

# 1 Corinthians

## Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

### Section 1: Unity and the Gospel

#### The Necessity of Maturity for Unity

#### A Dedicated Father to be Copied

#### *1 Corinthians 4:14-21*

### Introduction

#### **ILLUS:**

**Proverbs 3:1–2 (NKJV)** — **1** My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; **2** For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.

**Proverbs 4:1–2 (NKJV)** — **1** Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; **2** For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law.

Arriving at this passage, we arrive at the end of the first section of 1 Corinthians regarding Unity and the Gospel which began when Paul wrote ...

**1 Corinthians 1:10 (NKJV)** — **10** Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly

joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

A Food to be Eaten, A Field to be Planted, A Foundation to be Built Upon, A Family to be Indwelt but what Paul found was A Dysfunctional Family to be Confronted with A Distorted Frame of Mind to be Corrected, and now he ends appealing to them as A Dedicated Father to be Copied.

As such, there is a decided shift in the tone from verse 13 to verse 14. Paul moves from sarcastic to compassionate.

In these verses, Paul speaks with the heart of a father.

“Paul wants the church to know his tough words flow from a tender heart.” (Akin & Merritt, 94)

## A Dedicated Father Protects (14-15)

Paul begins with “I do not write these things to shame you.” I am sure the reader might be thinking, “well you could have fooled me!”

But note the tough words did come from a tender heart as he called them “my beloved children” – agapao – unconditional (with the Corinthians and kids at times it just has to be that way huh!?)

**2 Corinthians 12:14–15 (NKJV) — 14** Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. **15** And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls;

though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.

He spoke in that way to get their attention in order to “warn” or in some translations “admonish” them.

“Shame” means to “turn in” – Paul is certainly not saying that there are not occasions for such. In fact, later we will read ...

**1 Corinthians 6:5 (NKJV) — 5** I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?

**1 Corinthians 15:34 (NKJV) — 34** Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

But that is not where he wants to start. He wants to warn/admonish them which means “to put into mind”

Why would he take the time to do that? Because they were his children! Isn't that what you do?

But he wasn't their biological father, so what was this special relationship?

“Ten Thousand” is hyperbole – “The number was regularly used in Greek for the highest number imaginable.” (Taylor, 125)

“Instructors” in some translations “guardians” – from the Greek where we get the English term pedagogy.

The term is used in

**Galatians 3:24a (NKJV) — 24a** Therefore the law was our **tutor** to bring us to Christ ...

**ILLUS:** A slave instructed with the father's children

“Fathers”

This distinguished Paul from all the other pastors who had served in Corinth – Apollos and Peter included.

While they were great servants, they could not have the same love that Paul did for Corinthians because he was their spiritual father.

“A man can be a man without having children and even a husband without having children. But he cannot be a father without having children. A Christian cannot be a spiritual father without being used by God to bring life to spiritual children.”  
(MacArthur, 116)

“Begotten through the gospel”

Paul was not claiming the power to save, but the privilege of sharing the gospel which is the power to save.

The sad truth is that far too many Christian men and women are neither spiritual fathers or mothers because they have never shared the gospel enough to witness its power to save and transform them into spiritual fathers and mothers.

Yet, such ...

“Fathers should be viewed in a special way in the natural family. They should be viewed in a special way in our spiritual family too. Others are important in our growth and instruction, but no one can take a father’s place.” (Akin & Merritt, 96)

## A Dedicated Father Replicates (Reproduces) (16-17)

As a result of his being their spiritual father and acting in loving protection, Paul “urges” the Corinthian believers to “imitate” him.

Urge (parakalo) – to beg, encourage. It carries the idea of coming alongside.

Imitate (mimetai) – from where we get our English word mimic.

“Children have a way of imitating their parents, either for good or for ill.” (Wiersbe, 585)

Paul is not saying “do as I say, not as I do” – no, he is begging them to do as he says because it matches what he does.

“Discipling is more than teaching right principles; it is also living those principles before the ones being disciplined.” (MacArthur, 118)

While on the surface, this may see this as arrogant, biblically, we see it as the way of making disciples.

**Ephesians 5:1 (NKJV) — 1** Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

**Philippians 2:5 (NKJV) — 5** Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,

**1 Peter 2:21 (NKJV) — 21** For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

**1 Peter 5:2a, 3b (NKJV) — 2** Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers ... **3** ... being examples to the flock

But in what way is Paul telling them to replicate himself? In the ways he has previously mentioned.

Condemned to death, spectacle to the world, fools for Christ's sake, weak, dishonored, hungered, thirsty, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, hardworking, reviled, persecuted, defamed, made a filth and refuse – but enduringly blessed and eternally encouraged!

**1 Corinthians 11:1 (NKJV) — 1** Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

“What Paul wants them to imitate is his passion to live life in the light of the cross.” (D.A. Carson quoted by Akin & Merritt, 97)

Paul was first sending Timothy to them.

**1 Timothy 1:2a (NKJV) — 2a** To Timothy, a true son in the faith ...

Timothy was a replica of Paul – a disciple of his “ways in Christ” – “Like father, like son”

The way of Jesus is not just for some places and some churches – it is for every place and every church!

“It makes two vital points about the way disciples are made and formed. One is that disciples are ultimately made by people ... The other is that discipleship is a combination of doctrine (‘what I teach everywhere’) and practice (‘my way of life’) ... transformation happens when people not only teach but actually live out the Christian faith in front of us, showing us how the cross shapes our work, our relationships ... and in this case our unity and humility in Christ.” (Wilson, 44-45)

**ILLUS:** If we were to be replicated, what would the world be full of?

## A Dedicated Father Confronts (18-20)

Parents who love their children will not turn a blind eye when the children are dishonoring, disobedient, or heading in a dangerous direction.

Yet, in sin children (an all of us really) become more bold (puffed up even) when we think there is no accountability.

This is what was occurring in Corinth, but Paul wanted to assure them he in fact was coming.

And when he did, he wasn’t going to be interested in the power they claimed to have but in the power they actually possessed.

This wasn’t going to be determined by the words they spoke but by the evidence of the power of God’s Kingdom in their lives because as he had already stated in 1 Cor. 2:4 that

such does not come “with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”

“A person’s true spiritual character is not determined by the impressiveness of his words but by the power of his life.”  
(MacArthur, 120)

And if this letter or Timothy’s example would not lead to such a powerful change in the lives of the believers in Corinth, then ...

## A Dedicated Father Corrects (21)

What he is saying is that how you respond will determine how I respond. He is willing to do whatever it takes. So, he asks ...

**1 Corinthians 4:21 (NKJV) — 21** What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

This does not mean that “a rod” is without love, but it is certainly not immediately perceived that way.

**Hebrews 12:11a (NKJV) — 11a** Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful ...

**Hebrews 12:5–6 (NKJV) — 5** And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; **6** For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”

**ILLUS:** “A child’s will must be broken, but not destroyed. Until a colt is broken, it is dangerous and useless; but once it



learns to obey, it becomes gentle and useful.” (Wiersbe, 585)

This is not to say that every situation takes a rod, this is exactly opposite of what Paul is implying. The rod is only necessary if protection, replication, and confrontation is ignored.

It is much preferred by all parties involved to come in a spirit of gentleness, but when such efforts are not producing a changed life, then ...

**Proverbs 13:24 (NKJV) — 24** He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.

## Conclusion