

1 Corinthians Series #13  
"Godly Imitation" - 1 Cor. 4:14-21

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Tough Letters

1. You go get the mail
  - a. find letter from a distant friend
  - b. open it - begin reading
2. (Open letter and do it)
3. How would you feel?
  - a. warm feelings of affection?
  - b. just real excited to write back?
  - c. wish they'd come for a short stay?
  - d. probably not!

B. Today

1. That is pretty much where we are in 1 Corinthians
  - a. Paul has sent them a harsh letter
  - b. has called them spiritually immature, carnal, and to top it off, arrogant.
2. Today = We'll see WHY Paul is so harsh with them

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 14-15

*14* I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn *you*.

*15* For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *you do not have* many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

1. Paul has been hard on them
  - a. called them carnal
  - b. called them immature
  - c. called them proud and arrogant
  - d. called them worldly
2. But his goal was not to put them down or 'diss them
3. He was not a 1st Century Don Rickles responding to hecklers at the Corinthians Comedy Club
4. He said these things because he felt spiritually responsible for them
5. Paul had begun the work there in Corinth
  - a. he had led many of them to the faith
  - b. he was their spiritual father
  - c. so he had a responsibility to them to make sure they grew up into mature believers
  - d. he was not like so many modern evangelists who

- blow in and blow out
6. Paul looked at the Corinthians, in spite of all their shortcomings, as his BELOVED children
    - a. he loved them
    - b. he cared deeply for them
    - c. why then did he speak so harshly and even sarcastically to them?
      - 1) because in their immaturity, they had become hard
      - 2) pride had hardened them to his authority
      - 3) they were beginning to think themselves to be superior to Paul
      - 4) this happens with children
        - when young, mom and dad seem so wise; they seem to know everything
        - then at about 10 & 11, mom and dad become sort of old-fashioned
        - in the teens years, parents are totally out of touch with reality; living in the stone age
        - early twenties, parents seem to be getting some of their prior wisdom back
        - by the time a son or daughter is in their 30's mom and dad have fully regained their vast store of wisdom
      - 5) the Corinthians thought they had passed Paul in the things of the Spirit
      - 6) actually, they were horrible immature and proud
      - 7) and that is why Paul is so hard on them
        - he had to break through that rough exterior
        - only sarcasm would snap them out of their spiritual blindness
      - 8) Jesus used this same tactic with the Pharisees
        - He was all compassion and mercy with those who admitted they needed help
        - but with the proud, He was scathing in His criticism
7. So Paul writes, "I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you."
  - a. his goal was to keep them from falling away from Christ
  - b. so he warns them
  - c. warn = nouthetin; to call to mind
    - 1) it is a parenting word
    - 2) what a mother or father does as they train their children
    - 3) when they see behavior that will end in ruin, they correct it by warning

8. Paul had a unique relationship to the Corinthians
  - a. he really was their spiritual father because he is the one who had attended their spiritual birth
  - b. there were a lot of teachers there in Corinth
  - c. but they could only have one father, and that was Paul
  - d. as any good father, he yearned for them to grow up strong in the Lord
  - e. when word reached him about their failure, he sent them a strongly worded warning

B. V. 16

16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

1. What a statement!!!
2. To think that anyone would dare to tell others to imitate them, and by so doing they would be living a life pleasing to God, is mind-blowing!
3. But that is what Paul does here
  - a. he is not bragging = "Hey - I'm cool!!!"
  - b. he writes this with a sincere confidence that he is a good example of a believer
4. He also says it as a good father
5. You see, children first learn by imitation; they do not understand spoken instructions
  - a. Karesse & the fork
    - 1) at first just held it
    - 2) now, she uses it
  - b. she only understands a few simple words; so can't instruct her
  - c. but she learns from the examples around her; brothers, Lynn & I
  - d. not till she's older that we will be able to really instruct her
6. So it is in the Christian life
  - a. new believers don't have all the answers to every doctrinal position of the Christian life
  - b. much of what they do is learned by the example of others
    - 1) if the examples are good, better chance of having a closer walk with Christ
    - 2) if examples are bad, poor chance of having a close walk with the Lord
  - c. this is why home groups are so important; they allow us to see how mature believers live in real life - at home

7. Paul says, "Imitate me!"
  - a. 1 Corinthians 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.
  - b. imitate = mimic; to copy the actions of another
  - c. without flinching Paul could not only say, "Do as I say." He could say, "Do as I do!"
8. How many of us can say the same thing?
  - a. how comfortable would we be with having another Christian spend a month being our shadow?
  - b. 24 hours a day; watching, listening?
9. Or - let's turn this around: How many people are there that you know that live such a close walk with God you would like to imitate them?
  - a. Paul said, "Imitate me"
  - b. how many people today are saying that?
  - c. who live lives a demonstrated godliness
    - 1) not momentary flashes of glory
    - 2) but who live a life of consistent, humble faith
  - d. where are the Paul's of today?
  - e. really - this is what each of us should be endeavoring to be able to say as we have the opportunity to influence others for Christ

C. V. 17

17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

1. Paul wasn't there in Corinth, so how were they to imitate him?
2. The solution was to send Timothy
  - a. Tim was one of Paul's spiritual sons who had followed him closely
  - b. Tim had learned to imitate Paul as Paul followed Christ
  - c. as a result, Tim had established his own, unique walk with Christ
  - d. he could now go to the Corinthians as a faithful representative of Paul's life and walk
  - e. by imitating Tim, the Corinthians would be imitating Paul, and thus, learning to walk with the Lord Jesus
3. Again, I see this as a record of Paul's genius in spreading the gospel and leaving behind him a work that would go on long after he was gone.
  - a. he did not live and minister for his own glory and fame

- b. he ministered for the glory of Christ
  - c. he knew that he needed to plan for the future
  - d. so he poured his life into a select group of men  
would could carry on long after he was gone.
  - e. in this, Paul merely followed in the steps of Jesus,  
for this is what Jesus did
    - 1) he taught the masses, but he selected 12 to pour  
his life into
    - 2) when he left, he told that small group of men to do  
the same thing he had done with them
  - f. Paul was faithful to that command
    - 1) he preached to the multitudes, but he disciplined  
and trained only a small group of men to  
carry on the work of building the church
    - 2) then he told them to do the same thing he had  
done
    - 3) 2 Timothy 2:2 "And the things that you have  
heard from me among many witnesses, commit  
these to faithful men who will be able to teach  
others also."
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This is something Calvary Chapel needs to take serious thought of.  
 For most of our history - small group; able to know everyone.  
 That is changing.  
 Church growing  
 I have had to realize can't know everyone like I did.  
 But clear God wants the church to grow.  
 So, what are we to do?  
 Stay true to the pattern of ministry God reveals to us in the  
 ministry of Jesus and Paul.  
 Disciple and train men who can disciple and train others.  
 That is the main reason why we decided to drop the radio  
 program.  
 The time has come in earnest for me as Pastor to teach the whole  
 flock but to train a group of men who will stay in close  
 touch with the rest of the body.

Important this be emphasized: This is not some kind of a secular  
 management plan.  
 This is precisely what we see as the NT pattern of ministry.  
 We see it here.  
 Paul said, "Imitate me." Then he sent Timothy.

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D. Vs. 18-20

18 Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.

19 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.

20 For the kingdom of God *is* not in word but in power.

1. There were some in Corinth who were haughty & proud and who looked with disdain on Paul
2. They were men and women who thought they were something special and wanted everyone else to think them so
3. They spoke in fancy words and had great sounding arguments but their lives were void of content
4. They were all talk - no walk
5. So Paul says in v. 20, "For the kingdom of God *is* not in word but in power."
6. The gospel is not the mere words of man; it is the Word of God that transforms
7. Jesus said that many would come in His name
  - a. but not all were really His servants
  - b. they might have great sounding words
  - c. but Jesus said, "By their fruit you will know them."

E. V.21

21 What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

1. Every parent knows that there comes a time when a wayward child needs to be disciplined
  - a. discipline is a part of child-raising
  - b. you teach and train
  - c. you warn of the consequences of disobedience
  - d. if they disobey, you discipline them
  - e. not because you enjoy it, but because you love them and as the wise sage you are, you know that rebellion and disobedience, if not overcome, leads to great harm and destruction
  - f. it is not so much the specific disobedience you are disciplining them for as it is the whole issue of disobedience
2. Consistent, prompt and careful discipline is a sign, not of abuse, but of love.
  - a. Prov 13:24 He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him promptly.
  - b. Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; 12 For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son *in whom* he delights.

3. Paul, as a good spiritual father, loved the Corinthians
  - a. their carnality and pride called for correction
  - b. in ch. 5 we learn that he had already sent them a letter
  - c. but it did no good
  - d. word reached him that there were still serious problems
  - e. so he writes again and tells them that if they don't repent, he will come to them with the rod of correction
  - f. of course he is speaking metaphorically
4. The choice is theirs; do they want him to come with stern words of discipline, or in tender instruction?
5. Church discipline has been rather brutal at some times and places: Puritan churches - tithing men

### III. CONCLUSION

- A. Good Place To End
  1. A healthy church is NOT one where discipline never takes place but where it is administered consistently, promptly, and carefully
  2. We must not be afraid of discipline
  3. Rather, we must see it is a normal part of growing up together in Christ
  4. And as we grow, there will be times and seasons where together we will face the difficult challenge of church discipline
- B. If Paul Were To Write Us?
  1. What words would he have for us?
  2. If he came to us, would he have to come with the rod or could he come in a spirit of gentleness?
  3. Actually, we can answer that question.
    - a. because Paul's standard of judgment was the word of God
    - b. 2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,
    - c. God has written a letter to us, this is it!