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1 Corinthians 4:6-21
Paul Loves Them Sternly

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Let's turn to 1 Corinthians 4:6 as we continue Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Just a reminder, Paul had started this church and had spent 18 months there, really, on his second missionary journey. The Lord had met Paul, had actually spoken to Paul. He was very discouraged. Things had not gone well since they had arrived in Europe: he'd been chased out of town, beaten up in places, thrown in prison, and so he was really discouraged. And he was without his friends who had sent him ahead, and so he sat just really despondent. And it wasn't really until his friends arrived that he began to feel encouraged at all. But the Lord came and said to him, "Look, this is a city I have a lot of souls, and I want to reach them. I'll protect you. Nothing's going to harm you." And, indeed, for the year and a half that he spent there planting the church, nothing did. In fact, if you read the book of Acts, there're great miracles that God performed on behalf of Paul's ministry and the people there.

So, it's been years now since Paul's been there. He's in Ephesus on his third missionary journey - planting a church for three years - when he starts to get wind of how badly things were going in the church. There were some leaders who had been kind of house pastors, if you will, that came to him and said, "Oh, there's a lot of disarray." There were three gentlemen from this church that came to Paul in Ephesus and began to ask a lot of questions. And the words came across: there were divisions, and there was upheaval, there was a lot of carnality, the people weren't really walking with the Lord and all. And so Paul.....it broke his heart. This was a church he had started and founded and watched grow and watched the Lord do a great work. And so Paul wrote them two letters that we have, one that we do not have (that is mentioned in the first letter here). But, needless to say, he was all concerned for them, but he was stuck in Ephesus at the time, ministering, and so he wanted to write to them.

And if you've been with us since we started, the first nine verses of chapter 1 are very positive. Paul was discouraged, but yet the Lord had started a work; he'd seen it in the lives of the people, and he was sure that God would fix whatever was broken, and yet the things that he heard were very discouraging. But he starts off with a very optimistic tone. He realized that they were not doing well. They were planted in a city that was as carnal as could be. Some of that city had gotten into the church. And so Paul began to pray, but very encouraged.

Beginning in verse 10 of chapter 1 – and all the way to the end of this chapter today – Paul deals with the division that was taking place in the church. And most of the division was taking place around people – pastors. Paul had been there, Apollos had been there, Peter had been there. And so these folks were taking sides and fighting with each other, and Paul couldn't believe that this was what was dividing the church. Now there were a lot of other problems. In fact, starting in chapter 5 and going forward

to about chapter 12, Paul, every chapter, deals with a problem. This was a very weak and very challenged church. The Lord was obviously still working – even as He works with us when we're weak – but this was not a good place to be. And yet Paul had great hopes, and certainly the letters that you read from him are very personal, and they're very heartfelt. He wrote like a pastor who cared for the flock.

So, he deals with this issue of division first beginning, like I said, in chapter 1:10. And Paul talked to them about the wisdom of God and how that the wisdom of the world follows that line of, "I'll stand behind this guy," or, "He's my favorite," and, "I don't like him as much," and, "This guy's far better." And Paul said, "What in the world has gone on with you?! You're talking like the world does. You're arguing like people in the world. You have worldly wisdom." And Paul said, "You guys are just a bunch of carnal Christians. You should have grown up by now in these many years. You should have had it right, but here are all these symptoms of envy and division and strife." And Paul reminded them that one day the Lord was coming to judge the heart, and he said, "When the Lord comes, then we'll get our rewards from Him. He'll judge correctly. But, look, how in the world did you get to where you thought you were going? The Lord has brought us all together here. We all got in through the same door. So how can we start choosing sides at this point? That's a really worldly way to view life, if you will." And Paul, especially in chapter 3, talked about taking sides and how one would water and the other would plant and God would give the increase. But it always ended up where the Lord is. You know, there will be people that you love listening to, others that maybe don't do much for you, but that hardly matters. We need all of those folks to reach everyone that God has intended on reaching. So Paul reminded them often that this.....in fact, in the last study we did two weeks ago, Paul talked to them about the cure for division is that you see yourself clearly, you see others clearly, and you have a right view of the Lord.

Well, tonight, as we're going to finish, Lord be willing, from verse 6 down to verse 21, this last portion that Paul stays on that one topic before next week turning to immorality, in chapter 6 to civil affairs, in chapter 7 marriage and divorce and what does God have to say about it. Every chapter brings us closer, I think, to the things that were problematic in the church.

But Paul will finish this idea of childlike behavior by saying, "Pride motivates schisms," that he loved these saints enough to write to them. But I'll tell you what – these verses kind of lay down the law. In fact, Paul will end up by saying to them at the end, "Do you want me to show up angry, or would you like me to show up with a hug? Because, either way, I'm comin', and this isn't going to go well." Paul loved them. We call this study "Paul Loves Them Sternly." He did treat them like a parent, and he talked to them pretty straight-up.

So let's start in verse 6 of chapter 4. He had ended by saying, "Don't judge anything until the Lord comes, who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness everyone will get their praise from the Lord" and all. "It's a small thing you judge me; wait until the Lord comes" and all. So verse 6 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 the other.” Paul had just said back in verse 5 about the Lord coming to bring judgment and that we would have to stand before Him, and Paul begins in verse 6 by literally saying, “We’re judging by the wrong standards anyway. When the Lord comes, it’ll be righteous judgment.” But what’s happening in the church, at least in the Corinthian church, they were comparing themselves with each other, and that’s not a good idea. You know, if you want to compare yourself with someone, go stand next to Jesus and see how you look. In fact, ask other people how you look standing next to Jesus. You’ll get the same answers I think I would probably give you as well.

So they were comparing themselves with one another, and they had the wrong motive. He said they were being “puffed up,” they were being filled with an attitude. And so Paul says to them, “Look, don’t think anymore than what is written,” or, in other words, adopt a view of life and those around you in a way that you see clearly what’s going on here. And for the church, it was a lot of upheaval centered about people and favoritism and choosing sides.

Paul started off in verse 6 by saying, “I have figuratively used this for me and Apollos to illustrate to you that the way you get delivered from division is you see things for what they truly are.” And so he says, “Don’t think beyond what’s written.” It sounds like, at least the way it is written in Greek, that “beyond what is written” sounds almost like a proverbial phrase. I don’t know if that’s true, if it was used in the Corinthian area at the time. But it’s almost like saying “stick with the book” or “look at yourself” or “keep your opinions or attitudes lined up with what God has said” as opposed to adopting these worldly ideas of who’s better, who’s more famous, who’s more intelligent, who speaks better, and choosing, if you will, sides based on those things. Jeremiah, when he was writing there in chapter 17:9, said, of us, that our hearts are dreadfully deceitful above all things, desperately wicked, who can know them? That’s not a good analysis of you without God. But it’s true.....we are.....there’s no depth that we can find if we’re going to go at it alone without God’s direction and wisdom.

When Eliphaz spoke to Job, in chapter 15:14-16, he said to Job, “What is man, that he could be pure? And he who is born of a woman, that he could be righteous? If God puts no trust in His saints, and the heavens are not pure in His sight, how much less man, who is abominable and filthy, who drinks iniquity like water!” Pretty heavy-duty description of sin, right? “God puts no trust in His saints,” even though He knows us, He’s forgiven us. And so that’s what Paul’s idea is. “Don’t think beyond,” if you will, “what is written.” Man is lost without God’s help. I think you can probably make a list – if you’ve been around the church for a while or you’ve been in your Bible for a while – of the changes that took place in folks when they purely and finally recognized who the Lord was in relation to who they were. Whether it is Peter who said, “Get out of the boat, Lord, I’m not worthy” (Luke 5:8). Or Isaiah that just saw the LORD high and lifted up and he just fell on his face and began to confess the sinfulness of his life (Isaiah 6:1-5). Or Jacob, there in Genesis 32:9-10, he came back from being years away from his family and said, “LORD, I’m not worthy of the least of Your mercies and the truth that You’ve taught me. I crossed the Jordan with a staff. I’m coming back with two

companies.” You find hundreds of folks who changed their opinions about a lot of things – including the Lord – when they truly see who He is. And I think Paul’s call to this church – seven or eight years old now – is, “Why don’t you stop for a minute and think about what you see in the Scriptures in regards to you and your relationship to God?”

Paul would write, in 2 Corinthians 3:5 to them, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.” In other words, anything we have and can do, God has given us. So we should all applaud the work of God in each other’s lives. But none of us should walk around going, “Ah, I’m pretty good at that.” Because you’re not. You’ve been blessed with God’s blessing. But that isn’t the way that the Corinthians saw themselves. We read of Jesus emptying Himself. The Bible says (Philippians 2:7), “He made Himself of no reputation so that He could save us.” The One who could easily boast did not. He came and humbled Himself to accomplish His Father’s will. But these guys didn’t see themselves that way, and they didn’t see the group that they picked to stand with and the pastor they chose that way either.

“That none of you,” we read, “may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.” The word “puffed up” means exactly what it says. Swollen with pride. Supposedly here a justified attitude. “Look, I’m puffed up....not for myself, for my group leader” whoever that might be. And Paul said, “No, no. That’s all pride, and God hates it.”

So he says, in verse 7, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” This is the proverbial who, what and why. Who, what and why. Who made you to differ? The word “differ” is “diakrinos.” It means to be distinct or set apart. I think the NIV calls it “who regards you as superior?” Who made you different? Well, the Lord did. I read a funny story the other day. I liked it. It was a young pastor who had been hired on to the staff where the pastor had been there for years. And, as they were praying, the young pastor said to the senior pastor, “Just pray that I stay humble,” and the senior pastor responded, “What have you got to be proud about?” Well, that’s a good question when you’re just startin’ off, isn’t it? So “who makes you different?” Then, what do you have that you didn’t receive? Of all of the distinctive or different qualities or gifts that attract others to you, how did you come up with them? Did you earn them? Did you work hard for them? Did you buy them, trade for them? Or are they simply gifted to you? And, finally, if you did indeed receive them, here’s the why. Why do you boast as if somehow you didn’t receive them? If you admit that all that you have of benefit or blessings or talent are God’s gift to you, you can’t take any credit. You can say to the worship leader, “Oh, you have such a beautiful voice, you help me in my worship, you encourage me to sing because I don’t have such a beautiful voice. But I’ll sing under you.” If the worship leader goes, “Oh, thank you, I worked for years on that, that’s who I am,” their reward goes right out the window. Because they have that gift from God. Have you ever seen a 10-year-old virtuoso on a violin and just go, “How?! What? Where?” Well, we know where that comes from whether they’ll acknowledge it or not. Everything we have God’s given to us, isn’t it? Your gifts are

gifts from God. We need your gifts. One of the reasons we always encourage people to plug into church is the church functions best when all of the gifts are working and nobody's kind of dragging their way around.

But if we are given by the Lord these gifts, and we can take no credit, how can that cause division, then, among us or become a point of bragging? If you want to boast, boast in the Lord. "Look what God did in my life! I'm surprised He would use me and use you. But He does." Which is a pretty excellent, I think, rationale to write to a church in turmoil, especially this division and side-taking that was going on. Where did your worth and your value and your effectiveness come from?

We have some friends that are in the mission field in China. I don't know what possessed them to go there. They meet with the underground church. They're constantly in fear of their lives. If they're found, they're probably going to be in prison. They've been there 15 years, and they love it. And I said, "You're nuts!" (Laughing) One of our missionaries that we support invited me to go to Iran two years ago. "You want to go to Iran? We're going to sneak across the border and go teach a bunch of pastors." And I went, "Nope!" (Laughing) And I didn't even pray about it. I just said, "Nope!" right away. (Laughing) "Not my calling. Good luck, buddy. We'll be praying for you." And he went with great joy, and he's been back three or four times since. Where does that come from? That's God's work in their heart.

Whatever your desires, whatever God is doing in your life, that's God's work in you. And if we all do what God calls us to do, the church'll be great, and we can all applaud God's work in the individual life. Not as someone who's better than another but just someone who is being faithful to his calling. Your talent, your ability. Why do you boast? And why would any group make more value out of you as if somehow God favored you more or loved you more or made you more important or necessary or needful? You're not! He does the work.

Paul would write.....well, we'll get to it in chapter 12 which'll be a while, but.....Paul writes in chapter 12:20-23, "Indeed you're many members and yet you're one body. The eye can't say to your hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.'" In fact, Paul goes on to say, "The members that seem to be the weaker are of greater necessity, and yet we bestow honor on some more than others." Look, your heart, your lungs, those are fairly important. You don't even see them. But your face, your makeup, your hair, woooo. You can almost get along without all that stuff. Well, you can get along without hair. I'll tell you that right now. (Laughing) You may not like it, but it's.....I'm lookin' forward to having hair. You know, Paul said, "You're so quick to bestow the greatest honor on things that have the least value." We judge so poorly.

These are great verses to keep in mind if you are in a ministry or in a group of ministries that are enjoying God's blessings. You should keep your eye on the Giver because He can shut it down in a minute. And never presume that you're more important than the next guy. "Oh, I wish I could preach like you." You don't want to preach like me. I just

need to do the best I can to answer to the Lord for the gifts He's given to me. But we have ushers here and Sunday school teachers and nursery workers and janitors and maintenance crews and sound folks and book store volunteers and a lot of people that work in the café. If they are faithful to do what God has given to them, everyone gets a full reward, and the church does well, and the Lord is honored. So be careful when you begin to stand with one over the other and somehow place greater value on one thing than another. You can't all be Billy Graham or Greg Laurie. You can't. It's not what you're called to. Just do what God calls you to. But that was the big issue in this very carnal church. They were judging like the world does. "You're talented, you're not. You're important, you're not. You're great, you're not. We're better than you." And it just caused tremendous problems.

He says, in verse 8, "You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us – and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!" To unmask their conceit and selfish (kind of) sinful, childish position, I think Paul, here, heaps on sarcastic praise. I've always said it's a gift of the Spirit – sarcasm. (Pastor Jack laughs) My wife doesn't believe it, but here's another example right here. Because I think, in very satirical kind of tones, Paul voices what they actually felt about themselves. Paul pricked their bubble, "Oh, yeah, you're full, you're rich, you're ruling without us like kings. Oh, you guys are all in charge!" You remember when the Lord wrote that letter to the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:17, He said, "Because you say, 'I'm wealthy and in need of nothing,' you don't know you're wretched and poor and naked and miserable and blind.'" And I think Paul was just trying to be sarcastic to kind of shake their tree. "Oh, yeah, you're kings, you're reigning, some of you sitting on the throne. You're so important. You've got a few adherents. But, look, that's a grand delusion." However, Paul had talked about the judgment seat of Christ was coming, then it would be all sorted out, and then these fully-satisfied, smug folks who were satisfied with the opinions of others – "we all like him the best" – would consider what the Lord said. And so Paul's sarcastic, and then he says, "I wish you were reigning because if you're reigning that means the Lord's here, and I could reign with you! It would be the end of all this nonsense." But they were using self-glory, using God's gifts to beat each other over the head and cause division. Some kingdom citizens they were turning out to be. And this was a growing church in a very difficult place.

So Paul goes on, in verse 9, "For I think that 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!" Paul compares the aspirations of these filled with self-importance with the reality of his life and that of the other apostles. The apostles, rather than developing fan clubs and being heroes to their admirers, he said, "God put us on display. We are men that are condemned to death in the world." The word "spectacle" is the Greek word... or our English word "theater" comes from it. So, "We're put out on display. We're spectacles. The world doesn't cheer us, join us, stand with us. No, no, no. We are isolated even from the world." In fact, the word "spectacle," at least in Greek, is a word that was used of those who would go to the colosseum to be marched out to feed the lions after the

gladiators were done fighting. It was kind of a filler, where they would just throw some Christians to the lions, make a spectacle. No one seemed to care. They looked at them mockingly. It hardly sounds like a glorious place to be. “You want to be great, take sides? How ‘bout you stand with us? We’re on our way to death. We’re laughingstocks. We’re pushovers. Even the angels shake their heads at what we’re going through. You want to be in Paul’s group? You aspire to do this?” He was beaten and ridiculed and imprisoned, and down the road, he was executed simply for ministering God’s Word to people – in love, with boldness – and twenty years of being on the road, and they killed him for it. “You guys want to fight about it? ‘I like Paul, I like Apollos. Who baptized you? Well I’m not sure, but we’re the best group.’” Paul goes, “You got to be kidding me.” Those were the grim facts and the difficulties that awaited them. James had already been killed. Peter had barely escaped being killed; he got out the night before. Paul had had several attempts on his life, and he was still facing them every day.

And so, again, sarcasm. Verse 10, “We are fools, you’re the wise ones! We’re weak, you’re strong! We’re dishonored, but you are very distinguished!” “Look, I want you to realize,” Paul says, “that the cost of reaching the lost is being seen as a fool by the world. They see us as weak men. We are held in dishonor while you all vie for position and honor. To be seen as wise and strong, you’re actually setting Jesus aside.” So Paul, in sarcasm, I think, shames the saints. “We’re being spit out, and you fight amongst yourselves about who is wise. Let me tell you the road that we live on.”

And he mentions, here in verse 11, “To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.” Paul says, “Me and the apostles” (these missionaries that were constantly on the road) “paid a substantial cost for their ministries.” There wasn’t any honor here. There weren’t any statues in their behalf. They weren’t being lauded in newspapers and applauded by the crowds. It is quite removed from what you often hear today. Here’s what Paul says, “We’re hungry and thirsty and poorly clothed, and we’re beaten, and sometimes we’re homeless.” Nice work, Paul. “Yeah, come join me.” No, thank you. “Want to go to Iran?” No! I do not. Not enough support to spend fulltime at it, verse 12. Paul oftentimes found himself as a common laborer working in a tent-making business. And, by the way, just to underscore that – Greek culture would say if you are in a manual labor position, that’s a very demeaning position in the culture. They were all about education and higher learning and not working with your hands, working with your head.

So what does Paul say, here in verse 12 and verse 13? “We’re reviled.” The word “reviled” means to be personally slandered or railed upon. Our response, “We bless the people who rail against us. We’re persecuted. We suffer the hateful, purposeful hostility at the hands of others. And what we do, we endure. We endure. We forbear it. We don’t quit. They seek to defame us, literally to discredit us, to belittle us, to take our reputation and ruin it. And what do we do as a result? We entreat them. We speak

words of comfort, and we reach out to them in love.” Humility and patience taking a low place in the eyes of the world to exalt the high place that he had in Christ. And he says to these Corinthians – and I think when somebody read this to them, they must have gone, “Yeah, we have really messed up.”

Up to now, verse 13, “We have been made the filth of the earth.” NIV – scum of the earth. “Offscouring” – the refuse of the world. While the saints in Corinth were at war over prideful issues – who they followed, who they were baptized with, who was the most eloquent speaker – these men of God were seen in the world like this: trash laid along the highway. It’s really how the Lord placed His people out there in this generation. So don’t be so discouraged when the world doesn’t receive you with open arms. This is not your home. But this is the place you reach those people God sent His Son to save. Paul said, “We’re like dirty dishes, we’re like trash at the curb. We were left over what everyone else is finished eating until we’re thrown out.” But notice his words here. He says, here at the end of verse 13, “We’re like that until now.” Okay. This is what it is for now. But Paul had his eyes on greater things, that the Lord was coming, and the faithful stewards would be received by Him. And it’s like he said, “Come on, Corinthians. Wise up to your pursuit of glory and your standards of worldly acceptance. Come serve the Lord. Come stand with us as one.”

And so he says, in verse 14, “I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.” The word “warn” is a word that’s used a lot in the Bible. The Greek word is “nouthesia,” and “nouthesia” literally means to put in your mind to effect change. It’s counsel that gives you God’s perspective rather than human perspective. It is the word that is most often used in the Bible to give counsel to someone if they need direction. Give them God’s counsel so that they might effect change in their approach. Paul says to this church that he planted, “Look, there’s no joy in shaming you. I don’t want to browbeat you or humiliate you. I just want you to see that you’re on the wrong path here. And you’re my children by faith.” He wasn’t sarcastic to hurt them, but the irony was they had to wake up from this. You know, pride is the usual forerunner to destruction. Right? “Pride goes before the fall” (Proverbs 16:18). It’s the forerunner. And they were headed in the wrong direction at mach speed. So Paul’s heart, as a pastor.....he is hurt over their divisiveness and the personal attacks, and he wants to convince them that he loves them. He’d pay any price to serve the Lord, but he wants them to come and come back. But that’s going to take some doing. But he loves them more than a brother; he loves them as a father.

We read, in verse 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.” It was Paul who had led most of these folks to the Lord when the church started, seen them grow, took a parental interest in them, made a parental commitment to them. By the way, the word “ten thousand” – you’ll find it a lot in the New Testament – is the largest number in Greek. It’s the word for “myriads.” It just means innumerable. There were plenty of folks running around who would simply like to instruct them, to give them some information, tell them what to do, what to believe, what to follow. But they had no personal interest in their way of life. But that’s now how Paul was. Paul, when

he wrote to the Thessalonians, in chapter 2:10 of 1 Thessalonians, he said, “You remember before the Lord. He’s our witness of how blamelessly we acted among you, how we exhorted you and we comforted you, and we charged every one of you as a father would his children.” That’s Paul’s approach. That was the heart of Paul.

And the difference between a traveling evangelist and a pastor, or between a hireling and a shepherd, is that one serves the people and would lay down their lives; the other will come and serve when it’s convenient. The guy who blows into town and goes to the Honda Center and has three days of revival and then takes your money and leaves. Not exactly a father to the faith. Maybe a guy that’s trying to rip off the church.

So, his love for them was such that he wanted to tell them the truth, but he didn’t want to break their hearts. But he needed to tell them the truth. So Paul’s appeal to them, in verse 15, was, “Look, since the first day you came to know the Lord, I’ve been there to love you and to care for you. And I’m not just teaching you; I’m seeking to lead you as a father because you’re my beloved children. But I have to warn you,” verse 14, “because division starts with self and pride.”

And then he says, in verse 16, “Therefore I urge you, imitate me.” Such a powerful verse if you stop and think about it for a minute. Kids learn from their parents. I think it was Gayle Erwin who used to teach that.....he always had the line that, “I want to teach my kids good table manners, but they keep eating like I do.” That was his big line. We’d always laugh....hahaha. “Do as I do. Behave as I do.” The word “imitate” is the Greek word for “mimic” like an ape, to copy. Let me ask you a question very seriously: could you stand up here in the pulpit right now and say to the church, “Imitate me. Imitate me.” It’s pretty convicting. If the whole church were to behave and to act just as you do, if all of the church would attend church with the same regularity that you do, would the church be better off or worse? Would we move forward or backwards? Paul was able to invite this church to mimic his ways and especially in terms of walking in the true wisdom – unlike the world – and depending on the Lord’s love. If the whole church prayed like you, if the whole church tithed like you, if the whole church was involved in ministry as you are involved in ministry, would the church grow or fall apart? If the whole church prayed for missionaries like you pray, if the whole church witnessed to the lost as you witness to the lost, would the church be better off or worse? Paul said to the church, “Just follow my example.” Pretty powerful.

Verse 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.” So Paul is going to send Timothy down to them to see them. Timothy would eventually take the church in Ephesus when Paul would move along from there. But Paul calls him his “faithful, beloved son in the Lord.” You know, probably, from the book of Acts that Paul’s first missionary journey, he met this young man in his teens and led him to Jesus. By the time Paul went out on his second missionary journey and went to the same areas, Timothy would join Paul. He’d even be circumcised at an older age so that he could be in a position to minister to the Jews. Timothy knew what he was getting involved with. So Timothy was coming to the problem church with the

instructions to repeat again, to remind the church how Paul had taught them week in and week out. And it wasn't just there. Paul said, "I do this same message, I teach these same things in every church," which should be an indicator to you that this wasn't just a local Corinthian problem. It was a problem in a lot of places. Paul said, "I write the same thing to a lot of churches."

It's neat to have a disciple like Timothy, who shares your heart. Paul, in the Philippian letter, in chapter 2:19-22, said, of all of his disciples (and he had tons), there was no one like Timothy who shared his love for the people and his love for the Lord and his heart. Now Timothy and Paul were absolutely different. Paul was a Type A; Timothy was kind of a lily flower. He didn't say much, he was afraid of everything, his stomach hurt. By 40, he had to get letters, "Come on, buddy, you can do it!" He was just so different than Paul, but yet, again, God used him, and he loved the Lord. Of all those that Paul served with, Paul loved Timothy – maybe him and Titus – the most. Timothy's mentioned in six of his letters as being with Paul, been with him for years. In fact, he would be with him for over twenty years before he was sent to his first pastorate in Ephesus, and even then, Timothy wanted to quit. Paul starts off the letter to Timothy by saying, "Timothy, stay there, man. Finish the work. What are you doin'?" So Paul trusted him to go to Corinth and deal with these things and as Timothy would hopefully re-establish the truths that Paul had taught them over and over. So, "I'm sending someone. I'm not going to let this go. We gotta fix this."

Verse 18, "Now some are puffed up, as though 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. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" Now, understand, Paul is this big.....little short guy with a crooked nose with a bad complexion, and he didn't speak very well; and he was a smart guy but not exactly your threatening personality. But the Lord's hand was upon Paul, and I suspect that these words from him frightened the folks. Paul knew that many of the words of division that were spoken would cease when he showed up, and he confronted them. After all, Paul had apostolic authority. It's a good thing we don't have that most of the time, or things would go really wrong. But he had God's power upon his life, and it instilled a measure of fear.

You might remember that Paul had confronted a guy named Elymas. He was a sorcerer. He lived on the island of Cyprus. It was one of the first places Paul ever stopped to go on his missionary journeys. And it was in this city called Paphos, and he was trying to share with the governor – his name was Sergius Paulus. And every time he'd try to get in there with the gospel, this sorcerer would get in his way. And Paul finally, in Acts 13, said, "Lord, deal with this guy," and the guy got struck. He couldn't see, and he didn't like that. But God had given Paul power.

So here's Paul. Little guy. Been gone for years. Loved these people like a father but sometimes had to love them with some heavy-duty talking to. I think discipline and confrontation are a necessary part of good leadership. And Paul was willing to take a

stand against these proud-headed, divisive men. I suspect that some folks, at least from what Paul said, were thinking, “Oh, Paul would never show up here and say to our face what he’s writing down. He’s tough in his emails” kind of thing. Right? “Tough guy behind his computer. ‘Meet me on the corner.’ He’ll never show up.” He assured them that wasn’t the case. But hopefully Timothy would suffice. Paul had withstood Peter, you remember, in Antioch (Galatians 2), to his face. He had dealt with the Jerusalem church and James in Galatians 2. There was that fight, early on, between being saved by grace and become a Jew first and then become a Christian. He wasn’t easily intimidated by people that were puffed up.

According to chapter 16 (I know we’re not there yet), verse 5, Paul determined at some point to go, “I’ll just come now.” He said, “I’m just gonna go immediately.” But at the last minute, somehow the Lord stopped Paul, Paul himself fearing he may have had to take some dramatic action. He wrote in 2 Corinthians (the first chapter, verse 15, the third letter he would write), “This is the confidence I intended to come before you that you might have a second benefit. I wanted to come to you as I passed through Macedonia and be helped by you on my way, but the Lord bore witness to my soul that I should spare you, and so I’ve come no more to you.” In other words, he’d had enough. Paul was going to come be Paul, and the Lord said, “Don’t you do it, Paul.” So there’s that conflict for Paul. But he was a leader, if you will. He cared for the people, and he loved them.

So Paul trusted that Timothy could go. Notice, in verse 18, that Paul was taking a stand. Yet if the Lord wanted him to come, he said he was willing to go. As a parent, verse 19, “but I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, whether those puffed up words are just words or are they backed with the Lord’s strength.” So, “If the Lord wants me out there, I’ll come.”

Faith that produces words without life change isn’t faith and isn’t powerful; there’s no power in words, right? The Sermon on the Mount, chapter 7:21 of Matthew, Jesus said, “Not everyone who calls Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but those who do the will of My Father.” These guys were way out to lunch with their attitudes. You might remember the challenges that were brought against Moses by his sister, Miriam, back in Numbers 12. She was with a group who thought Moses had too much power. “We don’t want to obey you. We don’t want to follow you. Who died and left you to be king?” kind of thing. Right? And Moses said, “Well, you know, if the LORD didn’t call me, I guess He’ll move me along. But if He did, you’re going to see His power.” And it wasn’t later on that day, she broke out in leprosy.....all over her body; a sure death sentence. Isolated from the flock and away from her group. For the next seven days, everybody sat in the desert and waited for her to come to her senses. In Numbers 16, a couple of chapters later, there was a huge organization of folks who decided if they got numbers, they could overthrow Moses. So there was a guy named Korah and a guy named Dathan and a guy named Abiram. And again, they organized, and they said to Moses, “You’re not smart. We’re as smart as you are. Let us take a turn.” And Moses said to them, there in Numbers 16, “I’ll tell you what. If these men tomorrow die of natural causes or they somehow find the common fate that is waiting for

all men, then the LORD didn't send me. But if the LORD does something new like, oh, I don't know, open up the earth and swallow them all up, then you'll know that the LORD called me. So let's hang around and find out." And he hadn't even so much as finished the words – according to Numbers – and the ground opened up, and they were swallowed up – their households, their tents, their goods. And then everyone ran away. "Okay, he's the boss. He's the boss. I don't want to....." (Laughing) I think Paul kind of felt like that, you know? If the Lord's in it, then the Lord will take care of it. And I think Paul was upset.

But notice what he says in verse 20 and in verse 21, that the kingdom where God rules is all about His power. It's about changed lives. It's a far cry from hearers who won't do, who have to answer to the Lord. In reality, the work of God is seen in the life, not in the claims. It's seen in the life, not in the claims. It's seen in the life that's been changed. It's life.....it's godly living, not lip service. "So I'll see who's who when I get there." And Paul invited them to think about what kind of meeting they wanted when he came: a rod of authority or a time of "kumbaya." He preferred the latter, I think. He hoped they would as well. So he would have gone, but the Lord stopped him (according to the last chapter of this book) at the last minute.

Well, that's all Paul said about this division thing. In fact, he kind of ends it right there, and then he turns, in verse 1 of chapter 5, in this whole chapter to the immorality in the church that was being allowed, the sin that the whole church knew about, and it was fine with them – they made provision for it. And then, in chapter 6, he talked only about suing and taking our cases before the world. In chapter 7, all about marriage and divorce, if you will. And then all about conscience and self-denial and freedom in Christ. There's a lot to learn. But what a messed up church! If we follow the rules, we won't have to be a messed up church. We'll just read the book and go, "Gosh, those were foolish people. We'll be wise. We'll listen to what God has to say."

Next week chapter 5. I don't know how far we'll get, but we'll start there somewhere.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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