

## 1 Corinthians 4B (2013)

- What is our responsibility to our leaders in ministry?
  - How are we to respond to their authority?
    - Did they arrive at those positions as a result of the consent of the governed?
    - Or did they acquire their authority through the agency of a higher authority?
  - Paul has been speaking sternly with the church in Corinth regarding their immaturity in faith
    - As we've moved in Chapter 4, his critiques have begun to sting
    - He's called them arrogant, prideful, foolish
    - He's mocked them for thinking themselves superior even to the apostles
  - And he's just getting started
    - When we move into Chapter 5, Paul will begin to address the specific situations he heard from Chloe's delegation
    - And many of Paul's comments will come with demands and corrections
      - Paul will place obligations on the church and demand changes in behavior
      - He will challenge their thinking and call them out publicly for their sin
  - Paul's words were no less offensive in his day than they might be today
    - Imagine having your sinful behavior called out publicly among your brothers and sisters
    - Or imagine being embroiled with other members of the church in a fierce dispute about church practice, and Paul writes a letter that sides with the others against you
    - How would you respond to such a moment? Would you fight back, pout, run away...or submit to Paul's authority?

- The answer would depend on how you viewed Paul's authority
  - Do you see him as a man sent by the Lord speaking with the authority of the Lord?
  - Or is he nothing more than your peer, a man with an opinion like everyone else
    - And therefore, you can dismiss his opinion
- This was the situation Paul faced in Corinth
  - Only his situation was even more challenging, because he was physically separated from them
    - He had to impose his authority on the church from a distance
    - So he chooses his words carefully
    - And yet he doesn't tiptoe around the point
  - And so as we study Paul's response to rebellion and accountability, let's consider our own responsibility to leadership in the body of Christ
    - I'll start a few verses back from last time, in v.11
    - Paul is concluding his reminder that godly servants will often experience lives of sacrifice and need according to God's grace
    - And therefore, such things cannot become our measure of power or success or merit in the church
  - So speaking of himself and the fellow apostles, Paul reminds the church:

[1Cor. 4:11](#) To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

[1Cor. 4:12](#) and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

[1Cor. 4:13](#) when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

- Paul tells Corinth that even as he writes them this letter, he is hungry and thirsty
  - As they sat in comfort in Corinth, Paul was sitting in Ephesus poorly clothed, roughly treated and homeless

- Paul lived a life that was the epitome of want, weakness, and shame
    - Was this the consequence of laziness? Was Paul simply not willing to work hard enough to achieve a better standard of living?
  - Was Paul suffering in this way despite working hard with his hands?
    - He says he toiled, which is a Greek word meaning to work so hard and diligently that the worker grows weak and weary
    - Paul was tirelessly working to support himself even as he worked for the sake of Christ and the gospel
    - Paul's situation was not a reflection of laziness
- Paul's situation was the direct result of serving Christ and the Gospel
  - Paul was called by God to sacrifice to serve the Lord according to a basic spiritual principle
    - The more we seek to serve the Lord, the more we come to reflect Christ by our words and actions
    - And the more we become like Christ in our words and deeds, the more we should expect to experience the same things Christ experienced
    - Our Lord explained this principle Himself when He taught His disciples

[John 15:18](#) "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

[John 15:19](#) "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

[John 15:20](#) "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

[John 15:21](#) "But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.

- The more diligently we seek to serve Christ, the more we become like Him
  - The more we become like Him, the more the world will treat us like they treated Him

- And therefore, Paul's poor circumstances was a testimony to his Christ-like life
  - And to the negative consequences that naturally follow
- Paul's hard work didn't arrive at wealth, because he probably found it very difficult to find work for his tent making business
  - In Paul's day, artisans worked under the protection and authority of guilds
    - Like unions, these guilds regulated business to the extent that if someone was rejected by the guild, they would find it very difficult to do business in any Roman community
    - Paul's willingness to upset Jewish and Roman leaders with his ministry undoubtedly left him unable to prosper financially regardless of how hard he worked
    - So Paul's economic persecution was the natural consequence of living a Christ-like life in a world that hates Christ
  - If Paul suffered such things, then we should not be surprised to see negative consequences to living our faith and proclaiming the Gospel
    - And that's ok
    - We can't let that penalty cause us to question our commitment to serving the Lord
    - We simply understand that this is the natural consequence of a spiritual law the Lord Himself gave us
    - And we remember that our reward in Heaven will be great

**[Matt. 5:10](#)** "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**[Matt. 5:11](#)** "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

**[Matt. 5:12](#)** "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

- Secondly, Paul's poverty was a reflection of him placing a higher priority on heavenly goals rather than earthly goals
  - Naturally, preaching of the Gospel competed with his time and effort to make a living

- The more time Paul spent on serving Christ, the less time he could spend earning a living
  - And clearly, this was the right balance
  - Paul understood that earning a living was a means to an end, rather than the end in itself
  - He needed money to feed and clothe his body, but only so that he could then continue forward in ministry
  - As the saying goes, he worked to live; he didn't live to work
- And notice, Paul doesn't say he has nothing
  - He may have needs, especially in comparison to the affluence of Corinth
  - But we can have enough while still having needs unmet
    - We can have enough food, enough clothing, enough shelter while experiencing needs
    - Paul experienced needs, but the Lord gave him enough to ensure he could accomplish his mission
- There is a word for having enough even while we experience need: contentment
  - Paul knew contentment
  - He understood living in need but accepted that situation as a necessary condition of serving Christ
  - He also trusted the Lord to provide what was required to enable him to remain focused on his Master's business
- This is the joy of serving the Lord
  - As we set our mind on things above, the Lord gives us contentment for our circumstances
  - Our needs remain, but they concern us less
- Then Paul said he was reviled and persecuted and slandered by his enemies
  - Was he mistreated because he invited the negative attention?
    - Did Paul insult people, did he treat people poorly?

- Was he deserving of such mistreatment?
  - No. Paul says he returned those insults with love in the same way the Lord turned the other cheek
    - In other words, there was no earthly explanation for Paul's situation
    - He worked hard, but he was in need
    - He was diligent, but he suffered
    - He brought a blessing and tried to reconcile with people, but he was rejected nonetheless
  - Paul said he was considered scum, which means refuse
    - He has been rejected by the world, and the only explanation for why is his love for, and service to, Christ
    - Nevertheless, Paul's critics in Corinth had been using Paul's situation against him
    - Suggesting that his poverty and persecution was somehow evidence that his teaching was wrong or that he lacked authority
- Authority is a funny thing
  - It's something we can have easily but it's not something we can take easily

A Department of Water Resources representative stops at a Texas ranch and talks with an old rancher. He tells the rancher, "I need to inspect your ranch for your water allocation. The old rancher says, "Okay, but don't go in that field over there."

The Water representative says, "Mister, I have the authority of the Federal Government with me. See this card? This card means I am allowed to go WHEREVER I WISH on any agricultural land. No questions asked or answered. Have I made myself clear? Do you understand?" The old rancher nods politely and goes about his chores.

Later, the old rancher hears loud screams and sees the Water Rep running for his life. And close behind is the rancher's bull. The bull is gaining with every step. The Rep is clearly terrified and yells to the rancher for help. So the old rancher immediately throws down his tools, runs to the fence and yells at the top of his lungs...

**"Show him your card! Show him your card!"**

- That water representative reminds us that we can't take authority that hasn't been granted to us
  - If we try, we're just setting ourselves up for a fall
  - Sooner or later, we'll find ourselves challenged by someone – or something – that doesn't respect our claims
- But when we have been given authority and that authority is challenged, then it's necessary to demonstrate our authority through the exercise of power
  - In the church, God grants a measure of authority to individuals
  - He grants authority to parents over their children
  - He grants authority to husbands over their wives
  - He grants authority to teachers over their students
  - He grants authority to elders over the flock
  - And in Paul's day, the Lord granted apostles authority to found the church
- In each case, those in authority have the power to demonstrate their authority
  - That power is the word of God itself, which declares that these relationships exist
  - If we go against these sources of authority, we will experience the displeasure of God Himself, Who established these relationships
  - If we choose to rebel against these sources of authority, we may see consequences in this life
  - And we will most definitely experience loss of reward in eternity
- In the case of the apostles, the Lord granted unique authority and backed it with unique powers
  - Apostles were appointed to bring a new message to a people who weren't receptive
    - So God granted them power to persuade

- They spoke with power and they performed miracles to validate their claims
- These powers also gave the ability to quiet dissenters and oppose those who challenged their authority
- The most memorable example of this power comes in Acts 5

**Acts 5:1** But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, **Acts 5:2** and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet.

**Acts 5:3** But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

**Acts 5:4** "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God."

**Acts 5:5** And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it.

**Acts 5:6** The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him.

**Acts 5:7** Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.

**Acts 5:8** And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price."

**Acts 5:9** Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well."

**Acts 5:10** And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

- Merely by his words of judgment, Peter was able to bring these two to death
- And we can see the effect it had on the church: fear of God and fear of the apostle's authority
- This was healthy fear, in that it promoted obedience to God
- So now keeping in mind the power of the apostles, consider Paul's next words in Chapter 4

**1Cor. 4:14** I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

**1Cor. 4:15** For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.



[1Cor. 4:16](#) Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.

[1Cor. 4:17](#) For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

- Paul starts by explaining that he didn't intend to embarrass the church with his hard words
  - Instead, Paul wants to admonish his beloved children
    - The word admonish means to correct with instruction
    - Paul is both chastising and teaching the church
    - And sometimes we need to combine both to get folks' attention
  - There is a time for discipline, and a time for instruction, and a time when we need to combine both
    - In this case, the church was suffering intense pride and arrogance
    - So simply educating the church wasn't enough to address their problems
    - They needed to be corrected, to be humbled, to have the pride set aside just long enough that they might be willing to hear Paul's instruction
    - So Paul admonishes them
  - Notice also that Paul calls them his beloved children
    - Paul isn't acting in anger or spite or with intent to hurt them
    - Like when a parent tells a child that a spanking is a sign of love, such is the case here
    - Paul is correcting in love
- In a nutshell, this is the reason we've been given both teachers and leaders in the church
  - There is a time to be taught, and teachers fill that role nicely
    - But there is a time for discipline and correction, even in the midst of teaching

- And leaders with authority over the flock serve that role
- If we are willing to accept teaching, then we must also be willing to accept the correction of leaders even if it wounds our pride or challenges our ego
  - Especially if it wounds our pride and ego!
  - This is a primary way the Lord disciplines His children
  - He admonishes them through leaders who are called to teach us even as they correct our behavior
- Notice in v.15 Paul says that we might have countless teachers who educate us in our Christian walk, but we have a limited number of authority figures
  - Paul calls himself a father in the faith over Corinth
  - He's referring to his role as the founder of the church and the one who originally delivered the gospel in that region
  - This is no small matter, since it reveals the will of God to work through Paul
  - This church could see clearly that Paul was sent by God, and therefore it stands to reason that Paul carried God's stamp of approval
  - Like that water inspector, Paul had a card from God
- Expect that Paul's card came with real power
  - Like we saw with Peter, Paul could back his words with authority
  - He could easily demonstrate by the Spirit that he was speaking with authority granted him by Christ
  - Surely, Paul had demonstrated his power in the past
- In v.16, Paul appeals to the church to imitate him since they knew he was a man following the Lord
  - To ensure they had an example to imitate, Paul took the extra step of sending his young protege, Timothy, from Ephesus to Corinth to serve as his representative on the ground

- Paul knew it was important for the church to have a leader they could observe and emulate
- Teaching is far more effective when it is modeled
- So with Paul in Ephesus, he sends Timothy to Corinth to play the role of both teacher and example
- Our leaders in the church exist to serve similar purposes as Paul and Timothy
  - Pastors, elders, and teachers are not apostles
  - So we're not equating these roles to the power and authority of an apostle
- But they do play a comparable role in the church today in that they are called to do the same three things for the sake of the body
  - First, they are called to teach the church to follow Christ according to the word of God
  - Secondly, they are called to model obedience through their own lives so that we might imitate them as they follow Christ
  - Finally, they hold positions of authority over us to watch over our souls by admonishing us as needed to obey Christ
- We shouldn't neglect or minimize that third role
  - We will seek instructions from many teachers
  - But only have a few appointed leaders in the church
    - Just like we may have many adults in our extended family, yet we only have two parents
  - Christ has raised up church leaders so His sheep may be admonished or disciplined when necessary
- So we must recognize and accept the leadership of those God has placed over us so that we may gain the full benefit of that authority
  - When we receive correction, rebuke, admonishment and the like, we should consider those words carefully
  - Don't become defensive, don't reject difficult words out of hand

- Consider the correction in light of scripture and in prayerful consideration of how to respond
- As Hebrews says

**Heb. 13:7** Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

**Heb. 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

- Leaders aren't perfect, so they won't always have the right perspective
  - But we ought to be very careful in challenging that authority
  - Because men rarely recognize their own errors until someone points it out
- If we do not submit to our leaders, we are in danger of becoming arrogant, just as the Corinthian church, as Paul says:

**1Cor. 4:18** Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.

**1Cor. 4:19** But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power.

**1Cor. 4:20** For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.

**1Cor. 4:21** What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?

- Paul says the Corinthian church was showing evidence of arrogance in terms of rejecting authority
  - The key issue was lack of fear
  - Notice Paul says it is as if they assumed Paul would never return
  - This tells us that their arrogant behavior was inversely proportionate to their expectation of facing consequences
  - The less likely they were of facing consequences, the more arrogant they became
    - Just like every 4 year old child

- The less likely of getting caught, the more likely they will misbehave
- So Paul corrects this bad assumption
  - Paul would return one day, and when that happens these people will be called to account for their arrogance and disobedience
  - Because the kingdom of God exists in power, not merely words
- This is a great statement, filled with meaning
  - First, today the kingdom of God is a kingdom of people, the believers on earth
  - And that kingdom doesn't exist merely in words, meaning it isn't merely some human institution created by creeds and doctrines
  - It is an entity built with real spiritual power, the power of Christ's Spirit working in the hearts of men
- Moreover, it includes spiritual gifts given to leaders like Paul, which can bring punishment to the rebel
  - Paul asks when he returns, would they prefer he come in love and gentleness or with a rod (meaning a rod of correction)
  - Paul is offering an implicit threat of doing to this church what Peter did in Jerusalem in Acts 5
- Today, our leaders don't possess the powers of apostles, but that doesn't mean they are deserving of any less respect or submission
  - Leaders serve over us to educate us and direct us into a closer walk with Christ
    - A good leader asks questions, examines our life, encourages us to persevere and to do better, and corrects us when he finds fault
    - To object to these things is arrogance and Hebrews says it will be unprofitable for us when we reach the day of our judgment
  - Paul reminds Corinth he has authority, he has power and he has words of wisdom they need to hear
    - And if they were offended by what he wrote in Chapters 1-4, then they're really going to be bothered by what follows

- In Chapter 5, we'll hear of great immoralities in the church
- And a failing to fulfill the basic mission of the church
- Such are the consequences of failing to hear and obey the word of God and the leaders appointed to help lead us into righteousness