

Sermon: How the Church Ought to Relate to Her Leadership

Text: [I Corinthians 4:1-21 ESV](#)

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Introduction: This chapter in I Corinthians brings to a close the discussion about division in the church. It seems to me that Paul offers the Corinthians a solution in [verse 16](#): ¹⁶Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

Illus. Imitation is said to be the “highest form of flattery.” It is also how we learn.

Not everyone should say “do as I do.” It is easy to say: “do as I say.” But the Apostle Paul had the character to back up his words. He is telling the church not to form cliques or alliances that puts this person against another, don’t judge another’s work for Christ.

There needs to be a reality check about what we are to be as Christians. We are not to be self-important, but important to God and each other. There certainly is no place for arrogance or being “puffed up” ([KJV, ESV](#)), and being all full of “pride” ([NIV](#)).

[I Corinthians 4:1-5 ESV](#) ¹ This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. ³ But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴ For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

If we imitate Paul, we will imitate his:

I. Position of Responsibility

And by position I mean his roles. Like him, we are to be:

A. Servants - this word in [verse 1](#) is found often, but is not always translated this way from the same Greek word. There is *diakonos*, *doulos*, and here we have *ὑπηρέτης* which is sometimes rendered minister or helper, but here servant. It literally means underrower. This was the person who was rowing on the lower bank of a trireme (Roman galley or warship). “Some commentators have wished...to make it a picture of Christ as the pilot who directs the course of the ship and Paul as the servant who accepts the orders of the pilot, and labours only as his Master directs” (Barclay, p.40).

B. Stewards - could also be translated “overseer” in **verse 2**. So you can see the possible play on words here. Paul was to be an underrower, and at the same time, an overseer.

No matter what a person’s position is in the church, he is still to be under the control of the Head of the Church. Even though we are family (brothers/sisters), the relationship is still Master-Slave for all of us. We are ALL slaves each with his own set of responsibilities.

We are to be:

C. Guides - or teachers. Even in the Greek culture a teacher was usually a slave. In **verse 15** it is translated “guardians”(NIV) and instructors (KJV). Here the word is *pedagogue* (lit. a teacher of children). Even though the Corinthians had not had 10,000 teachers literally (KJV, NIV), but countless (ESV) (v.15), they have been influenced by many people and experiences. A teacher always needs a student who is *willing* to be taught. Some people are like adolescents who think they know everything. Yet Paul reminds them that it is he who has cared about them just like a...

D. Father - (v.16) -A father is to provide a good example as well as good teaching even through others he has taught - like Timothy here. About Timothy, Paul says: **Philippians 2:20-22 ESV** ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

Timothy is to remind them of Paul’s way of life. This word “way” has as much to do with conduct and literally the path one takes as it does the direction one is going. Everyone is on a path. The question is to where are you headed and are you following “good” examples? Movement is one way to define life, but direction is also important.

Paul insists that he is consistent in his life. He does not teach one thing and do the other.

We can imitate Paul even as an *Apostle* (at least in the sense of the word) - as one who is sent with a message. If we imitate Paul, we will also imitate his:

II. Attitude

I Corinthians 4:6-7 ESV ⁶ I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. ⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

A. Humility

Pride has no place in the Christian's life. Why?
Because everything is a gift by God. Elaborate...

Faith is a gift

Repentance is a gift

Our salvation is a gift

The Holy Spirit is a gift.... as well as our spiritual gifts chosen for us by God.

Paul goes on here in the text to make a comparison between the apostles and these puffed up, arrogant Corinthians.

I Corinthians 4:8-13 ESV ⁸ Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! ⁹ For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. ¹¹ To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, ¹² and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

The Corinthians claim to be kings. They thought they had arrived spiritually.

The apostles were being made a spectacle of (ridiculed by the world) sometimes in arenas where they were made sport of before being killed.

The Corinthians claimed to be wise, strong, honored (**v.10ff.**)

The apostles were looked at as fools for Christ, weak and dishonored mostly because of their odd behavior as the world viewed it.

The apostles lived with hunger and thirst, poorly clothed, having to work very hard to even survive. Yet that was not as strange as their reaction to being hurt. Paul says in **verse 12b-13**, When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; ¹³ when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like...

the scum of the world, - περικαθαρμα - that which is cleansed all around, that which is removed as a result of a thorough cleansing; that is, dirt, filth. The word was also used of condemned criminals of the lowest class who were sacrificed as offerings for the cleansing of a city.

the refuse of all things. περιψημα - that which is removed by the process of cleaning dirt off, scouring, scum. The previous word indicates a “rinsing,” this word indicates a “scraping” of a dirty vessel. It was used in the papyri in a letter greeting conveying the idea of “your humble devoted servant” (MM) - Rienecker, pp.397-98.

No matter what the world may think or do with us, those who would be like Paul will always want to:

B. Please *God* and be faithful by (in) God’s judgment.

Following God may put us at odds with the majority of people. Doing God’s will may not be popular, but we must not be swayed by human opinion.

As far as attitudes go, does it matter why we do things? **Matthew 6** may shed some light on this. **Matthew 6:1-13 ESV** ¹ “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. ² “Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

The Lord's Prayer

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹ Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.[a] ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done,[b] on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,[c] ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.[d]

Footnotes: [a] **Matthew 6:9** Or Let your name be kept holy, or Let your name be treated with reverence

[b] **Matthew 6:10** Or Let your kingdom come, let your will be done

[c] **Matthew 6:11** Or our bread for tomorrow

[d] **Matthew 6:13** Or the evil one; some manuscripts add For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen

Motives *are* important, but very difficult to judge.

We are NOT to be each other's judge. Why is that? - blind spots, sometimes

1. Judging others is problematic because we don't know another's heart.
2. Judging oneself is still imperfect because of the unreliability of the conscience.
3. God judging man is the only accurate evaluation that can be made.

If we imitate Paul, though, we will:

C. Never be complacent.

Paul struggled in the Christian walk to the very end. He was never satisfied. Paul never thought that he had arrived or that he was better than others.

There is another way to describe a complacent church. John uses the word "lukewarm" in his letter to the Laodicean church in the book of Revelation. They were in danger of passing out of existence. Jesus, the Head of the church said so.

Complacent people do not care about quality. (It's good enough, they say.)

Complacent people do not care about learning more about God's word, prayer, spiritual disciplines, or evangelism.

Complacent people don't care about standards of behavior, morals or ethics. In fact, Paul addresses this problem further in the next few chapters. The church had become so complacent they allowed immorality IN the church worse than what the world would even put up with.

Complacent people just don't care. And you can't be a Christian and not care!

If we imitate Paul, we will imitate his:

III. Behavior

A. As a father

He loves his children even by the use of discipline.

He had helped bring them into the Kingdom of God.

B. He was responsible for providing a proper model.

Paul gave them a model to imitate even though it was much different than the world's standards. How many of us can say we are like Paul? How many of us can say: live like me; follow my example as a Christian?

We may be a spectacle (Greek word is *theatre*) like its says in **verse 9**. People are watching us and how we will respond. And not only people around us here, but even those in the heavenly realm. People in the world may laugh at us and think we are fools, but the Hebrew writer tells us that we have a cloud of witnesses who are observing us, cheering us on to encourage us in this cosmic conflict of good and evil.

Hebrews 12:1-6 ESV ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

Conclusion: Some problems in the church never change. What were problems almost 2000 years ago still exist today. One of the problems in the contemporary church is its selection of things to imitate. Leon Morris quotes Findlay: This church is on dangerously good terms with the world.” p. 78, Tyndale NTC

The church today still seems unwilling to speak up on controversial issues for fear of ridicule by the world. Elaborate...homosexuality, right to life, inerrancy, marriage, etc.

Romans 12:1-2 ESV ¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

I like what Joseph Gettys said in his little booklet “How to Study I Corinthians,” produced by John Knox Press, Richmond, Virginia: “...a false evaluation of self led to self-trust and to self-satisfaction, all nurtured in pride and all leaving God out of account.”

The Corinthians were judging others, but God would judge them, and God will judge us. I pray we are following God's best examples, not man's feeble efforts at perfection.

James 4:1-6 ESV **1** What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? **2** You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. **4** You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **5** Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? **6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."