

**Read 1 Corinthians 4:16-17.**

v17

*For this reason...*

Whenever we encounter the phrase, “For this reason...” we always must ask, “For what reason?” And in this instance we needn’t look far, for this points back to just the previous verse.

Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. (v16)

*For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord,*

In large part, over the centuries and millennia we have lost this fundamental meaning of being a son, a daughter, a child. Though none of us share His perfection—nor His unique “parentage”—Jesus was the ultimate example of this classic idea of sonship. And the apostle John does a splendid job of capturing this idea in Jesus.

**Read John 1:18.**

**Sidebar:** Some ancient manuscripts read *monogenes huios* (only begotten Son), but the best and most reliable manuscripts read *monogenes theos* (God only begotten).

In our culture someone is referred to as a son, or child, if he is the issue from a man having sexual union with a woman—ideally, a husband and wife. But in Scripture to be a “son” means far more.

Clearly Jesus the Christ was not a son in our sense: He was not the issue from God the Father having sexual union with a female. The idea is not just ludicrous, but blasphemous. So there must be another sense in which the earthly Jesus is the Son of God (setting aside for the moment the mystical relationships within the Trinity).

In this early verse of John’s gospel, the earthly Jesus is said to explain, to make known, to reveal Father God as no one had before—or has since. Jesus later emphasized this in a number of ways. In Chapter Fourteen Jesus goes right to the punchline.

**Read John 14:7.**

That is, *Do you want to know what the Father looks like? Look at Me. Do you want to know how He behaves, how He thinks, what His personality is like? Watch and listen to Me.* Finally, let's look at something Jesus said to the increasingly antagonistic Jewish leaders regarding His equality with God.

### Read John 5:19-21.

There at the end of v19 is the biblical essence of sonship: "...for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner."

The apostle Paul could and did see young men such as Timothy and Titus as his "children in the Lord" because the Lord made Paul His instrument through which these men were converted to Christianity. Paul disciplined them, teaching them not just the ways of Christ, not just how to live for Him, but how to live for and minister to others in the Lord's name. This made them Paul's "sons" in this second sense: they behaved and did things "in like manner" as their spiritual "father."

*and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*

This is how the word "remind" is used here. It doesn't mean that Timothy will stand there and repeat everything Paul taught the Corinthians because they have forgotten. It means that his person, his behavior, the way he speaks, his love for them will remind them of the apostle.

**Sidebar:** Oddly enough, we have no evidence that Timothy actually showed up. The Corinthians knew Timothy; he had been there with Paul for at least some of the time Paul had been in the city. Verse 16:10 makes it clear that Timothy was probably not yet there when the letter was being read ("Now if Timothy comes...") and he was not the one who carried the letter to them. Also, there is no specific mention of a Corinthian visit by Timothy around this time in The Acts.

Paul had confidence that if and when Timothy showed up in Corinth, he would faithfully mirror the behavior and teaching he (Paul) exhibited there and had exhibited everywhere else.

### CODA TO vv14-17

Even so, let us not get carried away and sidetracked by this "father" and "begetting" business. Remember that just a few short verses earlier Paul referred to himself as an "under-oarsman"—the lowest of slaves. Let us not presume—as Robert Hawker points out that surely the *apostle* does not—that Paul had *anything* to do with their regeneration.

*Robert Hawker* (1805): The work itself is solely the Lord's. It is the peculiar and special office of God the Holy Ghost. And is rife of Heaven's wonders... I shall leave the consideration of the subject to the Reader's own judgment, under the Lord. But I confess I cannot but conclude, that it must be highly unsuitable, irreverent, and blamable, to assume the name of spiritual Father, from any supposed services, in the ministry of Christ. It is the special office of God the Spirit to beget souls from the death of sin. It is his work : and it is his sole glory. And when we hear the Lord speak of his jealousy, as we do in many parts of Scripture, it ought to be well considered, how the Lord expresseth himself: I am the Lord, that is my Name: and my glory will I not give to another: neither my praise to graven images (Isaiah 42:8).

We must never forget that God alone regenerates; God alone, justifies; God alone sanctifies.

Now let's read the rest of our passage.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 4:18-21.**

v18

*Now some have become arrogant, as though I were not coming to you.*

Whether one is of the position (as Fee) that there existed in the Corinthian church an organized rebellion against Paul, or of the position (as Garland) that this was simply an instance of "when the cat is away the mice will play," some in the church in Corinth were guilty of the sin of pride. Paul knew this because of the reports from "Cloe's people" (1:11) and from correspondence he has received from the church. They were "arrogant"—literally, puffed up, blowhards full of hot air. (Note that it is "some"—not all.)

Based on even a cursory reading of the two letters we have that Paul wrote to the church, it is not hard to see what happened. While Paul was in their midst they were hungry for his teaching; like a mystical force, the power of God working through the apostle was strong, keeping at bay the surrounding force of the Corinthian culture. As soon as he departed, however, some of that divine power left with him, and the enveloping local culture pushed back into the lives of even those who had become Christians.

Part of their arrogance—and ignorance—was in thinking that so long as Paul was not present, they could do as they wished, or at least that there was no harm in diluting his gospel of Christ with a generous helping of Hellenist philosophy. Even if this were true, Paul *would* return—twice, and he would (probably) write two more letters of counsel to them (for a total of four). Paul was not about to abandon the Corinthian church to the invasive culture in which it dwelt.

## v19-20

*But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.*

A Texan would say that these Corinthians were “all hat and no cattle.” In Paul’s estimation they were all talk but no power. This is not a brand new thought, but a fresh context for a point he made earlier in Chapter Two. Here he is referring to the words *they* are using, but earlier he described the words *he* used when he first came to them (“my message and my preaching”).

### Read 1 Corinthians 2:1–5.

Permit me to repeat something from our notes on this passage from Chapter Two:

On the surface our text could be interpreted to mean that the power of God was visibly manifested in Paul. But in everything Paul is saying here, he describes a process of getting *himself* out of the way for the “power of God” to go to work in the hearts of those in the Corinthian church.

Perhaps one of the more challenging concepts of life in Christ to apprehend, is that it is, at root, a mystical, supernatural process. The triune Godhead—works *through* people—invisibly, yet powerfully—for the good of others. There is a literal *transfer* of power from, say, the preacher to the parishioner, the teacher to the student. It isn’t the speaker’s power, but the power of God working *through* him—very much like what happens when the Spirit sends a bolt of lightning from the pages of familiar Scripture into the heart of the believing reader.

*David Garland:* Faith is based not on how entertaining, informative, or compelling the speaker is but on the power of God transforming the hearts of believers.

The apostle wasn’t interested in hearing their speech (*logos*), their rationale, their philosophical ramblings. He was coming to gauge the power of God in their midst—and he knew, from their level of arrogance, it would be found wanting.

*What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?*

With Paul's typical method of correspondence in mind—dictating to an amanuensis—I marvel at his ability to organize his thoughts and not lose track of his overarching themes. In vv18-20 he revisited his much earlier theme of the superior power of God contrasted to mere words. And now this Chapter closes with a reference back to v15, where he contrasted “tutors” to “fathers.”

### Read 1 Corinthians 4:15.

Now the apostle reuses that imagery of the “child conductor” compared to a father from v15 to conclude his thoughts before switching gears in the next chapter. A Lampel paraphrase:

*How would you like me to return to you? Would you like me to come with the attitude and behavior of a non-related slave, beating you with a rod when I am displeased with your behavior? Or would you rather I came as a loving father, showing mercy with gentleness?*

**Sidebar:** The editors of the NIV changed their original “whip” in this verse (which was a curious choice) to “rod of discipline” in the newest version of the NIV.

In Gordon Fee's outline of this letter, this first section just closed (1:1 to 4:21) is entitled “A Church Divided—Internally and against Paul.” In this section he has addressed situations in the church brought to his attention by reports from others (e.g., “Chloe's people”).

- He has addressed divisions in the church brought about by one group preferring one teacher, another group favoring another.
- He has labored untiringly against the pervasive influence of Greek “wisdom,” pleading with the Corinthians to reject the wisdom of the world in favor of the wisdom of God.
- He has painted a vivid picture of the servant-minded apostles that stands in stark contrast to how the Corinthians would like to see their leaders.

In the next two chapters, still addressing issues brought to his attention by others (“It is actually reported...”), Paul will move into issues of a more intimate nature in the church—ones which, even as we protest to the contrary, bear upon the integrity of the church today.