

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## 1 CORINTHIANS 3-4

There's an old American folk song called "Billy Boy."

Charming Billy is in love with a girl who is apparently too young to leave home. When you sing the chorus, "she's a young thing and cannot leave her mother," you get the impression Billy's girl is still a teenager.

But listen to the lyrics, "How old is she, Billy Boy, Billy Boy? How old is she, charming Billy? Three times six, and four times seven, twenty-eight and eleven - she's a young thing and cannot leave her mother."

Add it up and Billy's girl is not such a young thing after all. *It you're good at math...* She's actually 85 years old! *Suddenly you're concerned about Billy's girl.*

This is a folk song about a dysfunctional person.

By the time you're 85 you're expected to grow up and move out. You're no longer a child, but an adult.

And this was Paul's concern in regards to the Church at Corinth. At this stage in the life of the church Paul expected them to show some maturity. Instead, they were acting like "*babes.*" They were true believers, but there was some dysfunction. They weren't growing up.

Paul coins a term to describe them, "*carnal.*"

Chapter 3 begins, "*And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.*"

In chapter 2 Paul divided humanity into two groups - **the natural man** and **the spiritual man**.

The **natural man** doesn't know God. Man is a sinner by nature - born alienated from God. Left to himself he spirals to destruction. Sin and rebellion, ignorance and prejudice, *come natural for a natural man*.

But the **spiritual man** is animated by God. His Spirit dwells within him. He also sins at times, but it grieves him. It goes against his new nature. Deep inside he has a desire to please God, and to love others.

But now in Chapter 3 Paul brings up another type of person. He calls him the **"carnal man."** The Latin word **"carne"** means **"flesh."** I think about this when I eat a bowl of Kathy's chili. She puts meat - lots of flesh - in her chili - it's **"chili con carne"** or **"chili with meat."**

**"Carne"** describes the believer who lives oriented toward the flesh. *He possesses God's Spirit, but isn't possessed by God's Spirit.* He hasn't allowed the Holy Spirit to shape and color his outlook. His life is governed by natural, sinful appetites. **He has God's Spirit, but lives as if he doesn't.** Paul refers to such a person as a *carnal Christian* - a **"babe in Christ."**

And carnal Christians show the same behavior you'd see in the nursery... *If they don't get their way, or aren't the center of attention, they cry and pout...*

*They can't stand on their own, and need other people to prop them up... They lack discernment, and become vulnerable to deception... Because of their short attention*

*span they get easily distracted... And finally, they don't yet feed themselves. Their only nourishment comes from the pastor and their church...*

Realize, if you've been born again a few weeks this is an understandable dilemma. You're a babe in Christ.

It takes time to mature. But if you've been a Christian for years and you're still *carnal*, something is dysfunctional. You need to identify it, repent, and grow.

Nowhere in Scripture do we see playpens and burping bibs in heaven. Along the way, from earth to heaven, God expects His people to grow and mature.

When my daughter-in-law was pregnant she got an interesting baby shower gift. It was a "pee-pee teepee." It's a device that aids in changing a baby boy's diaper.

A washable cloth cone caps off a certain part of the male anatomy. This protects the diaper-changer from being fired on by an uncontrolled bladder. It's a great idea, but I hope it's viewed as a temporary fix. The real goal is for the young man to gain control of his bladder.

And this is God's goal for us. Rather than be carnal, He wants us to live under the influence of His Spirit.

And this is why God doesn't take us to heaven the moment we are saved. He leaves us in a wicked world. He subjects us to trials and temptation. The resistance training builds endurance and teaches us to trust Him!

Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 2, “I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able.”

Here's another characteristic of a carnal Christian. He drinks milk when he needs to be eating solid food.

It's cute to watch a newborn suck a bottle, but a teenager still on Similac is an alarming problem.

And this was the case with the believers in Corinth. They had an immature approach to Scripture. They were sucking on the basics, rather than cultivating an appetite for meatier truths. Hebrews 5:13-14 describes the issue, “For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age.”

*Realize, a babe reads Bible stories. The mature studies Bible doctrine... A babe wants to know about God. The mature seeks to know God Himself...*

*A babe marvels at what God does. The mature worships who God is... A babe learns biblical principles. The mature gains a biblical perspective...*

*A babe fills his mind with facts. The mature fills his heart with love... Again, it's okay to be a babe for a season. But too many believers stay there. They never graduate kindergarten, and become spiritually mature.*

Paul says to the Corinthians, “for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”

Another mark of carnality is friction and division.

You would expect to see quarrels, and fighting, and biting, and selfishness in the church nursery, but not in the sanctuary. Babies squabble, not mature adults.

Apparently, Corinth's worship services resembled a toddler's class. Paul writes, "For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" Kids fight over trivial, selfish stuff. You can hear them on the playground. "My dad is stronger than your dad..." "No way, my dad can whip your dad!"

Little kids take pride in human heroes - in celebrities. And this was the situation in the Corinthian church. The believers polarized around their favorite pastors.

And this is why I'm deliberately non-denominational. I think it's enough to simply wear the singular label, "Christian." For me, emphasizing any other distinctive, or association only diminishes the importance of our connection to Christ. Yes, we're *Calvary Chapel*, but we don't have to run around calling ourselves that.

Most importantly, we're *followers of Jesus*.

### **Speaking of denominations...**

Know how many Southern Baptists it takes to change a light bulb? *At last count 16 million, but they can't agree if the light bulb needs to be changed.*

How many Mennonites does it take to change a light bulb? *Eventually about five, but they can get along fine without a light bulb.*

How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb? *Three. One to change it, one to bless it, and one to pour the sherry.*

How many Nazarenes does it take to change a light bulb? *Eleven. One to change it and ten to organize the pot-luck supper that follows.*

How many Presbyterians does it take to change a light bulb? *They're not sure, but there's a committee studying the issue.*

How many Amish does it take to change a light bulb? *What's a light bulb?*

How many Church of Christ does it take to change a light bulb? *Only one, but if anyone else tries to change it, the light won't come on.*

How many Methodist does it take to change a light bulb? *Just one, but let's not offend anybody by the change.*

How many Roman Catholics does it take to change a light bulb? *Nine. One to install the new bulb, and eight to sell raffle tickets on the old one.*

How many Charismatics does it take to change a light bulb? *Three. One to change the light bulb, and two to bind the spirit of darkness.*

And finally, how many Calvary Chapel guys does it take to change a light bulb? *Only one, but he never shows up to church on time.*

I understand, that each church has its own flavor and style - and that's okay. I believe God creates a *wide array of churches* to reach a *wide variety of people*.

What's wrong is when churches accentuate their differences in a prideful way - as if they're better than other churches. We need *cooperation not competition!*

Despite our differences we are still one Body.

Verse 5 poses the question, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?”

*Why get excited about the messenger?* It's the Lord Jesus who died to save us, not His messenger.

Yes, someone delivers the message, but the Lord equips him, and sends him out, and even softens the hearts of those who hear him. It's the Lord Jesus - not his messenger - that's responsible for our salvation.

Paul says, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” In Corinth, Paul planted and Apollos watered. But in Ephesus, the roles had been reversed. It was Apollos who planted and Paul who watered.

God uses us to touch different people at different points in their life. I've spent years with some people sowing seeds into their lives, and watering them in prayer, and I've seen very little fruit... Then I bump into another guy for the first time and get to lead him to Christ. God uses us in different ways at different times.

But always, without exception, it is God who supplies the miracle of life. It's "*God who gives the increase.*"

An agricultural school in Iowa studied the ingredients needed to grow 100 bushels of corn on an acre of land.

Here's a partial list, "Four million pounds of water, 6,800 pounds of oxygen, 5,200 pounds of carbon, 160 pounds of nitrogen, 125 pounds of potassium, 75 pounds of sulphur, etc. etc." The researchers estimated that less than 5% of what's actually needed to produce a crop of corn is supplied by the farmer. It's God who supplies the lion's share of the resources.

*And the same is true of the spiritual harvest...*

Compared to the work of the Holy Spirit, our role in the saving of souls is minor. We can sow the Word, but we can't it make it *grow* in a heart. Nothing happens eternally or spiritually unless God's Spirit is involved.

It's always "*God who gives the increase*" - and thus, it's God who deserves all the glory!

Verse 8, "*Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.*"

We're on the same team! Christians should be working toward the same goal, *serving the same Boss.*

And our Boss will reward us not by the size of our contribution - or even the sphere of our influence - but



whether we're faithful in the task He assigns. We don't get to choose our job. He chooses. We're to be faithful.

*Look at how Chapter 3 breaks down...*

In verses 1-4 we are **God's family**. Our emphasis is on *maturity*... In verses 5-9 we are **God's field**, and our objective is *activity*... Now in verses 9-23 we're **God's Temple**, and our concern is *bringing God glory*.

**Maturity, evangelism, worship** are our priorities.

Verse 10, “**According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.**” Any architect knows the span, and strength, and height of a building depends on the density and depth of its foundation.

The foundation is the most important part of the structure. And the same is true with any kind of spiritual construction - among believers and in churches.

Verse 11, “**For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.**”

And here is the solid foundation on which every Christian ministry should build, “**Jesus Christ.**”

*Anchor a ministry to a social cause, or a pet doctrine, or some spiritual phenomena, or a political objective, or a style of worship, or an exciting personality - and you're building on a shaky foundation... If you want the ministry to last, build it so that it points people to Jesus!*

Verse 12, “Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw*, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.”

When you go to erect a building in Gwinnett County you can’t just slap up a structure - you have to comply to the county building codes. And God also has building codes. In serving God there are guidelines...

I grew up in a church with a domineering pastor. He pushed folks around to get his way. One day my mom and I were discussing it, and she defended him. She sighed, “*Yea, but he did lead a lot of people to Christ.*”

That’s when God spoke to me through my own words. “*But mom, in ministry the ends never justifies the means.*” And it doesn’t. That’s what Paul is teaching us here. One day our works will be judged...

The Bible speaks of three end-time judgments...

In Matthew 25 the nations of the earth are gathered together to be judged in the Valley of Decision...

In Revelation 20 the rebels and unbelievers are tried and condemned at God’s Great White Throne..

But believers will appear before the *Bema Seat - the Judgment Seat of Christ*. This is Paul’s focus here.

Unbelievers will be judged by their works, whether good or evil. Whereas, Christians are saved by faith, not works. But our works of service, after we’re saved, will be tested. God will reveal “*of what sort*” they were.

He'll expose the motive behind our acts of service...

The times you taught Sunday School *grumbling because you had to get up early to babysit a bunch of snotty-nosed kids...* the time you ushered, and hurried folks along so you could get home and watch football...

Those acts of service will be like *“wood, hay, straw”* in the fire. They look impressive going in, but the fire of God's holiness burns them to ashes. Whereas, the time you jumped out of bed eager to love the little ones with the love of Jesus... the time you led worship with a smile, and put out some extra effort... when those acts of service pass through God's holiness they'll come through un-singed - like *“gold, silver, precious stones.”*

Verse 14, *“If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”* Again, we're saved by the blood of Jesus. Our soul escapes judgment, because Jesus passed through the fire for us... But our service will be tested to see *“of what sort it is...”*

*“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.”*

In the OT Temple the priests would never defile or pollute what had been dedicated to God. And this principle carries over into the NT. The church is God's Temple - and church-work like Temple-work of old should never be polluted with a sour attitude, or jealousy of another man, or manipulation, or greed...

Christian service should be holy and bring God glory!

Verse 18, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

And to prove his point, Paul quotes from Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11, “For it is written, “He catches the wise in their own craftiness”; and again, “The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

He reminds the Corinthians not to become proud of what they know. Recall from Chapter 1, God doesn't reveal Himself through human knowledge, but through simple faith. Don't become proud of what you know, and how well you decipher and organize information - for up against God's wisdom we're all just bozos.

“Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come - all are yours. And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's.”

The splinter groups in Corinth laid an exclusive claim on their favorite teacher, as if he belonged to them.

Yet in the NT God's family is called a “fellowship.” The Greek word is “koinonia” which means “to hold all things in common.” Thus, the blessings of Christ are *yours*, only as long as they're *ours*.

Christianity is about sharing – not hoarding.

Think about it, what belongs to God belongs to those in Christ... *we like that!* But follow the logic - thus, all that belongs to me belongs to you. There's no private property in the spiritual kingdom Christ is building.

Author Alan Redpath writes, "I love to go out into the country and remember that it is my Father's world, and because it is His, it is mine. I may never own legal title to an inch of it, but it is all mine in the Lord Jesus."

That means, every sunset, every snowflake, every rainbow, every smile belongs to me - if I belong to God. All that belongs to God is shared among His children.

Chapter 4, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Paul describes a Christian minister in two ways: "*servants of Christ*" and "*stewards of the mysteries of God.*"

The Greek word translated, "*servant*" means "under rower." Slaves were chained to oars below deck in the Roman galley ships. Two columns of men rowed to the cadence of their overseer. The Romans kept up the pace with the use of a whip. The slaves had no say in the speed the boat traveled or how hard they rowed.

Their only job was to follow orders...

*And welcome to Christian ministry!*

If you want to be involved in ministry at any level: an entry level job... middle management... or CEO... the job title is "*servant.*" Somewhere along the line in our culture the word "*minister*" gained an exalted status, but the Lord has never

called anyone to be a *star*, or a *celebrity*, or a *sensation* - just a *servant*.

The Assistant Pastor for years at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa was Pastor Romaine. Romaine would tell young pastors, “**Serve the Lord as if you’re serving Him in only your underwear.**” If you're in your skivvies you're not going to want people noticing you! The idea will be to serve, and then get out of the spotlight.

We are “**servants of Christ,**” but we’re also “**stewards of the mysteries of God.**” A “**steward**” was a household manager - a trusted slave placed in charge of his Master’s house. He was expected to manage the household affairs with His Master’s interests in mind.

And likewise, God entrusts us with incredible spiritual resources. We’re to handle them *wisely*, not *wastefully*.

Note the steward’s lone priority, verse 2, “**Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.**”

**Not successful necessarily, but faithful.**

We live in a world preoccupied with success and its symbols. Even in church often the worth of a person’s ministry is measured by *budgets, buildings, and data bases - bucks in the bank and buns in the seats.*

But you can have great numbers - *loads of nickels and noses* - and still not be pleasing to God. *The Mormons have lots of people, but they’re heretical not faithful...* Don't be deceived. True success in ministry is determined by one quality - are you “**faithful?**” Have you been obedient to what has God called you to do?

When Mount Vesuvius erupted it covered the cityscape of Pompeii under a blanket of lava. Years later when the ruins were searched a sentinel was found - encased in the lava - still standing by the gate.

Even in the chaos of the eruption the man never left his post. Like a good steward, when the smoke cleared, he was *“found faithful.”* And this should be our goal as *servants and stewards* of our Lord Jesus!

Verse 3, *“But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court.”*

Evidently, Paul’s critics in Corinth were accusing him of being **unfaithful**. And in the next few verses Paul will answer their charges in three ways...

**First**, he says, *“In fact, I do not even judge myself...”*

Notice, Paul doesn’t even judge himself. Rather than *rake himself over the coals*, he *rests in God’s grace*.

**Rather than look inward Paul looks upward.**

Some Christians I know are into self-examination.

They spent enormous time and energy searching their heart for hidden sins. In retrospect their effort is wasted time. This is *not* how Paul dealt with himself.

Instead of *digging for sin*, Paul *reached for the heavens*. He focused on knowing Christ, and trusted the Lord to bring to light the flaws he needed to address. **Too much introspection causes depression.**

Spend all your time **looking for sin**, and you'll have very little time left to **look to Jesus**. Faith grows when we get our eyes off ourselves and fixed on Jesus.

**Second**, Paul makes the comment, "**For I know of nothing against myself** (in other words *he has a clean conscience*), **yet I am not justified by this...**"

God created in us a conscience as a moral compass. Our conscience is a tool to help us discern right from wrong. But the conscience can deceive us at times.

Proverbs 14:12 warns us, "**There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.**" We're vulnerable to blind spots that our conscience might not pick up on. Sin is like a crumb on your beard, without a mirror, you're usually the last one to see it!

And this is why for Paul, Jesus was his only Judge. "**But He who judges me is the Lord.**" Paul didn't answer to his critics in Corinth. The Lord Jesus was his Judge.

Then **third**, Paul realized all permanent judgments won't be made until Jesus returns. He says in verse 5, "**Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.**"

**Then each one's praise will come from God.**

Here's a danger we run into by casting judgment on another person. In the here and now, rarely do we see the whole picture. Only the Lord has all the facts...



Once, a couple came in for pre-marital counseling. When it surfaced that they were living under the same roof I hammered away at the idea of a separation.

*Suddenly the girl bolted from the room in tears...*

It turned out a few weeks earlier her apartment had been broken into, and she'd been raped. Her boyfriend was sleeping on the couch for her protection. I apologized for jumping to a conclusion before I knew the whole story. Only Jesus can read our motive.

This is why we need to leave the judgment of a person's heart up to him and his Master. Only at the return of Jesus will all our hearts be revealed and our motives disclosed. Until that day, don't jump the gun!

Verse 6, **“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.”** Here Paul identifies the root cause of the schisms in Corinth - it was pride!

The easiest way to lift up myself is by putting down a brother. By making *you look bad* I make *myself look good*. Pride was the cause of their destructive division.

It wasn't just that someone felt loyal to Apollos. He then tried to put down Paul. And the Corinthians who felt an allegiance to Paul weren't willing to leave it at that. They picked apart Apollos. It was all about pride.

And notice the cure Paul suggest for this unbridled judging, ***“learn... not to think beyond what is written...”***

Here's the boundaries of our judging - if it's not in God's written Word - if you can't pick up a Bible and point to chapter and verse - *if it's a question of style, or opinion, or taste, or tradition* - then stop your judging!

Just because you don't like it, doesn't make it wrong.

Paul 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?*" All the Corinthians had they received from God. It was a gift of His grace.

It's not as if they'd earned any of their blessings. Why then are they now taking pride in what was a gift?

It reminds me of the pastor who asked his friend, "Will you pray that I stay humble?" His friend replied, "First, tell me, what do you have to be proud about?"

The answer for us all is zilch. All we have is a gift.

In verse 8 Paul reeks with sarcasm. And I'm sure it angered the Corinthians when they first read these words. Paul mocks the arrogant believers of Corinth, "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!"

The Corinthians were acting like royalty. They were flaunting their privileges in Christ; while ignoring the responsibility that came with those privileges.

"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.” The word *“spectacle”* was well known to Roman citizens. The Emperor controlled the masses by keeping their *stomachs full and minds entertained*.

*“Bread and circuses”* was the Caesar’s formula.

And the various forms of Roman entertainment were known as *“spectacles.”* Amphitheaters were built to host athletic competitions. Chariot races were held in Rome’s Circus Maximus - the Talladega of the day.

At times the Coliseum in Rome was flooded to stage mock naval battles. Gladiators fought to the death on its normally dusty floor. A favorite, bloody headliner in the Roman Coliseum was to toss Christian leaders to the hungry lions. It all fed Rome’s thirst for *“spectacle.”*

Paul is saying that while the Corinthians are passing frivolous judgments on each other, and causing dissension - there are other believers in the Church who have been made a *“spectacle to the world”* - *who are paying a steep price to follow their Lord Jesus.*

The prideful Corinthians were being carnal; while men and angels were focused on the apostles who were being abused by the Roman as *“spectacles.”*

In verse 10 Paul speaks sarcastically. He contrasts the persecuted apostles with the prideful Corinthians...

*“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!”*

How did the mighty Corinthians become so wise, and strong, and honorable in their estimation; while the apostles - men that *God honored* and appointed as head of the church - who sacrificed their very lives for Jesus' sake appeared as fools. *Could it be that the Corinthians were judging success by worldly criteria?*

In the movie, "[Field of Dreams](#)," an Iowa farmer hears a voice in his cornfield tell him to plow under his crop and build a baseball diamond. He builds it, and shadowy men from a bygone era play ball on his field.

Of course, the farmer's extended family thinks he's a certifiable nut. No one trusts his actions. They think he's being reckless. Everybody calls the man a fool.

But as a Christian I also hear voices! I base life-altering decisions on a voice nobody else hears. I've taken economic risk to follow that voice. And as a result, I've seen God in action when no one else saw Him. Am I ready to be seen by other people the way farmer's neighbors saw him?... be a "*fool for Christ?*"

The Corinthians were proud. They were concerned and worried about their image in the eyes of others. They wanted to be seen as wise, strong, honorable.

In contrast, Paul could care less about his image. He was willing to be a "*fool*" if it was for Jesus' sake!

Verse 11, "*To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless.*" A

steward's job was not to be rich and comfortable, but **faithful** - even if it required suffering.

**“And we labor, working with our own hands.”**

In Corinth, Paul had met a couple named *“Aquila and Priscilla.”* They share Paul’s trade of tent-making. Together the three friends had gone into business. Paul had worked a secular job to support his ministry.

He continues listing the sacrifices he made for the sake of his ministry, **“Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat.”**

Paul was certainly a fighter. He never rolled over. He always struck back... *But it was the way he fought...*

He responded to personal attacks with blessing - he resisted opposition with increased commitment - and when falsely accused he retaliated with the truth...

Paul says, **“We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”** Literally, he’s saying, **“we’re treated like the scum of the earth.”**

This is how erroneous human judgments can be.

The people God crowns, the world clubs. Folks who are honored in heaven, are mistreated on earth.

Verse 14, **“I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.”**

**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.”**

Paul was grieved that the Corinthians listened to his critics, and didn't trust in the faithfulness of his ministry.

Paul was the person who had led them to Christ.

In essence, he was their spiritual father. Paul once said to a traveling companion, "**Luke, I am your father.**"

*Get it... Luke... the writer of the book of Acts...*

The Corinthians will have 10,000 teachers in their lifetime, but only one father... And this is true of all believers. *The pastor or friend who led you to Christ, the church where you were saved* - will always have a special place in your heart. You'll enjoy other churches and teachers, but you only have one spiritual parent.

And this made the Corinthians' doubts of Paul all the more painful to him. *He felt a personal betrayal.*

One of the first lessons we should learn involving ministry is that **love always flows downward**. We don't love our parents, as much as our parents love us. Our children won't love us, as much as we love our children. Love is like water. It always flows downward.

And the same is true spiritually. Just because you love and invest in someone else's life, doesn't mean they'll return the favor. The people you serve will probably never love you as much as you love them.

Paul tells the Corinthians in verse 16, "**Therefore I urge you, imitate me.**" *And what a powerful statement!*

Paul is not like some parents I know, who tell their teenagers, "**do as I say, not as I do...**" Don't think for a second

your kids won't see through that kind of hypocrisy. *Paul sought to be a leader by example!*

Verse 17, “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord...”

Not all of Paul's love had gone unreciprocated. Timothy stood by Paul, as a “*faithful son in the Lord.*”

“Who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.” Paul's critics had the attitude, “*while the cat is away the mice will play.*”

Paul issues a warning to the Corinthians, *before long, he'll be coming to Corinth to set things straight!*

Verse 19, “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.” Apparently, when Paul arrives in Corinth he's add some **pow** to his preaching! He's a tough hombre. He was not afraid to lace on the gloves.

I'm not sure exactly what he had in mind here, but it sounds like he was prepared to cram a little humble pie down some haughty Corinthian throats.

When Paul hits town he's going to demand an accounting of the church's attitudes and accusations.

And yet, Paul wants his return to Corinth to be a happy reunion... *yet it's their choice...* The chapter closes in verse

21, “What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”

Paul’s approach to the Corinthians will depend on their attitude toward him. Sometimes *discipleship* requires *discipline*. It takes love **and** a firm hand.



When my boys were little tikes, and they were intent on misbehaving, all I had to do to get their attention was to take off my belt and lay it over the door to their room. When dad's belt came off, I didn't have to say another word. **And here, Paul is taking off his belt.**

*Do they want him to come with a rod or in love?*

Let me close with a line from a country song, "Sometimes you're the windshield. Sometimes you're the bug." Paul isn't threatening them, he's just telling...

*They'll be the bug, if they don't stop bugging him.*