

## 9. Learning to Lead with Humility and Patience

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children by our example what it means to be a faithful steward of Christ. In New Testament times, a steward was a leader because he was managing what belonged to another person and many times had other people working with him to carry out his responsibilities. At the same time, the steward was also a slave of his master and had to give an account of his stewardship to his master. Some of those who were stewards and slaves of others had also become Christians. As a result, such people were slaves and at the same time leaders. As Christians, we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to be bondslaves of Christ at the same time they are leading others. That will be the focus of our topic today.

Paul understood what it meant to be a bondsman of Christ at the same time that he was leading others. Paul rebuked the Christians in Corinth as we finished our last topic for their pride, their desire for success by worldly standards and their desire for power. Now, we see that Paul contrasts the attitudes of the apostles with the attitudes of the Corinthian Christians. 1 Corinthians 4:9-10 says, “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. 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!” Paul said that the apostles had been made a spectacle both to angels and to men.

The word that is translated “spectacle” means *a place where people gathered for public entertainment*. It came to speak of a prisoner that was brought into a Roman arena to fight either against other men or lions until the person died. As a result, it came to mean a man that was gazed at and made fun of as he was in the process of being killed by wild animals. Paul said that the Lord had chosen him and the other apostles to be mocked, imprisoned, beaten and put to death in order to bring the Gospel to others. Paul said that this was done to the apostles in front of the world, people and angels. In this way, the apostles had become fools, weak and despised for Christ. In contrast, the Corinthian Christians wanted to be recognized by the world as wise, strong and honorable. Today, we have many Christians who want to be like the Corinthians instead of the apostles.

Paul went on to explain other things that happened to the apostles as they suffered for Christ. 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 says, “To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.” Paul and the other apostles had experienced hunger and thirst in order to take the Gospel to others. They often were poorly clothed as they went from place to place. Many times, they were beaten and had no home. We see that they often worked to support themselves so that they could take the Gospel to others.

The apostles also experienced much rejection from others. Paul told how the apostles had responded to various forms of rejection. The word that is translated “reviled” means *to heap abuse upon a person*. In 1 Peter 2:23, we read about the sufferings of Christ. “Who, when He was

reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously.” The apostles followed the example of Christ and chose to bless when they were reviled. When the apostles were persecuted, they endured the suffering. When people spoke evil and blasphemed the apostles, they spoke to strengthen and encourage others. The apostles were treated like the garbage or the worst criminals of their day. The example of the apostles was a rather strong rebuke to the Corinthian Christians who were filled with pride, wanted worldly success and power over others.

Paul goes on to explain to the Corinthian Christians why he gave them this strong rebuke. 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 says, “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. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” The purpose of this rebuke was not to shame the Corinthians. Instead, Paul considered the Corinthian Christians his beloved children and wanted to warn them.

The word that is translated “instructor” was used to describe a slave that raised a son for the father by severe discipline (The original use of this word was of a slave named Mentor.) The word is used two other times in the New Testament in Galatians 3:24-25 where it is translated tutor, “Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” The law showed us that we were sinners and needed to come to Christ for forgiveness. However, we see that once we placed our trust in Christ we are no longer under the law. The law never makes people do what is right. It only punishes them when they do wrong and break the law. Paul said that the Corinthians had lots of leaders that wanted to punish them for doing wrong.

In contrast, Paul said that he had begotten them through the Gospel. Here, we see that instead of being a mentor who helped Christians grow through severe discipline, he had chosen to become a spiritual parent that would help the Corinthians grow in their spiritual life through love and example. That is why he called them his beloved children. That is why he invited them to imitate his example. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul told the Corinthians why they could follow his example. That verse says, “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.” Paul could invite the Corinthians to imitate his lifestyle because he had chosen to imitate Christ in his own life. Here, we see that Paul explains to us what it means for us to be spiritual parents. We choose to lead others by love and example. This will only happen as we lead others with great humility and patience.

Paul goes on to tell the Corinthians that this was the reason why he had sent Timothy to them. Paul had taken Timothy along with him as a team member and partner with Paul. Over the years that they traveled together, Paul treated Timothy as a beloved son and a faithful partner in the service of the Lord and equipped him to carry on the same ministry to others. Paul said that Timothy would remind the Corinthians of his ways. The word that is translated “ways” was used to speak of a traveler as he journeyed or a course of conduct in the way a person carried on his life. Since Timothy had traveled for several years with Paul, he could tell the Corinthians about the

way that Paul carried on his life over a period of several years.

Timothy was able to remind the Corinthians of the conduct of Paul and the things that he taught because Paul had acted the same way wherever they went. He had taught the same message in every city that they visited. Paul summarized the life that he lived and the message that he taught as he talked with the elders of the church in the city of Ephesus. Acts 20:19-21 where we read, “Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” The conduct of Paul could be described by saying that he served the Lord with all humility and love wherever he went. His message was repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ wherever he went.

Since Paul had told the Corinthians that he treated them as beloved children, he asked them how they would like him to treat them when he made a return visit to Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 4:18-21, we read, “Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. 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. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?” A loving father has two primary ways that he shows his love to his children. If children are disobedient, he disciplines them. If children are obedient, the father is able to show a spirit of love and gentleness.

Some of the Corinthians were puffed up (proud) and acted like Paul would not come and visit them again. If it was the will of the Lord, Paul planned to come and visit the Corinthians again very soon. He said that at that time he would not evaluate those who were puffed up by their words but by the power of their character. When Paul later wrote 2 Corinthians, he said in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Here, we see why Paul asked the Corinthians how they wanted him to come. They could choose whether they wanted him to come with a spirit of discipline or a spirit of love and gentleness.

The very fact that Paul sent Timothy to the Corinthians showed his humility and patience. He wanted to give the proud Corinthian Christians time to turn from their pride and sin and get their heart attitudes right with the Lord so that Paul could come in a spirit of love and gentleness without a need to discipline his spiritual children. This is the same patience and love that we should show to our physical and spiritual children. May the Lord richly bless you as you show great patience to help your children grow spiritually.