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A detailed, grayscale illustration of a multi-cylinder internal combustion engine, shown from a front-three-quarter perspective. The engine is the central focus, with its various components like the intake manifold, belts, and pistons clearly visible.

FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

I Corinthians

SMALL GROUP LESSONS

PACKET 2

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FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

1 Corinthians

Carnal Divisions

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 3: 1-9

“I was reading a book entitled *New Life* written by Michael Green, and in the book he said that a friend of his came to him and explained to him his attitude toward his newfound Christian life in these terms, quote: “It is rather like a cyclist who when he has climbed a long hill, feels he should be able to freewheel down the other side. It is not until he reaches the top that he sees his task has only just started, and that the road winds on with even steeper hills than the one he has just climbed. When people accept Christ, they tend to think it is freewheeling from that point, but then they discover it is only the beginning.” End quote.

You look at the Christian life, and I look at the Christian life from our perspectives. So did this young man. But the interesting thing about it is, from all of our perspectives, the Christian life is not easy. It is difficult. And maybe when you first became a Christian, you thought that it might be freewheeling; and somebody told you that if you’d come to Christ, he’d solve your problems; and He does do that. If you’d come to Christ you have peace and joy, and the answers to life; and you did and you do. But in spite of all of that, it’s not easy. The Christian life is difficult.

In fact, maybe it’s harder to live now than it was before you were saved. Why? Why does a young Christian find that he thinks he might be able to freewheel it, and then as soon as he gets into the thing he finds out there’s greater difficulty all the time? Why is it not easy to live a Christian life, with the power of God within us? Why is it difficult to do the thing we know we want to do, to do the thing that is right to do, that God says to be done? There are two reasons, and really everything can be reduced to these two. Two things make the Christian life difficult.

... You see, Satan has two things that he works on in the life of a Christian: the world, that’s the external; the flesh, that’s the internal. And those two things make it very difficult. We are going against the grain. We are breathing different air than exists in our atmosphere. We are spiritual salmon going against the stream. And, secondly, we have within us a tendency to evil. And though the Spirit of God is there to subdue that, ultimately and practically, it is still there, and it rears itself; and though we win the battle ultimately, we lose a lot of skirmishes on the way.

This was precisely the problem that the Corinthians had. The problem the Corinthians faced was this: they had been able to avoid neither the world, nor the flesh. They were succumbing to the world; they were succumbing to the flesh. And as a result of that, all kinds of sins were occurring. ... Now one of the sins that was creating problems in Corinth was division. Division is a sin.”¹

¹ Sermon Excerpt from John MacArthur found at: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1817>

BREAK THE ICE

What was one of your favorite parts about a previous stage of life?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

EXPLORE IT

1. What do you think Paul means when he refers to the Corinthian believers as “people of the flesh”?
2. Considering the cultural and scriptural context of this passage, what do you think Paul means when he says he has fed them with “milk, not solid food”?
3. What case does Paul make against the division that has occurred in the Corinthian church in this passage?
4. What significance do verses 8-9 hold in helping us understand the significance of the role of those who serve and lead in God’s Kingdom?

APPLY IT

Paul's reference to a "carnal" or "fleshly" Christian in 1 Corinthians 3:1 might seem like he's identifying a distinct third category of people. However, he's emphasizing that while this state might be appropriate for a new believer who is just beginning their journey of faith, it's not acceptable for those who should have matured. Remaining in a spiritually immature or worldly state is inconsistent with the transformative power of the gospel. Paul's message is clear: we are expected to grow beyond spiritual infancy and move toward maturity, leaving the impulses of the flesh and the patterns of the world behind, reflecting the deeper change that comes with following Christ.

5. It's expected that infant believers will grow out of "fleshly Christianity" into greater maturity. How can we care for and nurture our younger brothers and sisters in Christ in their early days of spiritual growth and development?

6. What are some signs that a believer is maturing out of the "fleshly" phase of their faith?

7. What dangers are there for believers who find themselves "stunted" in their spiritual growth and aren't maturing out of their spiritual infancy? What steps can we take if we find ourselves in this position?

Paul identifies the immaturity of the Corinthian believers by pointing to their divisiveness as a key symptom. In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses the factionalism within the church, where members were aligning themselves with different leaders and causing discord. This behavior revealed their spiritual infancy, as true maturity in Christ would manifest in unity and harmony rather than division. Paul contrasts this immature state with the deeper, more substantial teachings he desires to impart, suggesting that their inability to move past such quarrels signifies their need for further growth in understanding and application of the gospel.

8. How did their divisiveness reveal their current spiritual maturity?

9. In what ways do our actions and attitudes act as indicators of our own spiritual growth and maturity today?

10. Paul's spiritual discernment allowed him to accurately assess and address their spiritual immaturity. How does Galatians 6:1-3 offer insight into how this should be done among believers?

“The problem of esteeming leaders too highly starts very subtly and innocently. It begins with a deep respect and appreciation, often because this individual has led them to Christ, or that he (or she) has significantly contributed to their spiritual growth. This one person is given excessive credit for the work of God and elevated to a position of authority above what should be given to men. Allegiance to this leader becomes a status symbol in which followers take great pride. Out of this misguided allegiance, they feel obligated to ignore or even oppose other Christian leaders.”²

11. How can deep respect for a leader cross into excessive esteem? How can we know if we've crossed the line in this area?

12. In what ways can we guard against elevating leaders to an undue status and ensure that our allegiance remains focused on the Lord rather than individual personalities?

² Sermon Excerpt from Bob Deffinbaugh found at: <https://bible.org/seriespage/5-different-look-leadership-1-cor-35-17>

“Three main lessons appear from this image.

Diversity of ministry. One laborer plows the soil, another sows the seed, a third waters the seed. As time passes, the plants grow, the fruit appears, and other laborers enjoy reaping the harvest. This emphasis on diversity will also show up when Paul compares the church to a body with many different parts.”³

“Unity of purpose. No matter what work a person is doing for the Lord, he is still a part of the harvest. “Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one” (1 Cor. 3:8). Paul, Apollos, and Peter were not competing with each other. Rather, each was doing his assigned task under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Even though there is diversity of ministry, there is unity of purpose; and there ought to be unity of spirit.”⁴

“Humility of spirit. It is not the human laborers who produce the harvest, but the Lord of the harvest. “God gave the increase.... God that giveth the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6–7). Granted, God has ordained that human beings should be His ministers on earth; but their efforts apart from God’s blessing would be failures. The Corinthians were proud of their church, and various groups in the assembly were proud of their leaders. But this attitude of being “puffed up” was dividing the church because God was not receiving the glory.”⁵

13. In what ways can we ensure that our work for the Lord remains unified in purpose, despite the diversity of tasks and gifts within our church?

14. How can the church as a whole cultivate a spirit of cooperation among the different campuses of Village Bible Church?

³ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 51). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Wiersbe, Warren. p51.

⁵ Wiersbe, Warren. p51.

15. How does recognizing that God is the ultimate source of growth and success in ministry impact our attitude toward our own contributions and the contributions of others? What are some practical ways to cultivate humility and ensure that God receives the glory?

In verse 8, Paul clarifies any potential misunderstanding from his previous statements. While he acknowledges that “neither he who sows nor he who waters” is of ultimate importance, this does not mean their work is insignificant. Rather, their labor will be evaluated and rewarded by God. Paul’s point is to emphasize that the aim of ministry is not to elevate the laborers but to honor the one who causes the growth—God alone.

16. What are some ways we can ensure that our service reflects excellence and dedication without shifting the emphasis away from God?

“What kind of person are you? It is important for all of us to answer that question.

Salvation gets the Christian out of the world. Sanctification gets the world out of the Christian.

What kind of person are you? If you are a person of natural depravity, come to Christ and be saved today. If you are a person of carnal immaturity, repent of your sins and flee to Christ as the rightful Lord of your life. And if you are a person of spiritual maturity, keep on growing and going for the glory of God that you may help win the natural person to Jesus and that you may influence the carnal person for Jesus.”⁶

17. What is one step you can take in the next week to move closer to Christ, whether that means coming to Him for salvation, submitting more fully to His lordship, or continuing to grow and help others on their spiritual journey?

Studies were compiled and questions were written by Pastor Jeremy Anderson (Indian Creek Campus Pastor)

⁶ Akin, Dr. Daniel. p58



FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

1 Corinthians

Under Construction

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 3:10-23

We are not all promised the same things in this life. Some of us will know much joy, others of us much sorrow. Some will be given fame and fortune, others nothing but obscurity and poverty.

But one thing we are all promised is that our life will soon end and we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). There, before our Maker, we will give an account of how we used the days, words, relationships, dollars, skills, and opportunities God entrusted to us.

Charles Thomas Studd, who served as a British missionary to China, penned a famous poem that helps us to consider the only worthy way to use the life God has given to us—for Christ! May God help us to be ever mindful that only what is done for Christ will last. Lord, help us.

Only One Life

By C.T. Studd

Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,
And stand before His Judgement seat;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to God's holy will to cleave;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,

Only what's done for Christ will last.
Only one life, a few brief years,
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its clays I must fulfill,
living for self or in His will;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

When this bright world would tempt me
sore,
When Satan would a victory score;
When self would seek to have its way,
Then help me Lord with joy to say;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,

Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Oh let my love with fervor burn,
And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.⁷

⁷ <http://garrettkell.com/only-what-is-done-for-christ-will-last-c-t-studd/>

BREAK THE ICE

What is the most complex thing you have ever built? (In the workshop, in the kitchen, or wherever you had the opportunity to be creative!)

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-23

EXPLORE IT

1. The Apostle Paul transitions from using the analogy of agriculture in the previous verses to now comparing the church to a _____. (verse 10 and following)
2. What part of the Church did the Apostle Paul build?
3. Who is the foundation of the Church?
4. If what has been built survives “the Day,” what will that person receive?

5. If what has been built burns up, what will that builder experience?

6. What does God think about worldly wisdom?

APPLY IT

The Bible talks about the Judgment Seat of Christ--also referred to as the *bema*--in three places: Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10--4:5; and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. Only church-age saints will appear at that judgment, as shown in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

The purpose of the *bema* is an exhaustive evaluation of our lives. First Corinthians 4:5 says the Lord will come and "bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

That passage reveals Paul's emphasis on the judgment seat of Christ. Notice that Paul says each man's *praise* will come to him from God. God gives rewards to the victors; He does not whip the losers. We know that He won't condemn us for our sins at that point, because Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Thus, the purpose of the judgment seat of Christ is to examine a Christian's total life. We will be recompensed for the deeds we have done, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). The term used there refers to a summing up and estimation of the total pattern of a believer's life. This overall focus should keep us from worrying over every stupid thing we've ever done, or thoughtless sin we have committed. It's a time of reward, not punishment.

At the same time, while we won't be condemned for our sins, our present lives do affect what will happen at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Here's how:

- Sin and indifference in this life rob us of our present desire for serving the Lord. That in turn means a loss of rewards, because we will not have used our time to His glory. That is why Paul exhorts us to "be careful how [we] walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of [our] time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16, NASB).
- Sin and indifference result in a loss of power in our lives because sin grieves the Holy Spirit.
- Sin and indifference cause us to pass up opportunities for service, which we would otherwise perform and be rewarded for.

The greatest consequence of unfaithfulness here on earth is that it disappoints Christ. First John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." That is a sobering thought--we could be ashamed as we stand before the Lord. At the same time, it should encourage us with the prospect of receiving His lavish rewards if we serve Him faithfully during our time here on earth.⁸

⁸ <https://www.gty.org/library/questions/QA97/what-is-the-purpose-of-the-judgement-seat-of-christ>

10. In the immediate context of chapter 3, Paul is talking about building the church. How could this also apply to a person's life? What are things you can build in your life that will last longer than your earthly life?

So, Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to stop boasting in human beings. That's the agenda. Back in 1 Corinthians 1:11–12, they were saying, "I belong to Paul," "I belong to Apollos," "I belong to Cephas." In other words, they were exalting themselves over others by borrowing significance from their favorite teacher or orator or intellectual, claiming to be superior to others because they were in the Paul group or the Apollos group or the Cephas group.

And basically, Paul says (in 1 Corinthians 3:21–22), "You're insane. You're crazy for thinking like that." Why are you crazy? And he gives them the reason. "Let no one boast in men," and here comes the reason: "[because] all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future." Everything is yours.

So, Paul exposes the craziness of the Corinthian boasting by turning their words upside down. They were saying, "I belong to Paul," "I belong to Apollos," "I belong to Cephas." And Paul says,

No, they belong to *you*, you idiots. All things are yours. Paul is yours. Apollos is yours. Cephas belongs to you. And by the way, so does the world and life and death. All things are yours, you crazy Corinthians. Come on, wake up to who you are. You belong to Christ. You are fellow heirs with Christ, and he is the heir of God, and God owns everything. Get it? Come on.

So stop acting like idiots, Corinthians. Stop trying to prop up your significance in this world by boasting in your favorite teacher. You own *everything*. The poorest Christian among you, the poorest Christian on this planet, is richer than the richest unbeliever.⁹

11. In what ways might we, like the Corinthians, attempt to 'borrow significance' from others or from worldly status? How does this mindset differ from finding our identity in Christ?

⁹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/death-is-yours-what-does-paul-mean>

12. How does Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians address our understanding of humility and pride in the church today? In what areas might we need to rethink how we view ourselves or others?

13. Paul's message to the Corinthians emphasizes that they 'belong to Christ.' How does this sense of belonging shape your interactions within the church and your broader community?

Specifically, then, what does it mean that *death* is yours, along with everything else? “You own death. It’s your possession. It doesn’t possess you; you possess it.” What does that mean? Now, I’ll give you my understanding of that statement, and then I’ll take you to several passages of Scripture that support this understanding.

When Paul says, “Death [is] yours,” he means, “Death is your servant — not your master, your servant.” It does for you what you need to have done. If I say, “The food in my refrigerator is my food; it’s mine,” I mean, “I can eat it without stealing, and it serves me; it strengthens me to do what I need to do.” If I say, “This car is my car,” I mean, “It serves me; I use it. It doesn’t use me; I use it. It gets me where I want to go.”

So, I’m saying that Paul means, “Paul is your servant” (in fact, he says that earlier in 1 Corinthians 3:5). “Paul is your servant. Apollos is your servant. Cephas is your servant. The world is your servant. Life and death are your servants. You don’t serve them; they serve you. You don’t exist for their benefit; they exist for your benefit. In the end, they will do for you exactly what you need to have done. Death will do for you what you need done.”

All Things Serve God’s Children

Now, here are some biblical pointers to that understanding. Psalm 119:90–91 says,

Your faithfulness [O God] endures to all generations;
you have established the earth, and it stands fast.
By your appointment they stand this day,
for all things are your servants.

Everything in the universe serves the purposes of God — *everything*. There are (as R.C. Sproul used to say) no maverick molecules. Every bird that falls, every hair that turns white, is of God. Everything serves the purposes of God. We are God’s children, and it would make no sense if God said, “Well, all things serve me, but when it comes to my children, I just have no idea how to make all things serve them.” That is crazy. It’s not only crazy; it’s blasphemous. If all things serve our omnipotent, all-wise, all-caring Father, then all things serve us.¹⁰

14. How has life been a blessing to you? What things in life serve you? What things in life bring you the most enjoyment? Take some time to thank God for the life He has given you.

15. How can death serve the believer? How does the worldly view of death compare with the Godly understanding of death?

Studies were compiled and questions were written by Pastor Steve Lomardo (Plano Campus Pastor)

¹⁰ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/death-is-yours-what-does-paul-mean>



FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

1 Corinthians

Who are You to Judge?

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 4:1-13

“Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

But we all have. We all do. Assessing, evaluating, sizing up—judging. It’s a part of our everyday experience. It is so common, in fact, that we mostly don’t even know that we are doing it. Is something good or bad, to our taste or style, does it seem well-made or cheap, is it worth my time? And we regularly do it with people too. What are they wearing? How do they look? Did they laugh at the appropriate (or inappropriate) moment? How do they act?

To a certain degree this is only natural. There’s a ton of information coming at us at any one moment, let alone over the course of an hour much less a day. We have to categorize and make assessments or we could never get anything done. But our judgments, our attitude about judging has gone way beyond this kind of natural assessment.

Judging things and people, often quite harshly, has become a sport for many. On the flip side is the person who says “don’t judge me!” (usually in a very judging tone of voice. Both extremes seem to thrive in today’s world, even in the church.

Too often though, our judgments are compromised. We caught someone at a bad moment and our impression is forever tainted (and the bad moment may have been ours not theirs). We misunderstood or didn’t have all of the information that we needed. Perhaps there was far more going on than we had any idea about. Perhaps we are deceiving ourselves.

In 1 Corinthians 4:1-13, Paul essentially asks the divided and divisive Corinthian church “who are you to judge?” He reminds them of what a leader in the church ought to be, how (and by whom) they ought to be judged, and challenges their ground for judging in the first place with one of the most sarcastic passages in the Bible. It is a great reminder both to be humble in our judgments and to remember who and what Christian leaders ought to be.

BREAK THE ICE

Describe a book or movie that you totally misjudged before you read or saw it (whether you thought it was going to be terrible or great).

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-13

EXPLORE IT

1. How are leaders to be viewed? (v.1)
2. What is the right criteria for judging leaders? (v.2)
3. Whose judgment does Paul not concern himself with and whom does he concern himself with? (vv. 3-5)
4. Why is Paul making the application he is? (vv. 6-7)
5. What do the Corinthians seem to think of themselves compared to Paul? (vv.8-10)
6. How did Paul and his companions respond to their circumstances (vv. 11-13)

APPLY IT

To this point, Paul has thanked God for the Corinthian church, called out their divisions, reminded them of his mission and the seeming foolishness of God's wisdom as compared to human wisdom, spoken to their immaturity and falling in behind one leader or another. Now, in 4:1-5, he addresses the role, responsibility, and real criteria for evaluating himself and others in positions like him.

No doubt Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, (the leaders Paul has named so far), are in view when Paul says "us" in verse 1. Apollos, unlike Paul or Peter, was only an apostle in a secondary sense of being sent to the churches, and he is no longer in Corinth (see 16:12; some speculate he left because of the divisions there), but his inclusion, along with the explanation in 4:6, shows he is making a wider point about church leadership.

Paul uses two words to indicate the place or roles of leaders: servants and managers or stewards. Both words indicate subordinate status. The first indicates someone who takes orders or direction. The second word refers to the slave who managed a household for a master. They may have been "elevated" in status, relatively speaking, but were still a slave.

7. How do we normally think about leadership in today's modern world? What words or characteristics come to mind?

8. How do modern leadership ideas or principles coincide or contrast with Paul's understanding here?

9. Since leaders manage the "mysteries of God," what do you think being found faithful refers to?

Paul's teaching in verses 3-5 almost sounds like he doesn't believe that there needs or even should be any oversight of leaders "called by God," but that would be at odds with his own story. While he did not immediately go to Jerusalem after his conversion in Acts 9, the events of the Jerusalem council in chapter 15 and his own testimony in Galatians 2, indicate that Paul was not a "lone ranger" simply doing whatever he wanted. Rather, Paul is providing a reminder of who the true judge of faithfulness is. It is not the Corinthians who follow after the latest popular speaker, it is not even his own clean conscience, but God himself.

10. Evaluations of performance, of faithfulness, are necessary, so why do you think it is so important for Paul to tell the Corinthian church he doesn't really care if they judge him?

11. We have a tendency to deceive ourselves about our own motives, much less those of others. How can Paul's instruction here help us to be both patient and reflective in judging leaders (and ourselves)?

12. Paul reminds us that the ultimate reward is not praise (recognition) from those around us, but from God himself, and that comes at judgment day, not now. How can this be both a reminder to us of our ultimate goals and a means for better evaluating our leaders?

Verse 6 brings the issue of leadership home to Corinth and to us. Paul says that he applied this discussion to Apollos and himself for their (and our) benefit. Most scholars believe that Paul is using himself to point out the flaws in some boastful leaders in Corinth without naming them. He doesn't want them to "go beyond what is written." This is an odd phrase to us, but likely refers to the Scriptures ("it is written" was a common Jewish way of quoting the scriptures). But which Scriptures? Generally for Paul this means the Old Testament, but given what he has covered so far in the book and the very next part of the verse "that none of you may be puffed up," it seems most likely he has some specific passages in mind, namely the ones he has already quoted.

- 1:19 – quotes Is. 29:14
- 1:31 – quotes Jer. 9:22-23
- 2:9 – quotes Is. 64:4
- 3:19 – quotes Job 5:13
- 3:20 quotes Ps. 93:11

All of these quotes, with the exception of Jer. 9:22-23 speak to God's wisdom relative to humanity's—a major theme so far in 1 Corinthians. The Jeremiah quote goes hand in glove with this idea; it says to boast in the Lord. The Corinthian church seems to have fallen prey to following human wisdom and rhetorically powerful speakers instead of the faithfulness of a servant of the mysteries of God.

Verses 8-13 offer a stark and sarcastic challenge to the Corinthian church. How do we evaluate "success"? Who is truly faithful to the message of Jesus? Paul paints a sarcastic picture. The Corinthian believers think of themselves as kings, especially compared to Paul and his companions who are called fools. The imagery Paul uses is of captured enemies after a campaign. The Roman general would parade them upon his triumphant return and they would be sold as slaves or publicly executed.

13. Why do you think we tend to follow after the latest idea or speaker instead of remaining faithful to the teachings of Scripture? How is our time and culture especially prone to this?

14. Why is it so important to remember that the things we have, even our talents and gifts, come from the Lord and not ourselves?

15. How does Paul's use of sarcasm strike you? (surprising, out of place, something else), and why? Why do you think he uses it her?
16. How does Paul's comparison help us to rethink what success or leadership should entail?
17. How does Paul's reminder of both the situations faced by the leaders (vv. 10-11) and the way that they respond (vv. 12-13) remind us of the difference between us and the world?
18. What are some ways that we can both recognize this kind of leadership publicly and internalize it in the way that we live?



FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

1 Corinthians

Pastoral Job Description

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Imagine writing a job description for a pastor. You might think of qualities like leadership, compassion, teaching, and guidance. But what does this really mean in practice? In 1 Corinthians 4, the Apostle Paul gives us a deeper understanding of these responsibilities. He describes pastors as servants of Christ, stewards of God's mysteries, compassionate fathers, consistent teachers, and committed rulers. This helps us see that being a pastor isn't just about fulfilling a role—it's about embracing a calling that demands both humility and deep care for the congregation.

Paul likens pastors to fathers in their relationship with their congregations, emphasizing that true pastoral care involves more than mere oversight. He clarifies that his intent was not to shame the Corinthians but to admonish them as his "beloved children" (1 Cor. 4:14). This resonates deeply with me as a father of three sons. Just as I guide my boys with love, seeking to nurture them in the right direction, so too must pastors lead their congregations. Like any father, my love for my sons drives me to teach, correct, and guide them—not to shame them, but to build them up in the way they should go. Paul contrasts this fatherly care with the role of "slave guardians," who lack a deep, personal investment in the well-being of those they oversee (1 Cor. 4:15). True pastors, like loving fathers, feel a profound internal obligation to nurture their flock, driven by genuine love and concern.

In addition to being compassionate fathers, pastors are also called to be consistent teachers. Paul underscores the importance of a teaching ministry grounded in the Word of God, explaining that he has taught "the ways of Christ" thoroughly and consistently "everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17). However, Paul goes beyond mere verbal instruction, urging the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 4:16). This call to imitation extends to all of us—myself, the campus pastors, and the elders. We are called to lead by example, living out the teachings of Christ in a way that our congregations can follow. Just as my sons watch and learn from my actions, our church members look to us for guidance in both word and deed.

Paul also presents pastors as rulers who are deeply committed to the spiritual well-being of their congregations. He contrasts the superficial "talk" of those in Corinth who are arrogant with the true power of God's kingdom, stating, "For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power" (1 Cor. 4:20). This power is not about control but about the gospel of Christ, which transforms lives through the Holy Spirit. When necessary, pastors must be prepared to discipline their congregations, not out of a desire to assert dominance, but out of a commitment to guide them back to the truth. Just as I must sometimes correct my sons to keep them on the right path, so, too, must we, as pastors, be willing to exercise discipline when needed, always with the goal of restoring the wayward.

Our text this week paints a comprehensive picture of pastoral ministry, where true pastors are seen as compassionate fathers, consistent teachers, and committed rulers. At Village Bible Church, my fellow pastors, elders, and I are dedicated to embodying these principles. We strive to shepherd our congregation with the same love and dedication I extend to my three sons, ensuring that each member feels valued, guided, and supported. Our commitment is to lead with both compassion and conviction, nurturing a thriving community where everyone can grow in the ways of Christ. Together, we aim to create an environment of trust and care, reflecting the heart of our Good Shepherd and fostering a church family that thrives in unity and faith.

BREAK THE ICE

Can you recall a time when someone in authority, like a parent or mentor, gave you difficult advice that ultimately helped you grow? How did it shape you?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

EXPLORE IT

1. What term does Paul use to describe the Corinthians in this verse?
2. How many fathers in Christ does Paul say the Corinthians have?
3. Who does Paul say he is sending to the Corinthians to remind them of his ways in Christ?
4. According to this verse, what does Paul say the kingdom of God does not consist in?

APPLY IT

Paul had already compared the local church to a family (1 Cor. 3:1–4). But now the emphasis is on the minister as a “spiritual father.” In none of his letters did Paul ever call himself “father.” He was mindful of the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 23:8–12. But in comparing himself to a “spiritual father,” Paul reminded the church of the important ministries he had performed on their behalf.¹¹

- 5. In what ways do the relationships in the church mimic our biological families? What characteristics or attributes make both healthy and productive for all (church/family)members?**

First, Paul had founded the family (vv. 14–15). The Corinthians were Paul’s beloved children in the faith. Whenever we share the gospel with someone and have the joy of leading him to faith in Christ, we become a “spiritual parent” in his life. This does not give us any special authority over his faith (2 Cor. 1:24), but it does create a special relationship that God can use to help him grow. The local church is God’s family for helping the newborn Christians develop. It is important to note that Paul did not take the credit for their conversion. Their spiritual birth was in Christ and through the gospel. Sinners are born again through the ministry of the Spirit of God and the Word of God (John 3:6; 1 Peter 1:23–25).

Paul was the “father” who stood by and assisted at their birth. A child may have many guardians and teachers, but he can have only one father. He has a special relationship to his father that must not be preempted by anyone else. There had been no church in Corinth before Paul came, so that even the second-generation believers in the church were the results of Paul’s effective ministry. Paul founded the church and Apollos followed him and taught the people. In some way that is not made clear in the Scriptures, Peter also ministered at Corinth. (Perhaps he had not been there personally, but other teachers from Jerusalem had ministered in Corinth as “representatives” of Peter.) God’s children need the ministry of different teachers, but they must never forget the “spiritual father” who brought them to Christ.¹²

- 6. Who has played a fatherly or mentoring role in your spiritual journey? How has their guidance shaped your faith, and how can you express your gratitude or continue to learn from them?**

¹¹ Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man’s Knowledge and God’s Wisdom (The BE Series Commentary)

¹² Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) Dr. Daniel L. Akin and James Merritt

7. Who have you had the opportunity to be a spiritual father/mother in another's faith journey?

In 1 Corinthians 4:15, Paul writes to the Corinthians not to shame them but to admonish them as his beloved children. He uses the imagery of a guide, a word derived from the Greek term "pedagogue," which refers to a slave responsible for the training and schooling of a child. This guide was not part of the family and was subordinate to the child's father. Although the guardian might care deeply for the child, there were no natural ties between them. The child's father, who had begotten the child, was ultimately responsible for the child's welfare. Similarly, Paul, as their spiritual father, urges the Corinthians to listen to him and take his warnings to heart, emphasizing his unique role in their spiritual growth and well-being.

8. Considering the analogy Paul uses of a guardian versus a father in 1 Corinthians 4:14, how might learning from preachers and teachers from afar (through radio, books, or study guides) differ from learning from your local pastors and elders? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of each approach, and what might be gained or lost in your spiritual growth and community involvement?

Paul says, "I urge you to imitate me." The Greek word translated "imitate" is *mimetai*, from which we get our word *mimic*. Schreiner notes, "In context, the imitation centers on Paul's suffering as an apostle (4:9-13)" (1 Corinthians, 105). I agree with this, though I would not limit it only to the sufferings of Paul. He has provided a pattern, a life worthy of emulation because his role model is Christ! Calvin argues, "But to what extent he wishes them to be imitators of him, he shows elsewhere, when he adds, as he was of Christ (1 Cor. xi. 1). This limitation must always be observed, so as not to follow any man, except so far as he leads us to Christ. (1 Corinthians, 173) I like Carson's simple summation: "What Paul wants them to imitate is his passion to live life in the light of the cross" (The Cross, 110).¹³

9. In what ways has imitating your spiritual leaders positively influenced your spiritual growth and helped you develop a deeper relationship with Christ?

10. What potential dangers exist in mimicking your spiritual leaders without discernment, especially if their actions or teachings diverge from Christ's example? How can you ensure that your imitation of others is always leading you closer to Christ?

¹³ Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) Dr. Daniel L. Akin and James Merritt

11. What should believers be looking for in their leaders that they can follow?

Here is an illustration of the absolute ultimate in spiritual fatherhood. Paul had done such a job on rearing Timothy that sending Timothy was just like being there. Do you see the point? He had so raised Timothy to be a spiritual son that Timothy could stand in his place. I'm telling you, folks, that is the epitome of rearing spiritual children, when you don't even have to go, you can send one of your sons in the faith in your place and know that if they follow him, they'll be following you who are following Christ.

Now, that's the way to minister on the broadest base. The best way to be an effective minister is not to get a high-powered car, a handful of airplane tickets, and keep going and go all over the place and minister to everybody. The best place to minister is probably to stay in one place, build spiritual children who then can go everywhere with the ministry.¹⁴

12. How does investing in the spiritual growth of others, like Paul did with Timothy, help ensure that the DNA of discipleship is effectively passed on and multiplied, compared to trying to personally reach as many people as possible?

¹⁴ Sermon by John MacArthur found @ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1822>

In these verses, Paul confronts the arrogance of some Corinthians, who believed they were above correction and acted as if Paul wouldn't return. Paul asserts that he will come soon, "if the Lord is willing," highlighting his humility and recognition of God's sovereignty. His visit will test the true spiritual power behind their words, contrasting mere talk with genuine spiritual authority, which is demonstrated by God's transformative power, not just by eloquence or self-confidence. Paul makes it clear that the kingdom of God is about real power, not empty words, and he will determine whether their arrogance has any true spiritual backing.

13. Why do you think some members of the Corinthian church became arrogant in Paul's absence? What are some ways that spiritual arrogance can manifest in a church today?

14. What does Paul mean by saying the kingdom of God is about power and not just talk? How should this understanding influence our daily Christian walk?

- 15. Why is it important for us, as believers at Village Bible Church, to seek the genuine power of the Holy Spirit rather than focusing on eloquence or charisma? How can this shift in focus impact the effectiveness of our church's ministry and witness?**

Parental love earns the right to discipline—hence verses 18–21. Paul warns us that our behavior ought to match our words. If not, then corrective action is required. Yet this corrective action must have the proper balance. All love without discipline produces a pampering permissiveness that leaves its recipients spoiled and still in their sins. Yet discipline untempered by love produces a harsh authoritarianism that drives people away from the church, and often from God, the minute they have the chance to escape.¹⁵

- 16. What are the dangers of providing love without discipline within the church, and how might this lead to permissiveness and a lack of spiritual growth?**

- 17. How can we, as a community at Village Bible Church, ensure that our love for one another earns the right to offer corrective discipline when necessary?**

Studies were compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal (Sugar Grove Campus Pastor)

¹⁵ Commentary notes from Craig Blomberg found @ <https://www.bibleoutlines.com/wp-content/uploads/1corinthians.pdf>