

Message #18

I Corinthians 4:18-21

Paul wanted every church he was ever connected with to finish winners. He wanted all believers to compete in the Christian race and win. Paul WAS NOT interested in making people feel good; he was interested in making people become good. Paul could be tender and he could be tough.

Paul was a minister who played for keeps. He took ministry very seriously and he did not win too many popularity contests.

A TENDER MINISTRY IN A CHURCH OR A HARSH MINISTRY IN A CHURCH IS DETERMINED BY WHETHER THE PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH CHOOSE TO PROUDLY REBEL AGAINST THE TRUTH OF GOD OR HUMBLY SUBMIT TO THE TRUTH OF GOD.

Sometimes a minister needs to be tender and sometimes a minister needs to be tough and it is the congregation who determines which way he should be.

As we look to this portion of Scripture, there are three key messages that Paul wanted to communicate to the Corinthians and to us in this text:

MESSAGE #1 – A carnal problem of some people in the church is arrogance. 4:18

As we clearly saw last week, a major problem in the church of Corinth was a puffed up, inflated arrogance (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2).

Some were so arrogant that they were even questioning Paul's apostleship (I Cor. 9:1-3). Still others were impressed by his writing ability but questioned the way he looked and spoke (II Cor. 10:10). Some others were so arrogant that they believed they could excel WITHOUT any ministers (I Cor. 4:8). Not all in the church thought this way but "some" did.

The central problem of carnality was that of pride. The Corinthians did not like to be told where they were wrong, they did not like to be told what to do, what to believe or how to behave. They were too arrogant to listen.

The sin of pride is probably THE chief cause of almost all major problems in the church. This is so ironic because the people in the church of Corinth wanted to be esteemed as very wise. According to God, humility is the key to wisdom, not arrogance.

MESSAGE #2 – A spiritual responsibility of the minister in the church is confrontation. 4:19-20

Paul was NEVER the kind of minister who would just turn his head to a situation and hope the problem would go away.

That certainly would have been the easiest thing for him to do because at the time he wrote this, he was responsible for several churches and geographically he was 250-300 miles away across the Aegean in Ephesus.

Step #1 - He was willing to physically go to Corinth. **4:19a**

That adverb “soon” is one that indicates Paul was interested in getting to Corinth to confront this problem quickly.

Notice carefully that Paul always left room for the will of God. Paul was ALWAYS dependent upon God’s will for all things, including his own ministerial plans and actions.

Wise are those leaders who attempt to resolve problems of sin and carnality quickly. But also wise are those leaders who always leave room for the fact that God may intervene and change the plans.

Step #2 - He was willing to evaluate those in Corinth. **4:19b-20**

That verb “find out” is one that means that Paul would perceive and understand each individual’s true spiritual condition.

Glimpse #1 - Paul DID NOT evaluate a person’s spiritual condition by his speech. **4:19b, 20a**

Anyone can talk a good spiritual game. The truth is in Corinth there were many people who were polished speakers, and were skilled orators.

Paul was not impressed with a person’s speech, but he did take a close look at a person’s life.

Glimpse #2 - Paul DID evaluate a person’s spiritual condition by his power. **4:19c, 20b**

Spirituality is evaluated by the spiritual power and strength in one’s life. No person can fake spiritual power. It will be seen, it will be sensed and it will be evidenced in the lives of those who are truly responding to God and His Word.

One who is truly spiritual will be greatly used by God to make a powerful impact in the lives of others. There will be a certain power about them.

Paul would not evaluate by speech, for as Proverbs says, “Many a man proclaims his own loyalty, but who can find a trustworthy man?” (20:6). It is not the speech that determines one’s spirituality; it is the power in the life.

MESSAGE #3 – A personal response to this message in the church determines judgment.
4:21

Clearly with some in the church the minister can be gentle; with others he must be harsh. A tender or harsh ministry IS NOT determined by God or by the minister; it is determined by the response of God's people to God's truth.

Judgment can be joyful or it can be sorrowful. Which will it be for you?