.

Another key reason for Timothy's coming will be addressed in chapter 5. What was that?

Note: Paul says Timothy will "remind" you of his way of life which agrees with "what I teach everywhere in every church." Don't miss the implication here that a church is supposed to give primary attention to teaching and applying God's Word. It's not enough merely to be a "soul winning" church. Why not?

But Paul wasn't going to leave the resolution of this problem solely up to Timothy...

III. Paul insists he will take action to bring about change (18-21).

Key: God honoring churches are problem-solving churches. God honoring families are problem solving families. Problems are inevitable in a sinful world. But God calls on us to deal with our problems His way.

A. He identifies the problem (18).

Q: What was the problem?

1. *There were arrogant people in the church.*

Q: How did their arrogance show itself?

2. *They were undermining Paul's leadership.*

B. He revealed what he intended to do about it (19).

1. *He planned to come.*

Q: What was coming contingent upon? "If the Lord is willing"

Q: What did he say he was going to do if he came?

2. *He planned to expose the critics for what they were.*

I see balance here. Paul was a loving and gracious man. He was willing to pour out his life for people. He wept with them. He lost sleep ministering to them. He supported himself so as not to burden them. He felt for them when they hurt. He was tender like a mother.

But he wasn't soft. He wasn't a pushover. When he felt Christ was being dishonored or the gospel hindered, he could become as bold as a lion. And he wouldn't back down, even if it cost him his life.

We need that kind of balance.

Here's how the *NLT* renders Paul's words in 18-19: "I know that some of you have become arrogant, thinking I will never visit you again. ¹⁹But I will come—and soon—if the Lord will let me, and then I'll find out whether these arrogant people are just big talkers or whether they really have God's power. ²⁰For the Kingdom of God is not just fancy talk; it is living by God's power."³

Someone might ask, "What right did Paul have to come to Corinth and straighten out the church, as he intended? Isn't he simply meddling, "sticking his nose" into things that aren't his business?"

By the way, if we take seriously our responsibility to engage in the *nouthetic* ministry of "warning," we will receive the same kinds of objections. For instance, suppose you notice a brother in Christ who is harboring a bitter, unforgiving spirit towards another church member. And so you go to encourage him to make things right.

And the response? "Who do you think you are? Of all the nerve, to talk to me about the problems in my life! What right do you have?"

What right do you have? The same one Paul had...

C. He gave biblical support for his actions (20).

There was biblical warrant for what Paul was doing.

Q: What biblical theme does he raise in verse 20? The *kingdom of God*. For many, the kingdom of God is merely some abstract theological notion. But not for Paul. It had tremendous implications for life.

1. *God's kingdom isn't about talk.*

That's what the critics were all about. All *talk*.

2. *God's kingdom is about power.*

Q: What kind of power? The kind exhibited in the 16 traits. God takes no name people, and uses them to advance His kingdom.

Key: Why is it so vital to have biblical support when we're dealing with inter-personal problems?

D. He offered an invitation (21).

Q: What two options did Paul lay before the church?

1. *Do you want me to come with a whip?*

Q: What does this question indicate about Paul?

2. *Or, do you want me to come in gentleness?*

Q: What would have to be true for Paul to come to Corinth "in gentleness?"

Discuss: What are some practical implications of what we've learned in this study?