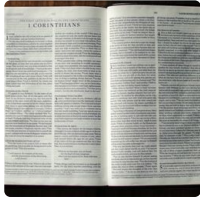


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1 Corinthians 4:8-21



1 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In 1 Corinthians 4:8-21, Paul addresses the issue of divisiveness and carnal behavior in the church, emphasizing the importance of humility and rejecting the pursuit of worldly success and respect. He stresses the need for leaders to be living examples and role models for younger Christians, based on spiritual maturity rather than worldly success. Paul also warns against those who present themselves as superior apostles and asserts his authority in disciplining those who are not acting in the expected manner.

Transcript

Today we're picking up our study of 1 Corinthians at chapter 4, verse 8. 1 Corinthians 4.8. Paul is winding down this section. There's a major turning point in the structure of the book at the end of chapter 4 and beginning of chapter 5, where at chapter 5 Paul begins to talk about the importance of humility and the importance of being humble. And he begins to deal with issues that sort of are an outrage to him that he wants to correct in the church.

There is a situation like that that he's been dealing with in the first four chapters, and that is the divisiveness of the more carnal people in the church who are dividing themselves into respective loyalties behind men that they are treating as if they are party leaders, like Paul and Apollos. And Paul has been saying that is not their role. They are not party leaders.

They are servants. They are co-workers on the project. The project is building the church, producing fruit, managing the mysteries of God faithfully.

This is what Paul, Apollos, and others are engaged in. And understanding their role in this task will help to cure this tendency to idolize them or to put them on a pedestal more than is appropriate. And therefore, to give some kind of significance to their own selves, not so much that they are honoring Paul or Apollos or Christ or Cephas, but that they are seeking honor for themselves.

They are glorying in men. They're finding personal significance and importance in their identification with these men. And that's what I understand him to be saying.

In verse six, for example, he says, Now, these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against another. That is, on behalf of Paul against Apollos or on behalf of Apollos against Paul being puffed up is speaking of their own personal pride that they take in themselves because of their association with one or the other. For who makes you to differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now, if you did receive it, indeed, why do you glory as if you had not received it? That's the last verse we treated last time.

And the point he's making, of course, is you have received tremendous benefits. There's no question about that. All things are yours.

He said in verses in chapter three, verses twenty one and twenty two, he said there. Therefore, let no one glory in men for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or a lot of other things to all these teachers are yours. Therefore, your benefit, you belong to Christ, he says in chapter three, verse twenty three.

But all these others belong to you and they are benefits that you have as Christians to have a variety of teachers to get input from a lot of different sources, to drink from many wells, many springs and to glory in one particular one over the other is missing the point altogether. And to think that you're superior to someone else because you drink from this spring instead of from this other spring is absurd when you realize that the spring is a gift from God. Whatever you have that gives you any kind of benefit or advantage over another person.

And there are such benefits and advantages that some people enjoy over others. Although the Corinthians had a tremendous advantage of having both Paul and Apollos and others. He says those advantages you have are simply gifts from God.

Why would that make you proud? What grounds is there for being proud and glorying in that which has been given to you without reference to your merit, that which is just of the grace and generosity of God? When a person is in possession of beautiful gifts and wonderful donations that have been made to them, that doesn't tell you anything about them. It tells you something about the generosity of the person who gave the gifts. And therefore there's nothing to boast in if my parents gave me an expensive watch, which is a case that is not the case.

But if I had an expensive watch and my watch was fancier than your watch, for me to be proud about that would be an absurdity in view of the fact that I couldn't afford to buy the watch anyway and I didn't earn it, I didn't buy it, it was given to me. The fact that I would wear such a watch, if I would, doesn't tell you anything about me, about what I have accomplished in my life or what I have earned or anything like that or what I'm capable of providing for myself. It would tell you only about the generosity of whoever it

was that gave me the gift.

So he says, if you've received whatever it is that makes you different from someone else that you tend to be proud of, if it's just something you've received as a gift, then why would you glory in it? Why do you take any credit for it? Now, at verse 8, and this is the new material today and it changes slightly in flavor, he says, you are already full, you are already rich, you have reigned as kings without us. And indeed, I could wish that you did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think God has displayed us, the apostles, last as men condemned to death, for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are distinguished, but we are dishonored.

We are poor, but you are poor. We are poor, but you are poor. We are poor, but you are poor.

We are poor, but you are poor. We are poor, but you are poor. We are poor, but you are poor.

We are poor, but you are poor. We are poor, but you are poor. We are poor, but you are poor.

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We are poor, but you are poor. We are poor, but you are poor. On the one hand, we are poor, but you are poor.

They want to be, they don't want to bear the reproach of the cross. And they appreciate, perhaps, whatever mixture of Christianity and sophistry or philosophical sophistication that they can have in their lives so that the Greeks around them who are not saved may appreciate the fact that they too are wise. They're not Christians, but they're smart Christians.

Yeah, they may be Christians, but they haven't checked their brains at the door. They're smart Christians. They're respectable.

They're distinguished. They are wise. Whereas Paul, the message he preached, the way he lived, didn't have any of that attractiveness about it.

It was to those who were perishing foolishness. He seemed weak. He was poor.

He was homeless. He didn't have any of the trappings of success that would give him honor or distinction in the world. Now, what he's pointing out to them is there's a tremendous contrast in his kind of Christianity and in their.

He's been ironic, sarcastic when he says in verse eight, you're already full, you're already rich. The funny thing is that there are people in our society, Christians who take those words and apply them not sarcastically, but literally. They would say that Paul and the rest of the scriptures teach us that we should be rich, that we should be living as kings.

We are, after all, king's kids, princes of God. And because of that, we should be living like kings. I have heard teachers, pastors actually make the statement that if anybody is going to have the money, it ought to be God's kids.

If anybody's going to be driving Cadillacs and Mercedes and BMWs, it ought to be God's kids. They've actually said it dishonors God when God's children are wearing rags or when God's children are driving an old beat up VW because they say that makes it look like God's not a good provider to his children. Makes it look like God's not a good father.

It's a reproach on Christ. Well, that kind of talk sounds at one level, logical, and it certainly is appealing to our flesh to suggest, well, yeah, we should be enjoying all the good things the world can enjoy. And that's something God wants us to do.

We can do so with a clean conscience, knowing that this is glorifying to God. However, that isn't what the Bible teaches. That may have been how the Corinthians were thinking.

We want the world to think Christianity is respectable. We don't want to give Christianity a bad name by being foolish in their eyes or weak or undistinguished or poor. We want to be rich, full, like kings.

We want to give Christianity an attractive face to the world and give it a good reputation by our successful living and our prosperity and so forth. And by our, in their case, probably more than any of those things, simply by our sophistication, by our command of the philosophical wisdom of the Greeks and so forth. Now, those things are a temptation to every generation, I'm sure, although there are some Christians who don't experience much temptation because those things are not available to them.

In many parts of the world, poverty is universal. Poverty is uniform. Everybody's poor, except for a very, very tiny class of elite rich.

And Christians in those societies don't spend very much time being tempted to be rich because it's simply not one of the things that's an open option to them. They live with the sober facts that Christians throughout history have mostly had to live with, and that is that Christianity is not a means of making people rich. Paul says you are already full, you're already rich.

He's making a positive confession there. Let the poor say I'm rich. Let the hungry say I'm full.

You have reigned as kings without us. Now, his last statement in verse eight, and indeed, I wish you did reign, that we might also reign with you. I could just imagine some prosperity teachers saying, you see, Paul's reigning and he wishes these people would learn to reign in life, too.

You know, like he is. Then we all be reigning together. I wish you did reign.

You should be reigning. Then we'd all be reigning together because we're reigning, too. But obviously in the context of the opposite is true.

Paul's saying you are reigning. At least that's how you view yourself is if you're reigning. But we certainly aren't reigning.

And I really wish you were reigning in the real sense, in the sense that we all shall someday. Because the time is going to come when we do reign. We are, in fact, king's kids.

We must bear in mind that the king is at war at the moment and his kids are in the trenches. It's not the place of king's kids today to be lounging in the palace while there's an enemy waging war against the kingdom. But when the enemy has been defeated fully and there's no more wars to fight, then, of course, there will be.

There will be kingly, palatial rewards. And we shall reign ultimately forever with Christ. We'll sit on thrones with him.

He said the one who overcomes will sit with him on his throne. It says in Timothy, I think it's first Timothy, could be second yet. It says, if we endure, we'll reign with him.

And that is, of course, one of the things that is held out before us. If we suffer faithfully, if we endure hardship and die faithful, then we shall ultimately reign for all eternity with Christ. That's a wonderful thing.

And Paul says, I wish you were in that position now, because then I would be, too. I wish the time had come that you were reigning legitimately, because then I wouldn't be

experiencing this homelessness and empty stomach and imprisonment, all the things I'm going through, because I'd be reigning, too, because when Jesus comes back and we're all glorified, then we'll all be reigning. There will be a time that we shall reign.

The problem is the Corinthian Christians had decided to step it up a little bit. They weren't wanting to observe the time tags. It's like someone trying to open their Christmas presents before Christmas or something.

It's not really time for that. It's jumping the gun. Reigning with Christ is held out before us as our ultimate destiny, but not now.

That's not what we're supposed to be doing now. He says, I wish it were. I wish that that time were here, because then I'd reign with you.

But it isn't here. And any reigning you perceive yourself as doing, any rich and distinguished and fullness of life that you're seeking in carnal terms now is just that, carnal. And he had already said earlier the church was carnal in chapter three.

And he is not encouraging this attitude. He is rebuking it. He's speaking sarcastically.

He's speaking sarcastically in verse eight. It's quite clear Paul felt that they should be more like him. We didn't we didn't read this yet, but if you look down at verse 16, it says, therefore, I urge you, imitate me.

So while he draws a clear distinction between their way of life and his in verses eight through thirteen, one could get the impression maybe maybe Paul's way of life is a special path for apostles. After all, doesn't he say that God has appointed apostles last verse nine? I think that God has displayed us the apostles last as men condemned to death. Maybe this is just true of apostles.

Perhaps Paul's the only one and people like him who are supposed to be, as he described himself here, hungry and thirsty and poorly clothed and beaten and homeless. And he's not really very, very attractive. But maybe that's something that not everyone is supposed to be doing.

But when you look at it for 16, he says, therefore, I urge you, imitate me. He makes it clear that this is the way of life for the apostles. And he makes it clear that of the two options, the two lifestyles, his is the right one.

His is the one that they, too, should be imitating their desire to prosper, to be comfortable, to be kings now, to reign now, to be distinguished in the eyes of the world. Now, that's simply not appropriate. Paul's lifestyle is not just the lifestyle of an apostle.

His is the lifestyle of the ideal Christian. You know, when you read of the qualifications for an elder in a place like First Timothy three or Titus chapter one, where we have in

those places. Actually, you know, what you're reading there is just a description of a good Christian.

It's a funny thing. I remember there was a Christian musician. He was a Christian musician.

He was a very good musician. He was a very good musician. He was a very good musician.

He was a very good musician. He was a very good musician. He was a very good musician.

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He was a very good musician. He was a very good musician. You would know his name if I told it to you.

Because it's a household word among Christians. But in Orange County this musician many years ago, in the 1970s, divorced his wife or she divorced him. I don't know much about the details.

I'm not sure whether he was fully...or whether it was his fault or hers or whatever. But in those days, Christian musicians were pretty loose living. Because they were modeling themselves after secular musicians, mostly in lifestyle as well as musical style.

And this man was a very successful Christian musician. And Calvary Chapel, close to Mesa, heard that this man was living in a way that they did not feel was a good testimony, that there were reports that he was flirtatious with girls at the concert and stuff. And so this musician's agent called Calvary Chapel, because Calvary was having, I think, every Saturday night, I think it was, concerts.

And they booked various musicians in. And the agent for this musician wanted to book him there at Calvary. Huge audience and a good place for a musician to play.

And the person at Calvary Chapel said, no, we've heard that this fellow, he's been behaving kind of unseemly toward women at his concerts. And we don't want to invite him to do that. And his agent said, well, he's only a musician.

He shouldn't have to measure up to the standard of a deacon. And I think that's ironic. I think it's an amazing thing.

I think that deacons, elders, people who are in leadership, apostles, that the standards that they set somehow are only for people in leadership. I remember talking to a Christian man once, who, although he didn't think it was wrong to drink alcohol himself, he believed that ministers shouldn't drink any alcohol. I know people who believe that while it's OK for the average Christian to be divorced and remarried in some cases, given some circumstances, there could be a legitimate divorce and remarriage, yet not for ministers.

Ministers can't have been. And I personally, I think that when we say, well, ministers, you know, there's a different standard for them than others. We're kind of missing the point.

It is true that Paul did give a high standard for elders. But the standard he gave is really just a description of what all Christians are supposed to be like. Paul is a realist.

Not all Christians behave like Christians should. And when you're appointing men to leadership, you should choose men who happen to be living the way Christians should live, so that they can set an example for everybody else to follow. After all, people in leadership are role models to the sheep, as it were, in the church.

And they should be living the right way. But the way they're supposed to live isn't somehow several notches above the way other people are supposed to live. They're just supposed to be what everyone else is supposed to be.

The difference is that they are. You know, people in leadership are supposed to be selected from among those who are living like Christians. And they are put forward as role models so that others who are not quite living up to what they should be living up to can see that as a standard to measure by.

But when Paul tells us, we apostles, we live this way, he's not saying, and that just comes with the territory of being an apostle. You guys should be glad you're not apostles, so you don't have to live this way. No, he says, you should imitate me.

Apostles, like elders, are role models to the younger Christians. And when he describes his condition, his way of life, he's doing so not to say, look how different apostles are from everybody else. He's doing so to say, this is the pattern.

This is the model to measure by. Now, this doesn't mean necessarily that every Christian is supposed to be homeless. Every Christian has to be beaten and hungry and poorly clothed.

Not necessarily. There were times when Paul was not as poorly clothed or not as hungry. He had cycles in his experience, like a lot of people do.

There were feasts and famine, ultimately. He said in Philippians that he knew how to abound and he knew how to be abased. Whatever state he was in, he'd learn to be content.

It is not mandatory for Christians to be poor and to be poorly clothed or to be homeless. That's not mandatory. But the point is, it is mandatory for all Christians to have the same spirit, which is not in pursuit of secure housing and fine clothing and a full stomach and all those things.

Those are the things the Gentiles seek after, Jesus said. Remember when Jesus said, therefore, take no thought, thinking what shall we wear, what shall we eat, what shall we drink? He said, those are the things the Gentiles seek after. You seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be added to you.

God wants you clothed. He wants you housed. He wants you fed, at least most of the time.

He may, in fact, want to put you through some trials where you're not so comfortably clothed or housed, where you do miss a meal or two. He won't let you starve unless that's the way he wants you to go. He does want you to die someday.

Maybe that's what that means. But the point is, Paul is not advocating a uniform ethic of poverty. What he is saying is that the Christian spirit is not one that pursues prosperity and comfort and kingliness in this life.

It is a life of contentment with whatever state God gives as we are pursuing the one thing needful. And that one thing needful is the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And being in pursuit of that means that we leave it to God to add all the other things in whatever supply he wishes.

Sometimes, mostly, God is very generous and gives us even more than the things we need. Sometimes, he only gives us what we need. And sometimes, he gives us less than what we would have thought we needed.

But in any case, Paul is saying, you should imitate me in this respect. Not that Paul had chosen. He hadn't taken poverty vows.

Paul did not extol poverty as a virtue in itself. People who are poor can be just as corrupt

and wicked as people who are rich. Being poor is no guarantee of spirituality.

Poor people can be bitter, covetous, dishonest, lustful, immoral. They can be all the bad. They can be just as bad as rich people can be.

Poverty is not a virtue. However, what is a virtue is learning to be content in every state of life. Not being taken up in the carnal pursuits that motivate the Gentiles and that motivate fleshly people.

But being caught up in the pursuit of the kingdom of God so that you become, as it were, oblivious to your station in life as far as the world is concerned. Oblivious to the degree of comfort that you have. I'm not saying you don't notice it when you're uncomfortable.

I'm not saying you have to be so otherworldly that you don't know that you're hungry or you don't know that you're cold or something like that. Paul certainly knew when he was. But the point is, it doesn't matter to you.

That's not the thing that matters to you. It is the thing that matters to the Gentiles because there's nothing for them in the future. That is, in the eternal future.

They've got no eternal hope. Therefore, this world is all they have. And they measure their happiness and their success by their acquisition of things in this life.

But because we're seeking the kingdom of God, we're seeking his righteousness, and our rewards are elsewhere. We are content to be without such things as the Gentiles could never be content without. And Paul is not describing himself as a model of a poverty lifestyle that everyone must embrace, but as a model of one who is content, if necessary, to be homeless, to be hungry.

He is not in pursuit of those things that the Corinthians are valuing, which is also the world value. They should imitate his value system. As we know, one of the things that the Corinthians apparently were real taken up with was the desire to have a reputation for being wise.

And one of the contrasts he makes is in verse 10, we, apostles, Paul and his companions, are fools for Christ's sake. Why? Because they preach a message that is foolishness in the eyes of those who are perishing. But you are wise.

This is one of the things that these people had to get over, this infatuation with wisdom, which was a goddess to the Greeks. Sophia, wisdom, was a goddess to the Greeks. And they needed to basically get rid of that idol in their life and accept dishonor in the eyes of man, if necessary, rather than distinguished reputations for themselves.

Paul says in verse 11, even to this present hour, we both hunger and thirst. We are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless. We labor, working with our own hands.

Now, Paul was a leader. There's no question about that. A leader in the church, so was Apollos.

And leaders who've got a bunch of loyal followers usually don't have to work with their own hands. They can require that those that they lead support them. Leadership is itself a labor.

Leadership is itself a job. And because of that, most people who have the admiration of a group of followers can justify being supported by those followers for making no further contribution than simply that of leadership. I'm leading.

Therefore, I should be supported. I shouldn't have to go out and work, too. But that is a way that proud leaders often will act.

Now, there are times when Paul had to be supported by others, for instance, when he was in prison. Or there were probably places where his ministry was so time consuming that he couldn't work on the side. There's nothing wrong with a person who's so occupied in ministry that there's no time left to support himself.

And therefore, he has to let God support him through perhaps the gifts of others. But the person who demands that he be supported because of his title, because of his office, is a proud man. And the Corinthians tended to look at Paul and Apollos, something like that, as leaders in the carnal sense.

And Paul says, we labor. We work with our own hands. We're not acting like some kind of prima donnas that can't get down in the dirt and get our hands dirty, support ourselves like anybody else.

We're not putting ourselves on any pedestals. We make a living the same way you do. Over in 1 Corinthians 9, he brings this up again.

He says in chapter 9, verse 1, am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ, our Lord? Are you not my work and the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. My defense to those who examine me is this. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord and Caesars? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? And then he goes on and defends his right to refrain from working.

He says, whoever goes to war at his own expense, who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit, whoever tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock. In other words, the labor he's doing as an apostle should justify his support without him having to work. He should be allowed to refrain from working.

And he says, for it is written in verse nine in the law of Moses, you shall not muscle an ox

that treads out the grain. Now, the point he's making is that he deserves to be supported for the ministry if anyone does. In verse 11 he says, if we have sown spiritual things to you, is it a great thing if we reap material things from you? And if others are partakers of this right over you, are not we even more? But in verse 12, the second half of verse 12 he says, nevertheless, we have not used this right, but endure all things, lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

So Paul has not taken advantage of his status, which he could rightly do as a minister. He could refrain from working. Other apostles refrain from working, he says.

Barnabas and he seem to be the only exceptions. They still work, even though they were in full time ministry. Of course, they might have been the only unmarried apostles, too.

It makes a big difference. They could work two shifts, one shift ministry each day and one shift working. When you're married and have family, then it limits the number of shifts you can work outside the home, because you've got responsibilities there, too.

But the point Paul is making is he doesn't have to work. He could, on the basis of his leadership and ministry, command them to support him, but that's not his style. He's not trying to be treated like a king, as it were.

Kings are always supported by their subjects. For doing what? The kings don't go out and plow the fields, but they eat the crops of the fields. All they do is be the king.

All they do is be the leader. And on that basis, they're supported. And Paul's not that kind of a leader.

The rulers of the Gentiles are that way, but not Paul. If you look over at 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul makes the same point about himself, how that he did not exert his special authority as an apostle to demand support for himself, but rather worked for a living. And he said, reminding them of his demeanor in their presence earlier, he says in 1 Thessalonians 2, 6, nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ.

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children, so affectionately longing for you that we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you became dear to us. And he says in verse 9, for you remember, brethren, our labor and toil, for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preach to you the gospel of God. Laboring night and day means he worked a night shift and a day shift.

Preaching in the daytime, working in the nighttime, making tents. We know that was his vocation. And so he mentions that about himself in chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians as one of the ways of showing that he is not trying to reign as a king.

Here, his children in the faith, the Corinthians, who arguably were of a lower station than himself, he being an apostle, they were demanding kingly honors for themselves, or at least seeking them. But he who had far more of a claim to such had no interest in those things. Rather than being supported, he worked with his hands.

He says in verse 12, chapter 4, verse 12, we labor working with our own hands. That's a humble thing to do. Being persecuted, being reviled, we bless.

That means we bless those who speak slanderously against us. This is what Jesus taught to do in Matthew chapter 5, verses 39 through 45. Matthew 5, 39 through 45, Jesus said to bless those who curse you and so forth.

He also said that in Luke 6. And Paul himself said it in Romans 12. Being persecuted, we put up with it. We endure it.

Being defamed, we entreat. The word entreat there, a marginal reading in this Bible says exhort or encourage. But actually, the meaning I think is that we answer back mildly.

We answer back kindly, even though people are defaming us. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. Now, the filth of the world, the word filth here, some translations use the word refuse.

We've been treated like the refuse of the world. The Greek word is a reference to the dirty water that's poured out of a vessel that's just been cleaned. You pour water into a vessel, clean it out, and you get all the sludge that was inside the vessel, depending on what was in it.

And then you pour that out. That's how we're treated. We're treated as something foul, something worthless.

It's just the sludge that's left over that's tossed out. He said that's how we apostles are treated. Sounds like he's whining, but he's not actually complaining.

He's just saying this is the way that it is. This is the way that it is for us, and you should be willing to be imitators of us. Do the same thing yourself.

He's not whining about his state. He's inviting them to imitate it. And he says we're like the off-scouring of all things till now.

The word off-scouring, the Greek word, literally means that which is scraped off. And I think the images of what we do after we've finished our dinner, there's garbage, what becomes immediately garbage when we scrape it off our plate. It's not garbage when it's on our plate, but as soon as you scrape it off into the bucket, it's now garbage.

It's compost. It's refuse. It's funny.

When it was on our plate, although we didn't eat it, it was considered edible. But as soon as you scraped it off, it's suddenly garbage. And the thought of eating it is revolting.

But the phenomenon is familiar to us all. But Paul says that's the way we're treated. We're treated like garbage.

We're treated like sewage. That's what we're treated like, us apostles. When he said in verse 9 that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, most commentators feel that Paul is alluding to the criminals in the amphitheater that were brought out at the end of the spectacle.

The worst criminals were saved for the end of the show. Some of the early contests that people would view for entertainment would be gladiators killing each other and various quick deaths and things. But the grand finale of the show was bringing out the worst culprits and making them wrestle with lions and tigers and get torn to pieces.

And it's sort of like the Fourth of July fireworks displays. They save the big stuff to concentrate at the end to end the show with a bang. Well, that's how the amphitheater games were too.

They had the goriest, bloodiest spectacle reserved for the worst offenders, the most despised criminals. And Paul is apparently alluding to that, that God has displayed us, apostles, last, as men condemned to death. For we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

Now, you shouldn't feel too guilty if you haven't experienced all of these things that Paul has. If you don't feel like you're continuously treated like the sewage of the world, or if you're not poorly clothed or homeless. But the point is, you shouldn't feel bad if you are.

If you are homeless, and if you are poorly clothed, and if you are treated like garbage, that's the point. He's not trying to make people feel bad if they haven't experienced all of these indignities. But they're not supposed to feel bad if they have either.

And that's just the point. The Corinthians would feel bad. They were not content to accept shame and reproach and indignity for Christ.

And that's where Paul wishes they would imitate him more. He says in verse 14, I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children, I warn you, for though you might have 10,000 instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers. For in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel.

Therefore, I urge you, imitate me. Now, here's the bottom line of the whole discussion. He started out the discussion indignant that they would align themselves between him and Apollos and Cephas and so forth.

And he starts talking that Christ is not divided. We're not in competition here. Apollos and I are partners in the ministry.

We're not competitors and rivals. But all the way through, even though Paul is trying to give that message, he's also, in my opinion, registering a little bit of unhappiness with somebody's method, probably Apollos'. He doesn't say he's unhappy with Apollos' method, but he's continually talking about himself and Apollos and comparing and contrasting their work.

And all the while that he's talking about his partnership with Apollos and the fact he doesn't really want people to line up behind him as over against Apollos, yet he's not entirely happy with Apollos' methods. And he does feel that he, Paul, has really chosen the higher path in terms of not seeking the honor of appearing wise and sophisticated in the eyes of the unbeliever, going ahead and speaking in fear and trembling a message of foolishness and just depending on the demonstration of the power of God for confirmation and so forth. Paul feels that that is a better approach.

And while he never comes out and blasts Apollos by name, and I could be wrong. He may not even be alluding to Apollos, but my impression is that he is. He doesn't ever say anything outright against Apollos.

And his whole desire is to reunite the church so that people aren't saying, I'm of Paul or I'm of Apollos. And they're not making that distinction as strongly as they were, which was to their detriment, saying, OK, I'm of Paul, therefore I'm not of Apollos. I'm of Apollos, therefore I'm not of Paul.

That is dividing the church in a very damaging way. And so at the same time he's trying to unite those factions, he also doesn't want to give the impression that there's no difference whatsoever between himself and Apollos or that one's methods are not to be preferred over another. It's a delicate situation to try to reaffirm your unity and your oneness with this other teacher.

And at the same time, not want to affirm everything about him, because there's some things that he's doing that you'd rather people didn't do. There's some things he's doing that you have not chosen to do and you've deliberately avoided because you don't think it's good policy. And here I think it comes out, too, because he says in verse 15, for though you might have 10,000 instructors, he uses a very large number, so it doesn't seem like he's focusing on anyone in particular.

Certainly one of their instructors was Apollos, as well as Paul. And those are the only ones we know of that they had, Paul and Apollos. There probably were other instructors, elders in the church and so forth, who taught.

But all this time, he's been talking about instructors, builders on this foundation,

waterers of these seeds. Apollos has been the principal guy in mind. And he says, though you may have 10,000s of people who come in and instruct you, yet remember, I converted you.

I'm your father in the faith. You have only one person who led you to the Lord. And while he's not saying that they should therefore say, I am of Paul, because Paul is my father in the faith, that's the very thing he's trying to prevent them from saying.

But at the same time, he wants them to respect his opinion. He wants them to still remember that it was Paul and not Apollos that God used to found that church, that Paul must have been doing something right if a successful church was planted through his efforts. And therefore, his efforts and his methods should be imitated, that his lifestyle, his policies have something in their favor that should be imitated, as opposed to other of the 10,000s of instructors that might speak to them.

And so anyway, I don't think we need to say any more. I feel there's some hints there that though they may have many instructors, all of them making some positive contribution, none of them have quite as important a role or the same kind of authority, God-given authority in their lives as the one who actually led them to the Lord, Paul himself. And the presence and existence of a church in Christ in Corinth was testimony to the rightness of Paul's methodology because Paul was the one who planted it.

Now, his encouraging them in verse 16 to imitate him is something Paul doesn't shrink from doing in a number of places. Some people think Paul proud or at least have high self-esteem because he has no problem saying, listen, just do it the way I'm doing it. There are a lot of people who apparently labor with an impure conscience at some level who would feel very uncomfortable, even pastors who would feel uncomfortable either themselves saying, just imitate me, or they are uncomfortable with anyone else saying that.

I remember one pastor I used to sit under, he used to say, don't imitate me. I'm just like you. I'm just another person.

Don't imitate me. Just follow Christ. Well, that's not Paul's approach.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11.1, imitate me just as I also imitate Christ. Paul's not setting himself up as the ultimate model. Christ is the ultimate model, but Paul is a good imitator of Christ.

Therefore, it is safe and advisable to imitate him. Christ is invisible to us. We walk by faith, not by sight.

As long as we're in presence of the body, we're absent from the Lord, and we don't see him. Whom having not seen, you love, it says in 1 Peter 1.8. And so not having seen Jesus, we're at something of a disadvantage in terms of imitating him. We're not entirely

at a disadvantage because we do have the Gospels, and of course, we have the spirit of Christ.

But his example in the Gospels is pretty helpful. But it's always nice to have an abiding and visible living example. If we had the advantage that the apostles had, to see him, to walk with him, to see how he reacts to situations, to see how he handles himself, to see what his policies were in all the areas of life, it would be very helpful.

The apostles did have that. And Jesus said to them, blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, because they hear. Because many prophets and wise men long to see what you see and to hear what you hear, but were not able to.

He said that in Matthew 13 to his disciples. It was a tremendous advantage to see Jesus, to see him and just imitate him. And everybody imitates somebody.

There's nobody who's completely original. None of you would have learned to speak the English language if you didn't have parents or somebody else in your home who were speaking it. You learned by imitation.

You would have probably not even learned to walk, although arguably, God has instructed human beings that they walk upright by nature. Yet, I think kids learn to walk by imitation. I think they get it in their heads to walk because everybody else around them is walking upright.

I know my five-year-old, she's 21 now, or almost 22. I remember one time I was talking to my daughter when she was five years old. People used to tell me, she walked like me.

Now, I don't know how I walk. I'm not sure if I should have been insulted or flattered. I mean, does that mean I walk like a little girl? Or does that mean that my little girl walks like a man? I don't know.

Or maybe they didn't mean either, but I'm not sure how they meant that. But more than one person noted it. That my daughter, when she was five years old and living with me, that she walked like me.

Now, I have no idea what it is distinctive about the way I walk that they were alluding to. But I don't think it's genetic. I think she must have learned whatever it was in her mannerism of her gait or her walk, she must have learned that from me.

It's not probably a coincidence nor genetic. It was she learned to walk by imitating her parents. I remember somebody once criticizing me years ago because I like to read Mad Magazine.

I haven't read Mad Magazine for years, but it's not as if I have convictions against it. It has become somewhat more corrupt in the past decade or so. And so I don't find it as

tolerable to my tastes as I once did.

But there are some cartoonists in Mad Magazine that whose work just is very impressive. Not only Mad, but I mean, there are comic strip artists, people like Walt Kelly, who drew Pogo and the guy who draws Calvin and Hobbes. And in Mad Magazine, there was a caricature artist named Mort Drucker, who drew some of the movie satires.

And I never did learn how to draw caricatures. I'm not good at that. But because I did cartoon work, I like to examine closely the work of other people who do it better than I do it.

And, you know, see how they tackle a particular problem in the illustration of a hand or an expression on a face or something. And since my childhood, I've examined those things. My own father did cartooning, he's an amateur cartoonist, never made any money at it.

It's a hobby for him, but I probably picked up some things from him when I was a kid. But later on, I just picked up things from other artists that I thought did a good job. And I remember somebody once criticizing this fact.

And they said, well, that doesn't give me much respect for your artwork, you're just copying what other people have done. I thought about that and I thought, you know, I can't think of any one artist that my artwork imitates more than others, but I can list a dozen that have very profound and I'm not ashamed to say so, that have had profound influence over the way I think about drawing. But I'm not sure anyone draws without having the influence of other people before them.

I don't even know if the idea of picking up a pencil and putting it to a piece of paper would arise originally in a person's head without seeing someone do it. Certainly musicians, even though they compose their own songs, they don't make up their own chords and their own notes. There's only a certain number of notes that have always existed and we learned chord progressions.

We learned melodies because we've heard melodies. We may make up our own melodies, new combinations and so forth, but there's always ingredients that were there before that we imitate. And if you write music or play music, if you draw, if you're creative, you're one of those people that are considered creative and original and there may be a high degree of originality in your work, but it's never completely original.

Everybody builds on the work of previous people who are models to them and mentors to them. I believe, now I don't want to get the wrong name here. Who was it? Some famous scientist several centuries ago.

It might have been Newton, but I'm not sure that it was. I think it might've been Sir Isaac Newton, but he said, if I have seen further than other men, it's because I've stood on the

shoulders of giants. And what he meant is, of course, that he didn't start from scratch and come to the point of scientific expertise that he arrived at.

He started on the researches of other men who were his mentors, whose work he examined and saved him the time of reinventing the wheel so that he could take off from where they were and move further. And that's the way progress is made in life. And everyone does this, whether they're aware of it or not.

They have mentors, they have people they imitate. And that is not wrong. Now, the ideal would be, is if we could imitate Jesus by seeing him, like the apostles did.

If we could just watch him all the time and learn all his mannerisms, all his values, all his policies, all of his reactions, just by intimate continual viewing. And we can do that to a certain extent by viewing him in the records of his life in the gospels, but only to a limited extent. I think there's only 39 or 40 days of the life of Christ recorded in the gospels.

That little, something like 40 days, something in that neighborhood of the life of Christ is actually recorded in specific incidents of his life in the gospels, which means we're very limited. And we are greatly advantaged if we have in our lives mentors like Paul who could say, imitate me as I imitate Christ. Not because they can do it better than we can.

They're just human too. And they don't see Jesus either perfectly. But if they've been at it longer, if they've, you know, and you can tell that they're doing it consistently, it's of a benefit to you to be able to say, okay, I'm a follower of Christ, but I've learned a great deal about what Christ is like by this pastor or this older Christian brother or sister that has been a mentor to me.

And there is a visual help for me. There is a living Christ-like example for me to follow. And there's no reason why an older Christian shouldn't be able to make this statement.

I'm saying all this because so many people seem to be uncomfortable with the suggestion of someone saying, just imitate me. And even pastors who've said, don't imitate me. You know, they feel like it's a humble thing to say.

Don't imitate me. They would feel too proud saying, imitate me because that suggests I'm doing something right. But shouldn't leaders be doing something right? I mean, isn't that part of the qualifications for being a leader is that you are doing it right? That's why you were selected and someone else has passed over is because you qualify.

That's the qualifications the elders are about. Like I said, they're just living the Christian life the way Christians should live it. The reason elders are supposed to be like that is because people need mentors.

People need role models. And Paul didn't shy away from being such a role model. Of

course, it puts a lot of responsibility on you to present yourself as such to younger Christians because you really got to do it right if they're going to imitate you and you do it wrong, then you're going to be responsible for them doing it wrong.

If you're going to be carnal or have wrong beliefs or wrong ethics or be spotty in your obedience or whatever, then those who are imitating you are likely to use your example as an excuse to do the same or maybe genuinely deceived into thinking that's the right way of doing it. That's why it says in James chapter three in verse one, my brethren, be not many masters or teachers for we have the greater condemnation. The people who are in front, leading, are the ones who really have a greater judgment upon them because it affects the way people live their lives.

And that's probably why a lot of people in leadership want to shun that responsibility and say, don't follow me. Paul didn't mind though. He didn't mind taking on the responsibility of living a Christian life.

He's going to do it anyway. He didn't even if he had no special responsibility due to people imitating him, he was determined to live for Christ and he was pretty good at it. He did it better than most.

Well enough to say, you know, if you want to know how to live for Jesus, just look at the way I do it because I do it successfully and you'll not go down the wrong road following my example. Paul said this in a number of places, not only here in first Corinthians 4.16 and also as I mentioned, first Corinthians 11.1 where he said, be followers of me or imitators of me as I am of Christ. Also over in first Thessalonians 1.6 and a number of other places that we could see.

Paul indicates that his own example is self-consciously presented to them by him as something to imitate and follow. He says in first Thessalonians 1.6, you became followers of us and of the Lord having received the word in much affliction with joy in the Holy Spirit. Now, they became followers of him and of the Lord.

Of course, if you follow his example and he's following the Lord, then you're following the Lord too. Just one step further back. In second Thessalonians 3.7 second Thessalonians 3 and verse 7 he says, for you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, that is, imitate us.

For we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but we worked with labor and toil night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you. Not because we don't have the authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. So, basically Paul worked at a job not because he didn't have the authority to be supported without working, but because he wanted to set a good example to them of what they should do.

Not everyone's an apostle. Not everyone has the right to be supported by the church. And therefore, most people are going to have to work jobs.

And he's very right. Most of my sheep are going to have to do that. And if they're not, then I as their shepherd will do it too.

I'll set an example to them that there's nothing undignified or unspiritual about holding a job. I'll set an example by my own behavior. In Philippians 3, 17.

Philippians 3 and verse 17, Paul says, brethren, join in following my example. And note those who walk this way as you have us for a pattern. God has given the church Paul for a pattern.

At least that church, because they knew him and saw him just like the earlier apostles saw Jesus. Those Christians in the first century saw Paul. Now, we don't see Paul any more clearly than we see Jesus really.

I mean, we see Paul today the same way we see Jesus basically in the records that are left behind of his life. Today we need living examples. Every generation needs living examples.

But they shouldn't be hard to find. Anybody who's walked with God for 30 to 40 years, and there should always be an abundance of such people in any country that's had the Gospel as long as we have, should be doing it right by now. I mean, sure, someone who in the first five, ten years of their Christian life may be getting the bugs out of it still.

And there will always be imperfections no matter how old we get. But in a place like this where you've got Christians 60, 70 years old, it shouldn't be too difficult to find someone who's been following the Lord for 50 years. And let's face it, those kinds of people are a tremendous resource if in fact, having followed the Lord for 50 years, they've really applied themselves to press in and to really follow the Lord.

They haven't just been warming pews for 50 years and remaining as carnal as ever. Unfortunately, some people do that. They're in the church for that longer.

They never grow up. But there are fortunately people, and I've known many of them, of advanced years who have many decades of following Christ under their belts and are excellent examples. And we need them.

I was talking to somebody yesterday. I guess it was either Bill or Jeff or maybe both. But we were talking about pastors and how some of the churches I've been in And when they were without a pastor and looking for a pastor, the pulpit committee would express their desire if possible, to get a young pastor.

Because a young pastor is, I guess in the sight of the world, more attractive. He's going

to be more youthful, more exuberant, more able to relate with the youth or whatever they figure. And therefore, they want a pastor who's young if possible.

Not too young. Most people don't want a pastor right out of seminary. They like someone who's had a church or two under his belt, a few failures behind him.

But not too many. Because then he gets too old. And somehow our society doesn't respect age as I think they ought to.

We were talking about this yesterday. I could not in any way relate with that. If I go to a church, I would think myself most blessed to be in a church where all the elders are old men.

Real old. But not just old. It's not being old that does it.

Being old and mature in the faith. But you don't get mature without getting old. You can get old without getting mature.

But you don't get mature without getting old. Because mature takes time. And when we came to this town actually, we immediately joined a church, partly because it's the church that invited us to come to this town.

But one reason we chose to do so, we wouldn't have ever done so, but that this church had some older men in the eldership. And we had been for a long time in churches that were like Jesus people churches that were full of life and everything, but not very full of old people. And the elders were people like me.

I was an elder in a couple of these churches. And I was in my twenties in one case and in my thirties. No, in my twenties in both cases.

Two churches I was elder in at different times. During my decade of my twenties. And I was called an elder.

To me, that's an absurdity today. But in the Jesus people, it was not so strange. There was a guy who was made the head over a Christian house when he was three months old in the Lord.

It's because there wasn't anyone older available to take the position. But I'll tell you, going through a few decades of that kind of youth church experience really put in us a desire to be in a church that had some real older role models, some real older saints who were seasoned and wise. And like I said, when we came to this town, one thing that really attracted us to the church we went to is that they had some old folks who had been raised Mennonite all their lives.

And now they were grandparents in their advanced years. And we were like, oh, that's wonderful. And about a few months after we came, the younger elders, there were some

younger who were actually the sons of the older elders.

They deposed the older guys. They kicked them out. The young elders who were younger than me in some cases, kicked out the old guys because the church wanted to become more progressive and wanted to become more.

Oh, they wanted more pizzazz in the church or something. And so they decided these old guys were a hindrance because they were too old fashioned. And we really felt like we'd been ripped off here.

We came, we were attracted to church because of the maturity we saw in the eldership there. But the elders, in fact, who were mature, were mature enough not to defend their own rights. And they fell prey to the scheming of a younger generation of leaders that didn't want them around being sticks in the mud.

So that was that was a real disappointment to us. It's hard to find churches that have older men who are role models. Now, there are some churches that have plenty of old men.

But not all those churches have even any who are good role models, because, as I said, just getting old doesn't mean you grow up. It's possible in a cultural climate like that, which we have in this part of the world for people to never have their faith challenged seriously. I mean, when you consider that in the second and third and fourth centuries of the church, the churches were full of people who were what they called confessors.

A confessor was a person who was almost a martyr. There's a person who during the times of persecution, when a lot of people were martyred, were generally arrested, tortured, possibly even sentenced to death. But for some reason, their their sentence was not carried out and they had remained faithful without lapsing.

There were also a whole group of people called lapses who under similar times of persecution had lapsed in their faith and denied the Lord. But the next generation And the next best thing in the early church to be a martyr was being a confessor, what they called a confessor, which is someone who held fast the confession of Christ, even facing martyrdom and torture and so forth. It's not their fault they didn't die.

It's just, you know, the providence of God. They survived. But they were martyrs in spirit.

And to live at a time when the church was full of people like this, these confessors who had faced death and torture for Christ would be a very different kind of spiritual climate than being in a church where some of them have been saved for 50 years, if they are really saved, at least in the church for 50 years, but they've never made one sacrifice for the faith. They've never had to. There's never been any threat to them.

They've been prosperous and comfortable and raised prosperous and comfortable kids

and grandkids. And there's really been no growth because there have been no trials. So just having a church full of old men doesn't mean you're going to have good role models.

And unfortunately, a lot of the elders in churches are selected nowadays not on the basis of their real spirituality, but on the basis of their success in business or in the community. If there's a rich man in the church, many churches will hasten to make that man a member of the board of elders. It's a good way to keep him from leaving the church and keeping his money in the church.

But without attempting to be overly cynical, this is a realistic fact in many, many churches. I've actually been in a church, not as a member, but a regular attender of a church that had a deacon who was kept a deacon in spite of the fact that he was a mason and an alcoholic drunkard. And everyone knew it, but he was a respectable man in the community and it was good politics to have him on the board of deacons.

So, I mean, I'm not just making this stuff up. It's an amazing thing. But, happy is the church that has some living role models that it doesn't sound absurd for them to say, imitate me as I imitate Christ, because they really do imitate Christ and they then are a living mentor for the younger Christians.

And that is what Paul presents himself to be, as he says in Philippians 3, 17, and he says, I want you to join in following my example and note those who walk this way as you have us for a pattern. Also, Philippians 4 and verse 9, he says, The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4, 9, What you've learned from me and received from me and what you heard and saw in me, that is in my life.

You listened, you observed, do that, imitate that, and you will have God on your side. Now, back to 1st Corinthians chapter 4, verse 17. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord and will remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach everywhere in every church.

Paul hadn't been there for a little while. He felt maybe the problem is you're forgetting what I was like. You need to be reminded of my ways in Christ.

Perhaps in my absence and with other teachers coming in, and other role models having passed through and exerting some influence, the clear vision of the model of Christian life that I presented to you is fading from your memory. So, I'm sending Timothy to you. For one thing, Timothy was a good imitator of Paul.

Timothy was a good protegee, a good disciple of Paul. And therefore, Timothy could be a living and visible example to them of all these things, but also, either by his own example or by telling them. Timothy, who spent a lot of time with Paul, could remind them of what they had seen in Paul on earlier occasions, but he felt were maybe needing

to be reminded of, perhaps had forgotten.

Some people feel that the mention here in verse 17 of Timothy being sent sounds as if Paul is closing the letter. In fact, it's kind of generally presumed on the part of commentators that Paul intended to close the letter at this point. And in chapter 5, verse 1, where it says, it's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, that the very abruptness of this tone suggests that as he was closing his letter, a new report came to him which shocked him of misbehavior in the church, and he had to extend the letter in order to answer these points.

that this is false. We can't be sure that this is so, but some have felt that the impression, verses 17 through 21, is that Paul is now winding down the letter. He had said what he wanted to say.

The problem was disunity in the church. That was the main only problem he really wanted to address. But then, before he could get this letter off in the mail, a new report came, probably from the persons mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16, who he names there, Stephanus, chapter 16, 17, Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus.

He says, I'm glad about the coming of these people. For what was lacking on your part, they supply. So apparently this group, Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, may have arrived before Paul sent off his original letter.

The first four chapters could have been written in response to what he had learned from messengers from the household of Chloris, to what he had learned from the household of Chloris. Back in chapter 1, he says, in verse 11, chapter 11, he says, For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloris' household, that there are contentions among you. So it would appear he began writing the letter because of a report that he had received about the church from people of Chloris' household.

But at the end of the letter, he mentions people who have come to him, Stephanus, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, who may be a different group who arrived about the time he finished his first portion of the letter, and that chapter 5 begins a new departure. And as I said, one of the things that has led people to think that is the fact that he mentions at this point he's sending Timothy as if in closing, Timothy is coming to you. And he'll remind you of what I'm not able to remind you in this letter of.

Now he says in verse 18, chapter 4, 18, he says, Now some are puffed up. Proud. He's used that expression back in chapter 4, verse 6. He's going to use it again later in chapter 5 and in chapter 8 and in chapter 13.

Puffed up. Inflated. Inflated artificially.

A person who's inflated is full of air. A balloon looks large and substantial, but it's really not. The balloon is just a thin piece of plastic.

What makes it large is all this air in it. But air is not substantial. It's ethereal.

It's light. It's nothing, really. And pride is that way.

A person in his own sight is large and significant, but he's really just like a balloon puffed up. He's full of air. I mean, he looks bigger than life.

But most of... And that would be in his own opinion. He may be a legend in his own mind. But his self-opinion is inflated artificially.

The stuff that makes him seem so big is just as ethereal and non-substantial as air itself. There's a story from Aesop's Fables about a bullfrog who was impressed when he saw a bull. And the bull was large and strong.

And the frog thought, well, I never get any respect around here. That bull, boy, everyone respects him. No one messes with him.

He's big and strong. I'm just too small. That's my problem.

I need to be... If I want any respect, I need to be big. So he began to inflate himself. He began to puff himself up.

And he got bigger and bigger until he got huge, the size of a basketball. He kept going. Inflating himself.

He was as big as a beach ball. Big, fat, round frog with his little legs sticking out in four directions. He just kept going.

I'm getting there. I'm getting there. His whole goal was to be able to project himself to viewers as someone big like that bull and impress it and to get some respect.

But according to the fable, he popped before he got that big. And then he was nothing. He was artificially enlarged.

And that's how many people are in their own opinion of themselves. That's what pride is. It always involves inflating your opinion of yourself artificially with so much air and not with anything substantial.

Some people were self-inflated. There were people who were really, I think, challenging Paul deliberately, not just forgetting what he was like and accidentally slipping into other patterns, but actually challenging Paul's pattern and saying it isn't the right one. Apollo's had it right, not Paul.

Or maybe it wasn't the Apollo's party. Maybe it was someone else. But it was somebody who found Paul's way less attractive and they were discrediting it.

And saying, you know, Paul, he's not coming back anyway. We need to find our own way

here. We can't just follow this guy, Paul.

He's a Jew. We're Greeks. He can't relate with us culturally.

Maybe he knew the truth about Jesus, but he's not coming back. And we need leaders from among our own ranks. And whether that was happening to a great extent in 1 Corinthians or not, we can't say for sure because there's not as many indicators of it there as there are in 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians, there's a lot of evidence that there were people in the church of Corinth who were jealous of Paul's authority. They were undermining Paul's apostolic authority. And actually, some of them appear to have been presenting themselves as superior apostles.

Although they weren't even, as far as Paul is concerned, real apostles at all. There is an expression that occurs a couple of times in 2 Corinthians. In the Greek, it means super apostles.

When Paul says, I'm not a wit behind the very super apostles. Scholars believe that super apostles is a sarcastic remark of referring to people in the Corinthian church who were putting themselves forward as superior apostles, superior to Paul. That they existed in the church when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians does not seem to be open to dispute.

But whether they were in the church in 1 Corinthians, we don't know for certain, but it seems likely that there is at least the beginning of that attitude among some getting puffed up against Paul. Saying Paul was here. He did a service to the church.

That was then. This is now. Paul's gone.

He's not coming back. We need to be progressive. We've got leaders that God has given us right here in the church.

We've got as much authority as Paul did. We don't have to do it in Paul's way. Let's do it the way we want to do it.

And Paul says, well, there's some people who are like that. They're puffed up in the church. As if I were not coming to you, but I will come to you shortly if the Lord wills.

And I will know not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power for the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. Now, the indication here is that those that were opponents to his methods were men of words. Now, Paul was not bad with words himself.

Paul was well educated. He was a man who could speak with anointing and power and conviction. I mean, the fact that he planted so many churches successfully makes it clear Paul was not deficient in his command of language.

However, as he made it clear in chapter two, at the beginning of chapter two, in verse four, he says, my speech and my preaching. First Corinthians 2.4. My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but with the demonstration of the spirit and of power. There are many people who are eloquent.

There are many people who can string words together in an effective manner and make powerful sentences and make a powerful impression with words. Some of them may be truly anointed people. Paul could do that himself and he was truly anointed.

But there are people who don't have any anointing. Then don't you have to be a Christian to be eloquent? Many Greek orators were great speakers, but weren't even, of course, weren't even saved. The kingdom of God is consistent in something more than just command of the language.

That's what he's saying. The ones who are opposing Paul and puffed up, they were probably good speakers. They could probably cast Christianity in an impressive oratorical mold that gained respect in the community for themselves and for what they were preaching and which they particularly liked to do.

But since Paul didn't, when he came, he didn't come with impressive words. These people who put so much stock in that and who were so gifted in those areas were a little embarrassed by Paul. They just assumed he didn't come back.

They just assumed they could put a more respectable face on Christianity in the eyes of the community and remove the reproach of the cross and so forth by their eloquence and so forth. Now, Paul's not denying that these guys might be good with words. He says the kingdom of God isn't just about it's not just talk.

It's not just oratory. The kingdom of God when it comes legitimately comes with power. Jesus demonstrated that and said so when he cast demons in one case in Matthew 12 out of a man who was dumb and blind, as I recall.

And when the demon was cast out, the blind saw and the dumb spoke. Power. And people were saying, this is surely the son of David, the Messiah.

And to react to that, the Pharisee says, no, he's casting out demons by Beelzebub and Jesus refuting them said, well, you know, if Satan's casting out Satan, then his kingdom is divided and will not stand. But he said, but if I'm casting out demons by the power of God or by the finger of God, Luke says by the spirit of God, Matthew says, if that's what's happening here, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Now, what he's saying is this demonstration of power, casting these demons out, restoring sight to the blind and so forth.

These things are demonstrations of power of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has come in power. And when the kingdom of God comes, sure, the message is

expressed in words, but the power is expressed in other ways, too, in supernatural effects.

And Paul, he knew how to use words, but anyone can use words. I mean, not anyone. Some people can't use words well, but but people who aren't saved can sometimes.

There is not a marked superiority among Christian preachers, for example, and non-Christian orators in terms of oratory skills. But there is a marked difference between an anointed man who can perform signs and wonders in the name of Jesus and a person who can't do those kinds of things. That's what Paul is essentially saying.

These people, they put me down. They think I don't have the goods. They think that they've got a superior method.

And all they have is talk. All they have is their speech abilities. And the kingdom of God is made up of more than that.

It's not just words. It's not just talk. It's power.

And I will come and demonstrate the power. If you wonder whether to follow my example and my trend or that of these other people. Well, just wait till I get there.

I'll show you some power and then you decide who's got the goods. OK, and then he says in verse 21, what do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod or in love and a spirit of gentleness? Now, Paul seems to be making a threat here that might sound like a little different than what I was telling you about him the other day, where I said that his idea of authority was not one of domineering, authoritarian dominion over people, but one of servanthood. Here he talks about coming with a rod as one of the options.

Should I come with a rod? That's like a parent or a slave owner having discipline and insolence in subordinate child or slave with a rod. And Paul is saying, you know, I'm in a position to do this. If necessary, I'll come with a rod.

I'd rather not. I'd rather come in a spirit of gentleness. That's more my manner.

But what do you want? I guess you'll have to decide. If you're self-correcting, I can come gentle. If you don't get this thing straightened out, I'm going to have to straighten it out when I come.

Isn't that kind of authoritarian on Paul's part? Well, as I pointed out in a previous session not long ago, in 2 Corinthians 1, verse 24, Paul says, Not that we have dominion over your faith, but we're fellow workers for your joy, for by faith you stand. Paul did not see himself as having dominion over them, although he certainly, and without question, had an office of dignity and authority in the body of Christ as an apostle. Yet his exercise of authority was that of a helper and a servant largely.

It was not his way, generally speaking, to come bearing a rod. However, he had said earlier, and he's continuing the imagery here, in verse 15, he said, You don't have many fathers. In Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel.

I mean, if children don't correct themselves, then it's the place of the father to do it, of a parent to do it. And while Paul may sound like he's getting heavy-handed here by saying, Shall I come with a rod? Of course, he's not talking about coming with a literal rod and literally beating people up. He's talking about coming with rebukes, with shaming them with decrying their behavior.

It's shameful enough to get a letter from him of this kind of rebuke, but it would be even more so if he was present looking them in the eye and telling them how wrong they are. That's the kind of rod he's talking about. The discipline he's talking about is a discipline that would be exercised through his preaching and exhortation and rebukes rather than through authoritarian physical violence or whatever.

Now, Paul doesn't mind wielding authority if basically he's acting in the person of Christ. And apostles were especially in the position to be able to do that because that's what apostleship means. One who is sent to act in the place of Christ.

And so Paul often, though it went against his preferences and his grain, he gets severe with his words sometimes and says the things that Christ himself would have to say to these people. And there's no one more qualified to say it than an apostle. But at the same time, Paul didn't choose, he didn't prefer to be authoritarian as he makes clear in a number of places.

But he's not going to be negligent either in his responsibility in this area if his children are strained and he must do the thing Christ would do. What did Christ do when he came in front of the money changers in the temple? But he made a whip of small cords and took to charge basically. He drove out the misbehavior.

And that's the kind of thing Paul would have to do as Christ's agent in the church. If he finds misbehavior and arrogance and corruption and so forth, he's going to have to come in and clean up the house. And that's what he threatens to do if they don't clean it up themselves.

But he'd rather come the other way in love and in a spirit of gentleness. Of course, we don't know how he came because we don't read of him ever going there again after the writing of this. But we can tell from 2 Corinthians when we get to that, that Paul had a stormy relationship with this church.

At least, maybe not initially. He did spend 18 months there when he first founded the church and we don't read of there being any problems between him and the church members in that year and a half that he lived there. But it would appear that... And I

don't know to what degree Apollos was the spark of this.

I don't think Paul intended any evil against Apollos. I think they were friendly. I think they may have operated on different philosophies to a certain extent, but I don't think there was any animosity between them at all.

But it's possible that what Apollos began, which was putting it in the minds of people, not by saying so, but by demonstrating that there are different ways of doing things than the way Paul did it. It may have opened the door for people to become critical about Paul in other ways. And eventually, he really had some serious problems on his hands in his relationship with that church.

That comes up far more in 2 Corinthians than in this epistle. But there's some hint of it here. In the close of chapter 4, where he says, you know, some people are puffed up.

They're acting in a way they wouldn't act if they expected me to show up. Because when I show up, I can take charge. I can clean house.

And I will if I need to. Their puffed up behavior is just as people would act if I wasn't coming. But I am.

If the Lord wills, I will come to you. And then we'll examine the words of these people and their power if they have any. And if necessary, I'll have to bring a rod of correction and clean house.

Okay? And that's the end of chapter 4. And the whole flavor of the epistle in some respects changes at chapter 5, where Paul begins to express his outrage about certain horrendous things that were going on in the church that ought not to be so.