

Sunday, May 15, 2016—I Corinthians 4:18-21: Correcting the Corinthians

### Introduction/Review

- Last week during our time together we studied verses 14 through 17. In summation we observed the following regarding these verses.
- Verse 14—after speaking quit harshly to the Corinthians in verses 6-13, Paul tells them in verse 14 that he is not writing these things to “shame” them. Rather, as his “beloved sons” it was necessary that Paul “warn” the Corinthians.
- Verse 15— the Corinthians were listening to anyone and everyone and their divisions centering around various teachers was evidence of this fact. Paul was their father in that they were begotten of the gospel through Paul’s ministry among them. It was on account of Paul’s labor in the gospel of Christ that the Corinthians were saved. The Corinthians were behaving like wayward teenagers who were ashamed of their own parents but were heading the spiritual council of everyone else.
- Verse 16—on the basis of the fact Paul had “begotten” the Corinthians through he gospel in verse 15 he beseeches them in verse 16 to be followers of him.
- Verse 17—it was for the cause of beseeching the Corinthians to be followers of Paul that Timothy was sent unto them. Timothy’s job in Corinth was going to be to bring them “into remembrance” of Paul’s “ways which be in Christ.” In order to bring them into “remembrance” implies that they already knew these things and had forgotten them. In running after their ten thousands instructors in verse 15 they had forgotten the very basic things that Paul had taught them.
- The Corinthians had been moved away from Paul. They did not want to count the cost along with the Apostle Paul.

### I Corinthians 4:18

- **Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.**
- This is the second time in chapter 4 that Paul has used the expression “puffed up” when describing the Corinthians. A third occurs in the next verse.
  - I Corinthians 4:6
- According to Webster’s 1828 dictionary the English word “puffed” means: “driven out suddenly, as air or breath; **blown up; swelled with air; inflated with vanity or pride**; praised.” The expression “puffed up” is used elsewhere in Paul’s epistles and it is never viewed as a good thing.
  - I Corinthians 5:2

- I Corinthians 8:1
- I Corinthians 13:4
- Colossians 2:18
- I Corinthians 4:18—describes “some” of the Corinthians as being “puffed up” as though Paul “would not come” unto them. I take that to mean that they had a lot to say about Paul behind his back. Expecting to never see Paul again they were talking a big game against the apostle.

### **I Corinthians 4:19**

- **But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.**
- Verse 19 begins with a contrast. Paul’s desire was to come unto them shortly. If Paul came unto them he wanted to know the “power” of those which had so much to say about him.
- I take this to mean that Paul wanted to see if these folks would behave thusly if Paul was in their presence. If Paul came to Corinth he would endeavor to know the reasons for the inflated egos of these folks.
  - I Corinthians 4:8—what was the source of their influence? Paul would endeavor to know if he came unto them again.
- There is no record that Paul ever made it to Corinth again.

### **I Corinthians 4:20**

- **For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.**
- In verse 19 Paul said that if he came unto them he desired to know the “power” of them which are puffed up.
- By what power or authority were they behaving in this manner?
- Galatians 5:19-21—their “puffed up” behavior and conduct was the byproduct of their natural flesh programming.
- Galatians 5:22-24—in contrast the fruit of the Spirits operation in their lives would not have been to be “puffed up” against Paul.

- I Corinthians 13:4—the charity produced by the Spirit in the life of a believer is not arrogant or self important i.e., it is not “puffed up.”
- I Corinthians 4:20—the folks Paul is addressing in chapter 4 were “puffed up” and behaving in a prideful arrogant manner.
- Their behavior was not consistent with the ethical and moral functioning of God’s kingdom. Therefore, Paul wanted to know the source of the power upon which these folks were functioning.

### **I Corinthians 4:21**

- **What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and *in* the spirit of meekness?**
- Paul opens verse 21 with a question, “what will ye?” In other words, “what do you want?”
- Having confronted those who are “puffed up,” and having told them that he is not interested in their empty words and talk but in the presence of power in their lives, he now gives them a choice. If they continue in their arrogant frame of mind, he will respond accordingly. On the other hand, if they allow the Holy Spirit to replace their fleshly haughtiness with humility, he will come unto them in a spirit of meekness.
- Much could be said about the word “rod” in scripture. It is clear in this context that Paul has the issue of correction in mind. The “puffed up” attitude of the Corinthians elicited correction.
  - Proverbs 22:15—does Paul literally mean that he is going to line up the Corinthians and spank them physically.
- On the other hand, if their pride gave way to humility, Paul would come unto them in love and in the spirit of meekness.
- II Timothy 3:16-17—Paul is seeking to reprove and correct the poor thinking and behavior of the Corinthians via the act of addressing the epistle of I Corinthians unto them.

### **Chastisement During the Dispensation of Grace**

- Verses like I Corinthians 4:21 often bring up questions for people regarding how correction works during the dispensation of grace.
- Hebrews 12:5-11—see whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.
- Scourgeth—means to flog or beat with a whip

- Matthew 10:17
- Matthew 20:19
- John 19:1
- Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:1-4—the readership of Hebrews has a reference point in God’s prophetic history. The writer of Hebrews is drawing his readers attention to some things they had already been taught.
- Ephesians 2:11-12—the gentiles do not possess the same historical perspective as the readers of Hebrews because in time past we were strangers from the covenants of promise without hope and without God.
- Ephesians 3:3—the formation of the Body of Christ is the subject of the mystery, therefore, we have no prophetic reference point like the readers of Hebrews.
- So the question becomes if the book of Hebrews is not written to the Body of Christ does God still chasten believers and if so what form does chastening take?
- Psalm 94:10-12—the first definition is that of correction which takes the form of instruction. The law provided correction which is a form of chastisement. Therefore, the first definition simply means to educate or inform with the goal of correcting.
- Proverbs 3:11-12—the second definition deals with keeping the law and fearing the punishment of God that is outlined in the Law.
  - Deuteronomy 28:1-14—delineate a series of blessings that would be given to Israel for following the Law.
  - Deuteronomy 28:15-44—delineate a series of curses that would come upon Israel for their failure to comply. The Law contract said they would be cursed for disobedience.
  - Deuteronomy 28:45—these curses would designed by God to pursue after them until they were destroyed.
  - Deuteronomy 28:46—this system of curses was to serve as a sign, that is a flag or indicator that would tell the nation where they were at with their relationship with God.
- Romans 6:14-15—we are not under the Law system. Therefore, we are not under the sign program. The things that happen to us are not indicative of God’s favor or disfavor with us.
- Romans 5:1—based on the merits of his son God is at peace with us. If God is a peace with us he is not out to destroy us when we mess up.

- Colossians 2:13—believers have already been forgiven all trespasses. Why would God punish us for things for which we have already been forgiven?
- I Corinthians 4:21—as members of the body of Christ we still need correction from time to time as the book of I Corinthians makes abundantly clear. The question is what form does that correction take? We will look at that next time.