**Paul – A Father to the Corinthians**

*A Portrait of Spiritual Leadership – 1 Corinthians 1-5*

**Introduction**

1. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is not only a product of inspiration, but of a loving heart devoted to leading those who have been entrusted to his care.
2. **1 Corinthians 4:14-15** – Paul had only just started addressing the multiple problems within the Corinthian church, but he ensures them it is because he cares for them and loves them.
   1. **(v. 15)** – this is not some way of Paul elevating himself above others, but of expressing his intimate connection with these brethren.
   2. **2 Corinthians 6:11-13; 7:2-3** – His affection for them was apparent by all the things he was doing for them.
3. The way Paul approached the problems within the Corinthian congregation manifests great spiritual leadership which should be imitated by all who find themselves in leadership roles. (elders, deacons, preachers, parents, older Christians, peers, etc.)
4. Humility and Stewardship
5. Those in the position of spiritual leadership must constantly remind themselves of Christ’s consideration of the position – **Luke 22:24-30**
   1. There is not a denial of their position of authority/leadership – (**v. 25** – authority), (**v. 26** – governs), (**vv. 29-30** – kingdom/rule bestowed, judging).
   2. There is a correction of the common view of leadership – (**vv. 27, 29-30**) – leadership is ultimately a service, and stewardship.
   3. Leadership requires humility to stoop to the needs of others, to be harnessed by the will of God, and it requires the recognition that who you are entrusted to lead belongs to someone else.
6. Paul’s authority is recognized in the beginning, but in the same breath he places himself among the Corinthians in a similar light – **1 Corinthians 1:1-2**
   1. (**v. 1**) – He is an apostle – He has the right to assert that authority (**cf. 1 Corinthians 9:12, 18** – but it is not for his sake to abuse it).
   2. (**v. 2**) – the Corinthians are noted to be saints, and subject to the authority of Jesus, but uses language that numbers himself with them. ***(“their Lord and OURS,” NASB***, emph. – JC).
7. His leadership is a stewardship – **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**
   1. (**vv. 1-4**) – He is accountable for God for how he handles the gospel, and the people he is to minister to.
   2. (**v. 5)** – humility is the result – I only want/need God’s recognition – this translates into the humble service of others who were placed by God in Paul’s care.
8. He simultaneously views himself as important, and unimportant – **1 Corinthians 3:5-9, 18-23**
   1. (**vv. 5-8**) – his ministry is important and is a responsibility of His to labor in diligence, but he knows he is simply one THROUGH WHOM GOD IS WORKING (**v. 5**) – God gives the increase.
   2. **(v. 9)** – He recognizes that though he plays a role, this is all God’s.
   3. (**vv. 18-20**) – a contrast to the party spirit among them, and the mindset Paul himself possesses.
      1. He humbly hides behind the cross of Christ to bring people to faith in God – **2:1-5**
      2. Others promote themselves by human wisdom, and the Corinthians follow suit – **3:3-4**
   4. (**vv. 21-23**) – where others would be zealous for the Corinthians for their advantage, Paul explains that HE IS FOR THEM, and that is so they can be for Christ and God.
9. Acknowledgment and Optimism
10. Any position of spiritual leadership is going to deal with various negatives – sluggishness, insubordination, naivete, immaturity, ignorance, worldliness, etc.
    1. Paul to Timothy – **2 Timothy 2:24-26; 4:2** – need for gentleness, patience, humility, longsuffering, etc.
    2. However, despite all the negative a leader may observe, it is imperative that they look for any positive to acknowledge and appeal to – **Hebrews 6:9-12** – there was serious problem he was addressing, but there were exceptional things they had been engaged in, and were engaged in.
11. 1 Corinthians is one of Paul’s earliest letters, and in it he manifests his custom to spend some time regarding his thanksgiving to God for them – **1 Corinthians 1:4-7**
    1. **(v. 9)** – they were called into fellowship with Christ (**v. 2** – sanctified in Christ and call on His name).
       1. They belong to Him, and He works among them and with them.
       2. They are servants of Christ, and active in His kingdom.
    2. **(vv. 4-7a**) – God’s grace was at work among them in the bestowal and exercise of spiritual gifts.
       1. **(v. 4)** – ***“grace”*** in a concrete sense (**cf. 2 Corinthians 8:7**) – (**v. 7a** – came short in no spiritual gift).
          1. Paul introduces here a subject he would spend three chapters on later – **chs. 12-14** – spiritual gifts.
          2. There were problems Paul knew about concerning their use of these gifts, and estimation of them – HE WOULD GET TO THAT, BUT THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE THANKFUL FOR.
       2. **(v. 5)** – through the revelation by these gifts they were given to know the gospel further – God worked in and among them as His people.
          1. **(v. 7a) – 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11** – God the Spirit was at work among them – their abuse of the gifts was not a reflection on His work or intentions.
             1. Paul acknowledges this great blessing, and how God was at work among them.
             2. **(12:31; 14:5)** – He does not discourage them from desiring the gifts but seeks to harness the desire with the right motivations.
          2. In a more general sense – **Acts 11:22-23** – the grace of God among believers – would there have been corrections to make, and knowledge to impart? Yes! But they had changed and were being used by God.
       3. **(v. 6)** – the gospel was confirmed among them by these miraculous gifts. **(cf. Hebrews 2:3-4)**
          1. Implied result is their conviction and obedience.
          2. **1 Corinthians 12:13** – they were persuaded by the confirmed word (not everybody is) and partook of it.
    3. **(v. 7b)** – part of their conviction and obedience included their anticipation of Christ’s coming.
       1. The waiting Paul refers to is not passive – they were actively engaged in spiritual matters as they looked for Christ’s coming.
       2. **Cf. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** – turned from past life, serving God, waiting for Jesus’ coming.
       3. They are far from where they need to be in this and there is much to correct, but they had still undergone a tremendous change that Paul is thankful for, and acknowledging.
12. Paul not only acknowledges what is good among them, but also mentions his optimism for their future by God’s grace – **1 Corinthians 1:8-9**
    1. Before Paul admonishes them, and points out their problems, he first demonstrates his confidence that they will allow God to work in them.
    2. **He does not express doubt and then encourage change.**
13. Clarity and Conviction
14. Though Paul engages in encouraging and optimistic tones as he acknowledges the good that is occurring among them, he does not hesitate to address their faults with precision and clarity.
15. He received negative reports, and confirmed their validity rather than ignoring them, and addressed them to the Corinthians – **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**
    1. **(v. 10)** – though they were enriched in utterance and knowledge **(v. 5)** they were in great need of unity.
    2. **(vv. 11-12)** – there were divisions among them.
    3. **(v. 13)** – he did not water them down but exposed their severity in unmistakable fashion.
       1. Did Christ stand for multiple things? Was He divided?
       2. Was any man the sacrifice for your sins? **(cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15).**
       3. Was it by and into Paul’s authority, or any other authority that you were baptized? **(cf. Matthew 28:18-20).**
16. He exposed that the mindset they possessed was arrogant, and robbed God of the glory due Him – **1 Corinthians 1:29-31**
17. Though he called them saints before **(1:2),** he did not hesitate to rebuke them for their carnality – **1 Corinthians 3:1-4**
    1. **(vv. 2-3)** – He shamed them with their failure to progress – he should have been able to expect more of them by now, but they were reverting to their worldly ways.
18. Paul even used irony and sarcasm to convict them of their folly – **1 Corinthians 4:8-13** – you are acting as though you are beyond where we are as apostles!
    1. Ultimately, with words as these he helps them see their own folly.
    2. Sometimes it is necessary for a leader to set the erring up and say, “YOU ARE THE MAN!”
19. As harsh as the language had seemed, Paul reaffirms his love for them, and explains that his clarity and conviction was out of his concern for their souls – **1 Corinthians 4:14-17**
    1. **(v. 15)** – This is not a statement of pride, but of genuine and intimate concern for them – He is not just some teacher that followed, but he has served them and cared for them from the beginning!
    2. **(v. 17)** – He is not giving up on them but is trying to aid them to faithfulness.
20. Warning and Discipline
21. Spiritual leaders are called to the difficult and selfless sacrificial act of being the bearer of bad news, and warning concerning divine punishment and discipline – **Ezekiel 3:16-19**
22. He warns them of divine judgment against any who would be complicit in defiling the church through error or division – **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**
23. Not only does a spiritual leader like Paul warn of divine judgment in the end, but he does not resist God’s desire to use him for corrective discipline in the present – **1 Corinthians 4:18-21**
    1. After the lengthy discussion of carnality and division; the party spirit they displayed – **Chapters 1-4**
    2. **(vv. 19-20)** – he would not just come talking, but acting, and meting out punishment/discipline – the consequences warned about are real.
    3. **(v. 21)** – the warning is given to grant the option of repentance, and therefore a pleasant visit. (NO LEADER ENJOY’S CORRECTIVE OR PUNITIVE DISCIPLINE, BUT UNDERSTAND’S ITS NECESSITY.)
24. Paul enforces discipline in a specific case among the Corinthians – **1 Corinthians 5:1-5**
    1. **(v. 3)** – Paul is essentially expressing the clarity of the problem to the extent that he knows it must be addressed from a distance – he does not put his head in the sand.
    2. **(vv. 4-5)** – in the disciplinary measure, Paul shows his leadership in understanding two major things about spiritual discipline:
       1. **(v. 4)** – it is by the authority of the Lord. (**cf. Matthew 18:19-20**).
       2. **(v. 5)** – it is for the salvation of the one disciplined.
       3. **Any “leader” who refuses to follow the warnings with discipline when necessary, opposes themselves to Jesus’ authority, and withholds love from the one needing discipline.**
25. Paul shows his ability as a leader to look not only at the narrow view of an individual soul, but the broader view of the church – **1 Corinthians 5:6-8**
    1. (**v. 6)** – their pride kept them from seeing the damage – Paul was able to see it through humility – HE DID NOT ACT AS THOUGH IT WASN’T A BIG DEAL BECAUSE CORINTH WAS THE CHURCH HE ESTABLISHED.
    2. (**vv. 7-8**) – He manifested the incompatibility of maintaining fellowship with sin while claiming fellowship with Christ (**cf. 1 Corinthians 1:2, 9**).
26. Leaders must be humble servants, and there is not much that requires more humility, self-denial, and a servant’s heart than doing the difficult work of warning and discipline.

**Conclusion**

1. God calls us to spiritual leadership in many different relationships and responsibilities.
2. It is important that we all aim to possess the kind of leadership patterned in the word of God, and that we understand the aims of those we follow rather than resenting them.