

## Paul Ends and Summarizes His Appeal to the Corinthians to Seek God's Wisdom and Humility

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

*This portion comes at the following point in the outline.*

- II. Paul's response to reports of division (1:10-6:20).
  - A. A church divided, internally and against Paul (1:10-4:21).
    - 7. The Corinthians and their apostle (4:1-21).
      - a. On being a servant and being judged (4:1-5).
      - b. The marks of true apostleship (4:6-13).
      - c. **Appeal and exhortation (4:14-21).**

### Introduction

*Paul finally comes to the end of his admonition to the Corinthians that started in 1:10. There is a sense here in which he summarizes the importance of everything he has said thus far by reminding them of his love for them and authority over them, exhorting them to imitate him in his ways, stressing the sending of Timothy to apply all this to their lives, and planning to visit them himself to personally apply everything. Before he moves on to address specific concerns in the next chapter, he pleads with them to apply the realities of God's wisdom, humility, unity, and so on for their benefit.*

### Verses

<sup>14</sup>I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup>For though you have countless (Greek - ten thousand) guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. <sup>16</sup>I urge you, then, be imitators of me. <sup>17</sup>That is why I sent (Or am sending) you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. <sup>18</sup>Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. <sup>19</sup>But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. <sup>20</sup>For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. <sup>21</sup>What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

### Questions

- 1. General.
  - a. What are your initial observations, thoughts, or questions about the passage?
  - b. How would you briefly describe the passage?
    - Because of love for them and desire for their good, Paul stresses his authority over the Corinthians as their spiritual **father**, urging them to model his ways, and sending Timothy to help them. He plans to personally visit them also, for their good, whether it is authoritatively or gently.
- 2. Specific Verses.
  - a. Before we look at the individual verses, it's important to notice how Paul grounds everything. He uses the words "in Christ" or "in the Lord" four times (Vs. 15, 17), and "through the gospel" once (Vs. 15). How is this the basis for his exhortations?
    - As it is anywhere else, Paul is making sure there's never a disconnect from who we are in Christ, the realities of the **gospel**, and his enabling **grace**, and what he says to do. **Jesus** is our basis and power.
  - b. Discuss why you believe Paul says what he does in verse 14, and why it's important.

- He has thus far said some confrontational, though true, things, and here reminds the Corinthians that it is not to **hurt**, but **help** them, because of his love for them as his children in Christ.
- c. To what is Paul referring when he mentions “countless guides in Christ” in verse 15? How does he compare this to his own role? Why is this important?
- The countless guides would be the **ministers** he’s mentioned, or even others. But he elevates his own role as the **planter** of this church, and the one who in that role was a spiritual father to them (Ac. 18:1-11). This is important because his appeals to them come from this relationship, and there is God-given **authority**.
- d. Verse 16 is one with which we all are likely familiar. Knowing the context, what do you think Paul is stressing?
- Certainly there’s a general sense in which he can tell them to act like him (his ways in Christ, as vs. 17 mentions). But he is particularly appealing to them to imitate him in the **humility** and embracing of God’s **wisdom** he has stressed, because of his love and authority.
- e. What is the nature of Paul sending Timothy in verse 17? How does this particularly relate to what he has said about being their spiritual father?
- He has sent or will send Timothy to emphasize in person all he has said, and Paul’s way of **life** in **Christ** that he lives and consistently teaches. There’s also a unique sense in which the **father/son** relationship between Paul and Timothy needs to impact the Corinthians, who are also Paul’s children in Christ.
- f. In verse 17, how do Paul’s “ways in Christ,” as he “teaches them in every church.” relate to the context?
- His ways in Christ could refer to his general Christ-enabled **character** and **behavior**, or specifically the ways he demonstrates the **wisdom** of God and **humility** that he has stressed. He is consistent in his living and teaching of this.
- g. To end this plea, what does Paul say in verses 18-21? What stands out here, and how does it relate to the context?
- He states that there are some who are arrogant, picking up on the idea of the **criticism** of him that he’s having to defend. They are like this because they think he won’t come to defend himself and **confront** their error, but, if the Lord wills, he will do so. Their talk stands against the actual **power** of God’s wisdom, which Paul models, and appeals to. He asks them if they want the nature of his visit to be confrontational or gentle. This brings to a decision point how the church needs to **process** what he’s said thus far.
3. Final thoughts and application
- a. Do you have any final observations, comments, or questions?
  - b. How do you think you can apply the truths of this passage to your life?