

Sermon Notes / follow-up

5/30/10

1 Cor. 4:1-21

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We've been going pretty slowly through Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, but today we swallowed a whole chapter in one gulp. As I said, 1 Cor. 4 cannot be boiled down to just a couple of points; there is way too much going on. There are several layers here: Paul's relationship to God as an apostle; his relationship to the congregation as his children; their collective relationship to God as the their Lord, Savior, and Judge; Paul's reprimands, sarcasm, warning, and appeal; the themes of suffering and humility; the theme of mimesis/imitation; the Corinthians' desire for ease and a pain-free Christian life vs. Paul's embrace of suffering; etc.

Paul is caught between his divine mandate as an apostle and his love for the erring Corinthians. What's an apostle to do? Paul responds the only way he can: by focusing on his accountability to God and seeking to jar the Corinthian church out of its cultural captivity.

We need the same kind of response to the cultural accommodation of the American church in our day. Francis Schaeffer pointed out that the church in the West became more concerned with personal peace and affluence than with holiness and mission. We are consumed with consuming, we are fixated on our own comfort. If we are going to jar the church free of its American captivity, we must be willing to take on the burdens and risks of a truly counter-cultural lifestyle. To be sure, our lives will still overlap with those outside the church – we'll live in the same neighborhoods, drive the same cars on the same roads, shop at the same stores, cheer for the same teams...but we'll do everything with a "Christian accent" (if I may riff of Tom Petty and Johnny Cash). Our whole lives will have a gospel tinge, a biblical coloring. We'll be engaging the world around us, but on different terms, with a different purpose. It's within this same-but-different dynamic that all kinds of opportunities for inserting the gospel into situations with unbelievers open up. Paul shows us that true Christian leadership is distinctive, in that it is missional and open to suffering. True Christian leadership puts the kingdom first.

Paul's style of leadership is refreshing and challenging in our day. We live in an age in which leadership in church and state is collapsing. We need a strong dose of what Bonhoeffer called "civic courage," that is, the determination to do the right thing no matter consequences, no matter the wishes of the constituency, no matter it's unpopularity. Pastors, like politicians, have all too often given in to the whims and wishes of the people for reasons of pragmatism and popularity, rather than standing for principles. As a result, we are suffering from a collective lack of maturity and direction in both church and state. We aimless, controlled more by opinion polls than a vision of what the truly good life should look like.

Paul's explanation of his own leadership style is freeing but also demanding for leaders. Paul says that while leaders should certainly serve those under their authority, they must ultimately rise above the will of the masses to do the will their true Master. A leader's actions are not to be dictated by the 51% (or a vocal minority, for that matter). A leader must know whom he belongs to and what he's called to do. He must do what's right even if it offends and rebukes some of those he's in charge of. A leader cannot actually lead if he just reflects the people; he must be ahead of them, blazing a trail to ever-greater maturity. A leader must certainly represent his people's interests, but above that he must be driven and controlled by God's kingdom purposes.

Paul's vision of the future judgment in this passage is fascinating, encouraging, and counter-intuitive for many Reformed Christians. Paul has confidence in the future judgment, based on the work of Christ and the Spirit. He is, in the most fundamental sense, already justified by faith alone because of Christ's work for him on the cross. But he is also confident he will be justified according to deeds at the last day because of the Spirit's ongoing work in him. Paul knows that the Father and Son will not reject the work of the Spirit at the last day. When Paul hears the Lord's praise at the last day, "Well done good and faithful servant!" he knows the Lord will be simply approving the Spirit's work in his life. There is no merit involved on his part; it's all grace. He knows that when the Lord rewards him, he will simply be crowning his own gifts.

Many theologians seem to think that if our works are evaluated at the last day, it can only result in rebuke, not praise, in condemnation, not justification. Paul obviously disagrees. Paul knows that Jesus' blood will cover his sins at the last day; he knows Jesus' intercession will make up for whatever was lacking in his good deeds so they become acceptable to the Father.

Because Paul is confident in the prospects of the final day (as all faithful Christians should be!), he is able to put all temporal, human judgments into perspective.

On 1 Cor. 4:1-5 as a "future justification" text, see Paul Rainbow's *The Way of Salvation*, throughout but especially 163ff, and (perhaps unwittingly) D. A. Carson's *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 101.

A huge problem with the Corinthians is their over-realized eschatology. Many of the commentators (e.g. Carson, Witherington) go into this problem at great length, so I will not do so here. Needless to say, it's a problem that keeps showing up later in the letter. Paul says here they are already trying to pass the final judgment in the present. They believe they have already entered into final kingship. Later we'll find they even believe the final resurrection of the dead has already happened (cf. 1 Cor. 15).

The Corinthians do not understand what is entailed by the newness of the new covenant. For example: They're so excited that priests can now drink wine in the sanctuary (unlike the old covenant, per Lev. 9-10), they were actually getting drunk at the Lord's Table. Many of them seem to think life in the body no longer matters since they have the Spirit (1 Cor. 5, 7, 11). They seem to think the Spirit's coming means all order in the worship service (that is, liturgy), has been done away with in the new age (1 Cor. 14). Paul seeks to correct them on each of these issues, by using a combination of ethical and eschatological arguments.

The end of the chapter had to be passed over the sermon, but a few quick notes here can make up for that omission. Paul tells them in v. 17 that he is sending Timothy to them. He calls Timothy his Spiritual son, again applying the terminology of familial relationships to pastoral work and church life. Timothy will serve as Paul's surrogate, Paul's second-self, Paul's representative stand-in. Timothy will remind them (presumably in word AND deed) of Paul's way of life. Paul further reminds that this pattern of life is being taught everywhere in all the churches – which seems to indicate the Corinthians' pride and divisiveness stood out like a sore thumb in the early church. Timothy will try to bring the Corinthians into alignment with the other apostolic communities. (You'll note how the desire for unity / catholicity keeps popping up in the letter. Paul is concerned with both inter- and intra-congregational unity.)

In 2 Tim. 3:10-12, Paul identifies Timothy as a true disciple who has learned the Pauline pattern of life. As such, he can transmit that pattern to the Corinthians so that they too can become imitators of Paul as he imitates Christ.

Note also the way Paul insists his life and theology always converge. His life embodies his doctrine and his doctrine explains his life. The two go together and are mutually interpretative.

The end of chapter 4 bleeds over in the disciplinary action of chapter 5, and we see the final consequence of this total interaction in 2 Cor. 2. Paul disciplines the church (and even specific members of the church) via a harsh letter (1 Cor.) so that when he comes to them in person, he can comfort and rejoice with them (2 Cor. 2).

I put several caveats on Paul's anti-judging polemic in the sermon. Paul is not saying we can dismiss anyone's opinion of us. In fact, he is emphatically not saying we can dismiss godly counsel because of a "why should I care what you think?" pattern of thought. When someone judges you according to God's word, to call you out of sin and towards righteousness (as Paul will do with the whole community in 1 Cor. 5), you had better pay attention and not throw Matthew 7:1-2 back at them. Again, the key is recognizing the nuances in the Bible's teaching on judging. There are appropriate and inappropriate ways of judging, appropriate and inappropriate times for judging. Judging is not wrong, per se;

after all, God himself is a Judge. But there are ways of misusing and misapplying our faculty of judgment. The Corinthians are judging Paul in a self-righteous, Corinthian fashion, rather than a biblical fashion.

For example, the Corinthians are so snobbish that they are even put off by the fact that Paul chose to work with his hands (as a tentmaker). None of the other great rhetors/orators in the city worked a menial job on the side. Why should the Corinthians have to side with a guy who does demeaning manual labor? How will that make them look in the eyes of the city's elite? But the Corinthians are missing the point. Paul was not obligated to be a self-supporting, self-sufficient missionary (1 Cor. 9). Rather, he was going above and beyond the call of duty, so that his ministry might have greater integrity and effectiveness. Because the Corinthians are living out of a skewed value system, because they are living more by the narrative of Corinth than the gospel narrative, they miss the worth and beauty of Paul's gospel-driven lifestyle. They're repelled by the very kind of thing they should be imitating. Paul is living out the gospel before their very eyes, but they don't get the point of it. He's a living parable of grace, but somehow they think they're too good for him.

We find in v. 18 that some Corinthians had been pridefully challenging Paul because they thought they'd never see him again (cf. Phil. 2:12). Paul acknowledges that his itinerary is always contingent on the Lord's will, but states emphatically that he does plan to come see them again so he can deal with them in person and meet his ecclesiastical opponents in a face-to-face way.

What will happen when the Lord comes? Perhaps we should speak of the "parousia" of Paul. Richard Hays (see *Moral Vision*, p. 40) points out that Paul's coming is a type of the Lord's coming. The Lord is with Paul so that the judgments and actions Paul makes towards the Corinthians may be in some way identified with the Lord's own work. When Paul comes to discipline them, it will be as the Lord himself were coming to them. They need to prepare for Paul's visit even as they would prepare for a visit from the Lord. When he comes to inspect them, what will he find? Will he have to discipline them more? Or will he be able to rejoice in and with them?

Paul reminds them that the kingdom of God is not a matter of mere speech (even the kind of fancy rhetoric they love so much!). Rather, it is a matter of power – perhaps he has in view apostolic miracles that authenticated their message, but I think it's more likely he has in view the power of the Spirit transforming hearts and lives and cities. Paul tells them all their talk is cheap. He insists that the gospel must change not only their beliefs but their behavior, not only their creed but their conduct. As we used to say in Texas, the Corinthians are all hat, no cattle – Paul's going to show them what *real* Spiritual power looks like when he gets there.

Paul, as their Spiritual father, is clearly motivated by love. But the manner of his coming is still up in the air, depending on how they respond to his letter. He

would prefer to come in gentleness. But if they refuse to repent, he'll come with a rod. What does this mean? I doubt it's to be taken literally since nothing in the NT authorizes the use of physical force as a tool of church discipline. Rather, in keeping with his claim to be their Spiritual father, this is a metaphorical way of saying, "If it's tough love you need, I'm ready to bring it!" Whatever kind of love the situation requires – whether gentleness or firmness – Paul will administer it when he comes to see them.

Paul's threats should be considered a measure of last resort. Paul is clearly reluctant to defend himself and to warn the Corinthians. But a dire situation calls for dire rhetoric and even dire action.

As I stressed in the sermon, this is not really a personal issue between Paul and the Corinthians. The Corinthians do not just have a personality conflict with Paul. In rejecting him, they are coming dangerously close to rejecting the gospel. Paul's life is offensive to them precisely because he embodies the cross, which is still a scandal to them. The Corinthians would very much like to combine the benefits of the gospel with an easy, carefree, culturally accommodated lifestyle. The Corinthians have one foot in the kingdom, one foot in the city. They're half pagan, half Christian, in terms of how they're living their lives.

Frankly, the church scene in Birmingham has more in common with Corinth than many of us would like to admit. There is precious little counter-cultural Christian practice in our city. And many who do try to become radical actually end up dropping out of city life altogether, rather than learning how to do the hard work of really engaging the city deeply with the cross. Far too many Christians in our city take their faith for granted. This is America, this is Alabama, this is Birmingham, after all, so why should we expect to suffer for our faith? Haven't we created a culture that's safe for Christians? This is "God's country," this is the Bible belt. Why should being a Christian cost us anything? The Corinthians may have had a different set of premises (e.g., the new age has arrived, the kingdom is here), but they have reached the same conclusion: there is no reason to expect suffering to be an intrinsic part of the Christian life.

Paul, of course, has reached the exact opposite conclusion. Because Jesus conquered sin, death, and the principalities and powers through his cross, his people will only expand his kingdom to the corners of the world as they too suffer and serve in God's name. The Christian life, for leaders and followers alike, is a cruciform life. As I said in the sermon, *to be of any use to God, you must be willing to suffer for him*. Otherwise, you doom yourself to a life of uselessness and mediocrity. But who wants to live a wasted life? If we want to count for something, we must be willing to take up the cross and follow Paul as he follows Jesus.

The Corinthians thought they were so special, they could be exempted from suffering. In reality, they were settling for a mediocre, half-Christian existence. They thought they had arrived, they thought they had matured. They were like a

13 year old kid who thinks he's ready to drive so he takes out the family car....and promptly wrecks it.

Most us will probably never have to suffer as Paul did (thank God!). We do not need to seek suffering out like the "white martyrs" of old did. But we should be open to suffering when it comes because in a fallen world, anything done for the sake of the kingdom will provoke fierce opposition sooner or later. It's this willingness to suffer that breaks us free from the cultural captivity of the church. What are you willing to risk, and even lose, for the sake of the kingdom? How much will you pay to see the kingdom advance? What's the kingdom worth to you? Where does it rank in your scale of priorities?

Again, in Birmingham, we are surrounded by Corinthian-type Christians who have bought into worldly versions of and definitions of success, wisdom, and power. We're surrounded by a quasi-Christian milieu in which many believe the Christian life should be easy and pain abnormal. Thus, Christians in our city are notorious for putting sports' allegiances ahead of allegiance to the kingdom. Christians in our city are notorious for using sex, money, and status (including racial status) for worldly ends. We need to reconfigure our understanding of the faith by recovering a cross-centered view of Christian existence. What does this look like? The gospel does not call us to flatly renounce various powers God bestows on us; rather, we must learn to use them for the sake of the kingdom. Privilege is given to us not just for our own benefit but so we can share power with the weak. We should our influence and resources – whatever social "capital" we have been able to accumulate – for the advancement of the kingdom and the spread of the gospel.

If God bestows wealth and power on us, we should not take those things to be automatic signs of his favor. Rather, we should see them as tests: God wants to know what we're made of, what kind of people we are, where our hearts are. While continuing to live "in" the world, we have to use our worldly existence in a way that furthers the reach of the gospel, so God's kingdom can keep making ever greater inroads into the culture around us.

What gives us an openness to suffering? What enables to break free from our cultural captivity? In a word, humility. Humility means relying on Christ rather than self. Humility means boasting in the cross rather than self. Humility means submitting our lives to what is written rather than trying to figure out life on our own. Humility means plugging into the community of God's people where we can learn to serve and suffer with others.

Humility is always a sign that we tuned in to God, that we are on his wavelength. The best, most useful people in the Scriptures have always been marked by deep humility (Moses, John the Baptist, Paul, the mature Peter, etc.).

Our calling is to show the world Jesus, to show that the world that the Savior and King of the universe is a crucified Messiah. But humble suffering is the only way we can make this demonstration.

Imitation is a major ethical theme in this chapter, as well as in other parts of Scripture. To be sure, mimetic ethics can never be separated from the gospel. Christ not primarily an Exemplar, but a Savior. Imitation is not just a matter of asking "WWJD?"; it must flow out of trusting Christ to do for us what we could never have done for ourselves. However, we must also insist that those Jesus saves will devote their lives to reproducing his character in themselves. This life of *imitatio Christi* will flow out of our trust in his saving work. Paul sought to imitate the Lord, and so we can imitate Paul as a way of learning what it means to live like Christ lived. We learn many lessons best by some form of apprenticeship. This is as true of the skills that constitute the Christian life as anything else.

There is a lot of good material on biblical mimetic ethics, e.g., Willimon's *Calling and Character*, 48ff.

Let's revisit Paul's description of apostles/pastors as stewards of the mysteries of God. As a steward he is manager of God's house (= the church) and entrusted with the message of the gospel. How does a pastor best steward the gospel? He must keep the message pure and uncontaminated with the ideas of fallen men. He must study the Scriptures intensely and closely so that he can proclaim and apply the gospel with skill.

Sadly, we live in a time when many pastors drift from this task. They get more concerned with growing churches, or being hip, and the gospel gets lost. Some pastors get so busy trying to start new programs, carrying out administrative tasks, or getting better buildings built, that study of the Word gets lost. Some pastors put the felt needs of their people above their true, gospel-diagnosed needs, all in an effort to be popular and well-liked. (As William Willimon says, if a pastor makes it goal to meet his people's felt needs, he's going to be *awfully* busy!)

Here is how John MacArthur describes the situation, in light of Paul's description of pastors as servants and stewards and the coming judgment (emphasis added):

When I serve Christ I will best serve His people. But when I serve His people, I may not best serve Him. In other words, sometimes when a man gets focused too much on filling the needs of the people he may violate that which God wants. In other words, he may compromise true spiritual principles for the ends that he wants. But if I am always serving Him, then I will best serve people. For in His will I am the most benefit to His people. So many times in the ministry you can become so

preoccupied with meeting the needs of people that you start doing things because people want them done and then you begin to compromise what you know is right. And you find that the end justifies the means.

In order to win people or to help people you start violating the thing that is most important. A simple illustration of that would be **you become so preoccupied with meeting the needs of people on an individual basis that you don't study the word of God and then you don't meet the needs of anybody.** It's important to remember that we are first of all ministers of Christ. In Acts 20:19, Paul says, I look at my ministry this way "serving the Lord with all humility of mind." Serving the Lord, this is the priority...

Now what is the primary task of a servant. If I am a huperetes and I'm going to go through all of this, what am I supposed to do? What is the simple order that I have? Well, I told you that I read Luke 1 and it said we are huperetes of the word so it would seem to me that my obedience is to the word of God. Well, what am I supposed to do? Look at Colossians 1:25 and here it is. Colossians 1:25, Paul says, "I am made a minister," there's the word servant or slave again. "I am become a slave or servant according to the plan of God." The operation of God which is given to me for you. To do what? To fulfill what? The word of God and the literal Greek would say to give full scope to the word of God. And the idea here is to proclaim it. **If I am a servant then I simply do obey the orders. And what are the orders? Take the word servant and give it out.**

That's what I'm called to do. I'm not called to be creative. I'm called to be obedient. Not called to be innovative, but obedient. Not called to have great ideas and great thoughts, I'm called to be obedient. Simply that to proclaim the word and we served God best by giving men His word. Not our opinions, not our great ideas, not our innovations, God's word. So the minister's identity, what is it in 1 Corinthians 4:1, "A servant of Christ." What does that mean? Lowly place, no honor, no rank, just a simple task of giving the word....

Musterion, something hidden now revealed. What was hidden and is now revealed, but the New Testament, the word of God. This is it. The gospel of God. The revelation in the book. We are to take God's revelation and dispense it to the household. That's what we're to do. **When I try to examine my ministry and say what am I to do, it's a simple thing. I simply say God has called me to take His word and pass it out to His people. That's all. I'm a waiter. That's all. Just a waiter, He gives me the food. I get it out of His kitchen and I deliver it to the table. That's all I do.**

And the thing I want to do is make sure I don't mess it up on the way. Just get it to them the way God intended for it to be heard. In Acts 20:20, Paul says, "I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shown you and talked to you publicly from house to house." Now Paul says when I came to you I taught the mysteries of God and I kept back nothing that was profitable. You say well, how do you know what's profitable? The Bible says this, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is, what? Profitable.

What are you supposed to give out then? All of it. It's no wonder so many people have spiritual malnutrition. They don't get a good diet. There needs to be a balanced diet. And that is to declare the whole council of God, Acts 20:27. Paul said, "I am not shunned to give unto you all the council of God." It's all profitable. It all needs to be given out. That's what I'm to do. I'm just a steward to do that. But you know it's so easy to pervert the word of God and twist it and distort it and that is mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4:2 in a very interesting statement.

Paul looks at his own ministry in verse 1 and says see we have this ministry. Now here's our ministry. What is it Paul, verse 2. 2 Corinthians 4:2, "We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully." You know there are people who take the word of God and twist it around to make it say what meets their own needs and their own desires and their ends. The word of God is to be given out as God intended it, not to be twisted to meet my own whims and opinions and desires. There are all kinds of people who have opinions about things and they scramble around and try to find verses to support their opinions....

We are subordinates. It's a tragic think, you know, when the minister doesn't do what he's told to do. It's so simple to do. It's tragic. When like Milton said "The hungry sheep look up and are not fed." That's tragic. So many people exist in churches where the minister does everything but what he's supposed to do. He couldn't possibly dispense the word of God in the way God intended it because he never studies it. So the identity of the minister. People don't exalt us, don't lift us up, don't honor us, don't rank us over each other. We're nothing but slaves anyway. We're all obeying orders. That's just God's business, not yours, not mine...

It's amazing to me how people have taken that simplicity of the ministry and prostituted it into everything. And there are some people in the ministry who are so busy doing other things, they don't have time to do the one thing God wants them to be faithful to do...

It's not up to you to preach your feelings and opinions....you didn't come here for me, I hope. If you did, you're not getting me. If you got me, you wouldn't be back. This kind of thing is a guilt that is expressed in 2 Corinthians 2:17. "We are not as many who corrupt the word of God." That word corrupt is so very interesting. It is the word kapelos, it is the word huckster. Hucksters of the word of God.

They sell a cheap gospel. They sell a cheap Bible. It's emasculated of any difficulties. It's a Bible without hell. It's a Bible without sin. It's a Bible without judgment. It's a Bible without depravity. It's a Bible without damnation. And believe me, it's a Bible people buy. And when they take home the cheap diamonds, they find out they're glass. Anybody can preach a cheap message, but he's a huckster of the word, not a steward.

Don't prostitute the ministry for glory, fame, wealth, popularity, whatever. All God wants out of His ministers that they be what? Faithful. What does faithful means? It means just do what I tell you to do. What did you tell me to do? Dispense the mysteries. So simple...

Listen, God does not evaluate a man on how many people he baptized. God doesn't evaluate on how big his church was or how many letters he

has at the end of his name or how many conversions or how many books or how great a preacher or how much he knew. Listen, when it comes down to the day when we face Jesus Christ, He's going to evaluate us on one key thing. You want to hear what it is? Look at verse 5, "Don't judge anything before the time until the Lord comes." Don't you make evaluations. That's His business. You're out of line. You're usurping the seat of the judge and you don't belong in that place.

You quit judging before the time until the Lord comes. He's the one who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the, watch this word, motives of the heart. That's that word. What is God going to judge us on? Not nearly so much what we did as our motives. One word is the evaluator people. Why did he minister? Why did John MacArthur minister? Did he minister for fame? Did he minister for filthy lucre like so many? Did he minister for the satisfaction that had gave his own ego? Did he minister for popularity? Did he minister for prestige or did he minister because he wanted to give me glory? That's all that matters. Not how big was his church. Not how many degrees did he have. Not how many books did he write. Why? Why did he do what he did? Stop passing judgment. Some day there's going to be a judgment.

Revelation 22:12, "The Lord's going to come quickly and His rewards are going to be with Him." 1 Corinthians Chapter 3 we studied some months ago talked about the fact that there's going to be a judgment day and the Lord's going to check out the works whether they're wood, hay, stubble, gold, silver, precious stones. 2 Corinthians 5:9-10, we're going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and we're going to receive rewards for what has been done in our body whether it's valuable or worthless. God's going to take care of that and the hidden things of darkness and I'd take that not to refer to evil, but simply things that we can't see, hidden things. Things that are dark to us. The reason I don't think it's evil, is because it says at the end of verse 5, every man will have praise.

So the things that we can't see, that humans can't know are going to be opened by God who can know them and He will manifest motives. And on that basis men will be praised. Every servant of God's going to be praised, because in Christ there's no condemnation, right? But as to who gains the greatest praise, who gains the greatest reward only God can make that judgment because He alone knows the motives. What you need to do in your heart when you serve the Lord is search the reason. Why? I'll tell you people that's a struggle in my heart. That's a struggle that Satan throws at you all the time? Why am I ministering? Am I ministering so I'll be famous, so I'll be popular, so I'll be loved by everybody? Or am I ministering so that God is glorified. There's only one motive. There's only one motive, 1 Corinthians 10, "Whatever you do whether you eat or drink do it," what, "all to the glory of God." It doesn't matter what it is.

Something as simple as eating and drinking, preaching, anything.

One motive, God's going to evaluate it and the key is motives. Paul says there's no place for evaluating human teachers. No place for exalting one above the other. Why? Because they are all slaves. Because you're not in a position to do it, because you don't know the truth about them. Your

standards are all wrong. God says all I want is that they're faithful. And all I want is that their motives pure and only God knows that.

Since we know Paul was deeply concerned with contextualizing the gospel in new cultural contexts (1 Cor. 9), why was Paul so adamantly hostile to the Corinthian style of leadership and rhetoric? There is much to be said here, but the short answer is this: To lead like a Corinthian would have compromised Paul's witness to the gospel. Paul was willing to adapt in matters of adiaphora, he was willing to reach across the cultural aisle as much as was lawful, in order to reach the lost. But for Paul to adapt to Corinthian rhetorical and leadership techniques would have been to displease the Lord. Paul knows that living and leading like a Corinthian would contradict the gospel.

Contextualization is driven by a desire to communicate and desire to be relevant. But relevance is tricky – and many times we actually find it very hard to be relevant in biblical ways. (For example, there is nothing more relevant at the present moment than a biblical critique of homosexual practice – but those who emphasize relevance most are typically the very last to actually speak faithfully to such an issue!) Paul reminds us here that the more the church becomes like the world, the less relevant she actually is.

Further, Paul insists (to put it in modern terms) that the medium is the message. Or, to put it another way, ministry style is the message. The slogan, “what you with them with is what you win them to” was true then just as it is today. Paul knew that adopting a Corinthian posture and speaking style would garble the very message he was seeking to communicate. It may have made his job easier but it would have gotten the church off on the wrong foot.

On Paul's sarcasm, see Doug Wilson's book *Serrated Edge*, as well as John Frame's review (http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/2007WilsonReview.htm).

Paul shows us in this passage that there are very severe limits on the value of human judgments. After all, some people are too easily pleased, so their praise does not amount to much. It turns out to be little better than flattery. Others are too harsh, too demanding, too critical in their judgments. Only the Lord can render a perfectly equitable judgment. Hence, Paul's point in v.5, that only the Lord can bring to light the dark secrets of the human heart. Only the Lord knows our motives and the true value of our work.

To be an apostle was a death sentence. Paul knew it. Other apostles knew it (cf. Jn. 21). Because apostles were the greatest in the kingdom, they had to undergo the most intense suffering in service to the gospel and church. That's the pattern Paul is giving to the Corinthians. It's paradoxical. It's painful. It's not a pattern we want to have to embrace. But it's the pattern of the kingdom of God.