

## MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

Imitate Me Pt 1

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 10.02-03.10

If you are visiting for the first time welcome to Crossroads. My name is Tim. I'm one of the teaching pastors and although our church may seem very different if you come out of a traditional church background we actually follow classic Christianity and we do what most churches in America do. We begin by the worship of our God. That's what you just experienced and then transition. We continue that worship in the learning of His Word, and that's what we're here to do this morning. So I want you to take a bible out; either your bible or one in the chair back in front of you and turn to 1 Corinthians, chapter 4. We are studying the book of 1 Corinthians exegetically which means we're going verse by verse through the entire book. And what that does it presents the entire Word of God to us so we're not skipping over hard parts or missing some of the controversial things. We're working right through it so we see what God has for us.

Now, we've been in this series for about, I'm not quite sure, about 10-12 weeks and it seems like we're a bit repetitious because Paul is dealing with one issue. This one issue through the first four chapters and that is division that is going on within the Corinthian body. The division is caused because there were certain factions within the church elevating one leader over another. And this is been the principle discussion since the beginning. Now, we're coming to the end of this section of 1 Corinthians. We're about ready to see a whole new topic begin to develop as we cross over in chapter 5. But chapter 4 is really the heart of the issue that we've been dealing with these past 10 weeks.

What we saw in the beginning of chapter 4 was Paul begin to be somewhat harsh with the Corinthians. He's been gentle up to this point but now he's started to become harsh and some might even say ruthless with his wording and sarcasm. He was saying listen Corinthians. This has got to stop. You've got to stop elevating one leader over another. This is causing division within the body. He said in verse 8, he says do you think you've become kings? Do you think you've become spiritually rich? Do you think you have the ability? I mean, he just goes off in what looks like a tirade. But as we come to verse 14 the whole mood changes and we see why Paul was so harsh. In fact, we get to look into a very gentle side of the Apostle Paul and why he spoke the way that he did. Let me read the text and then we're going to dissect it together.

Beginning in verse 14 we're going to read all the way down to the end of verse 21 in chapter 4. Paul says this, I did not write these things to make you ashamed. I don't write these things to embarrass you. I don't write these things to hurt your feelings. I don't write these things to criticize you. I write these things to admonish you as my beloved children. Do you notice already the tone has changed? For though you have countless guides in Christ you do not have many fathers. For I became, or I begot you is the idea. I became your father in Christ through the Gospel. I urge you then be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child or the Lord to remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church. Some, he's saying some of you; some of you are making divisions. Some of you are arrogant as though I were not coming to you. For I will come to

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you soon if the Lord wills. And I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist of talk but of power. What do you wish? Should I come to you with a rod or with love in the spirit of gentleness.

Why did Paul speak so harshly to the Corinthians? Because he says, verse 15, I'm like your spiritual father. You're like my children. The reason why I say difficult things to you up to this point is because I care about your spiritual growth. In fact, he could say with John I have no greater joy than to hear of my children walking in the truth. That's very pastoral. He could say I have no greater joy in my life than to know you Corinthians are following after righteousness. He said to the Galatians in Galatians 4:19 he says my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. Let me decipher that. Do you know what he is saying? He's says it tears me up inside until I see you walking like Christ; till I see you fully formed; till I see you fully devoted in your maturity after Christ.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? Very pastoral here. I understand this. This is the heart of a Pastor. Pastors rejoice and have great joy when they see those who sit under their ministry excel in righteousness and at the same time they feel great anguish when they watch them walk and fall into unrighteousness. This is what Paul is saying. This is why he is being so passionate with them.

Now, we have a choice of how we can study this section of scripture. We can study it exegetically and that's very easy to do or we could study it topically. Let me explain. You could study this exegetically – divide this passage. Basically there are six characteristics of a spiritual father. Let me give those to you in case you want to explore this side of the scriptures. He admonishes, he loves, he births, he gives them examples (sets an example), he teaches and he disciplines. Alright, that's really the traditional layout of these passages. If we were exegetically this morning going to go through this piece by piece I'd take each one of these words: admonish, loved, births, example, teaches and discipline and we would come to understand how it applies to the Corinthians.

But I actually want to take a step back from the text this morning and I want us to look at a topical approach, a phrase that caught my attention. Paul says it this way. He says it in verse 16. Look at it. He says I urge you then be imitators of me. Do you now why that caught my attention? First it caught my attention because it just seemed somewhat counter-intuitive to what was going on in the passage. You look at it and you think – Paul, it sounds like you're being a bit egotistical, a bit arrogant. Didn't you just tell the Corinthians in 4:6, didn't you tell them not to be puffed up? It sounds like you're being puffed up. Then we start to look at it. You start to see really what's behind the words. You have to remember what was going on in Corinth at that time. Corinth wasn't like anything you and I ever experienced.

First of all, when someone follows Christ in our culture they could go to a church that teaches the Word of God and they could find a pastor, a small group leader, some man or

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woman who would disciple them and teach them how they should live their life. That did not and was not happening in Corinth. You have to remember when Paul went there, he literally took the Gospel to them and then he came to Corinth and he began the church – he begat them. That’s what he meant by that. Many of them came to Christ under his ministry. They did not, listen, have a Christian heritage like you and I do. They did not have Christian models, a very few. And so what Paul was saying is I’m going to be like a father. I’m going to show you how you should act. By the way, that’s what fathers do, don’t they? That’s what parents, that’s what we do. We teach our children how to act. Sometimes they just pick it up, don’t they? Sadly, they pick up the good and the bad. That’s just part of parenting, right? We model before them.

I have to laugh because Michelle has a favorite seat in our house and she’ll sit crossed legged – like Indian style in that chair. That’s just kind of how she relaxes. If I try to do that you’d have to peel me apart. My joints don’t do that anymore. What’s interesting is to watch all three of our children sit in that chair. No one has told them how to sit but when they sit in that chair they sit Indian style in that chair. How did they do that? Well, it was modeled. So they just picked it up.

Now, Paul is not just going to assume that the Corinthians are going to pick up how they should act. He’s going to say, I’m going to teach you how. In fact, that’s what he says in verse 17. I’m going to send you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child of the Lord to remind you of my ways in Christ; remind you how I lived out my Christian life. I see what we see here, what Paul is saying is I want you to imitate, mimic me. Literally has the sense to walk in the same tracks. Did you ever play that game when you’re at the beach? Someone walks ahead of you and then you walk right in their footprints? You’re mimicking them. That’s what Paul is saying. I want you to do what I do.

Now, he clarifies in chapter 11, verse 1 and he says be imitators of me as I am of Christ. He’s not saying be Paul-like. He’s saying I want you to be Christ-like. By the way, this was fairly typical of the way Paul would teach his people. For example, Galatians 4:12. I entreat you to become as I am. Later in Philippians 3:17 he says, join in imitating me. 2 Thessalonians 3 he says imitate us. We give you an example to imitate. So this was just something common for Paul to do.

Here’s the question: What would it look like if we lived like Paul lived? What would it look like if we imitated the Apostle Paul? A couple of weeks ago I got stuck on that concept. I started writing down all of the things that I knew about the Apostle Paul. And then I went to the book of Acts and I perused through the book of Acts and I went through his different letters and I filled a number of pages of just my own scribble of what I thought Paul acted like around people. And so what I want to do this week and next is just give to you a list, just my list of how Paul could have impacted the lives of the Corinthians and more importantly how he impacts our lives today.

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If we were following him around I think that the first thing we would notice and this didn't come to me right away. This actually came after working through his life. The first thing we would notice is how laser-focused he was in his life. To put it in one word he was passionate. He was singular in his focus and passionate for Christ. That's the first thing that started to develop in my thinking; that what I would pick up if I followed Paul around; if I was trying to imitate him is what I think would rub off is Paul's singular focus towards Christ. Now, let me help you to understand this. Martin Luther in his study of the Apostle Paul wrote this:

Paul always has Christ on his lips; he cannot forget Him, because he foresaw that nothing would be less known in the world – even among those professing to be Christians – than Christ and His Gospel... Then he says this, this is very interesting... as often as Paul speaks of grace, righteousness, the promise, sonship, and inheritance, he usually adds: In Christ.”

Martin Luther

What Luther Says pg. 1026

He does. Eighty-six times throughout the Pauline corpus we see him pointing back to Christ “In Christ”. He's always pointing about our relationship “In Christ”. Grace “In Christ”. Hope “In Christ”. Faith “In Christ”. Always Paul pointing towards Christ, why? Because Christ is always on his mind. If we're going to imitate Paul, if we're going to grow in our Christian life Paul gives us a great example of putting Christ front and center into our lives.

Do you want to know how he did it? There's a great little passage in Philippians. Follow me over there. Philippians chapter 3 that you get to look into the inner life of the Apostle Paul. Now listen. We don't have volumes and volumes of words, autobiographies of Paul, Paul writing about himself. We don't have that. All we have is the scriptures. So, if you really want to understand someone when there's limited amount of text like we have on the Apostle Paul you have to look at everything very carefully and you have to think through it. Look what we learn about the Apostle Paul when he tells the Philippians in chapter 3, verser 13. He says, he's talking about his own spiritual maturity. He's talking about his own Christ-likeness. He says I do not consider that I've made it my own. In other words, I don't consider that I've arrived but one thing I do when I'm following Christ, forgetting what lies behind, straining forward to lies ahead I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Now, you need to see the singular expression “but one thing I do”. Interesting little words – I do are not actually in the Greek. Those are added by the translators because it's implied but it's written in a staccato fashion. Fast. Abrupt. Impassioned by Paul. One thing. That's what he's saying. It's as if it's at a preaching level. But, one thing, this is what I do with my entire life.

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Have you noticed that single minded people stand out? I mean, single minded people get things done. They set records. Think about athletes, Olympians. Single minded. That's all they do. I remember reading just a couple weeks ago at the doctor's office waiting for my daughter and I was reading a Sports Illustrated and there was an article about a gymnast on the upcoming Olympic Team and how since she's been at age 6 she's worked eight to ten hours everyday, six days a week in the gym. Think about that. And she said she started late. Many gymnasts start much earlier. Now, she's put all of her focus in life, everything and some would say she's wasting her childhood but she would say, no. I am focused on the prize.

Think about great businessmen, great leaders, great inventors. I was reading the biography of Thomas Edison called *The Wizard of Menlo Park*, Menlo Park New Jersey. That's where he moved his lab. That's where most great inventions came from. He had four-hundred inventions; four-hundred patents in the span of six years. That's an incredible speed of work. But obviously, he's known for what? The light bulb, right? But actually, did you know this? Thomas Edison did not invent the light bulb. A man by the name of Humphry Davies invented the light bulb in 1807. Edison came along seventy years later and he perfected it. When the incandescent light bulb was originally invented it would only stay lit for about 12, at max 20 hours. So it was really never a viable piece of invention. Edison's bulb changed society. When he was at Menlo Park he decided he was going to take all his energy and he was going to focus on the incandescent light bulb and he tried all kinds of different filaments to get this thing to light longer, wire, paper. He did string. He used all of these different filament objects and he could not keep the light bulb lit for more than, at the top end forty hours. One day he's out fishing on the New Jersey river with a bamboo fishing pole and it dawns on him that he never tried a raw material like bamboo as a filament so he goes back to the lab. He carbonizes bamboo. He uses it as the filament. The bulb stays lit twelve-hundred hours. That was the birth of the incandescent light bulb.

Now, that's a fascinating story but you know what really fascinates me? Is the fact that Thomas Edison was thinking about the light bulb while he was fishing. Seriously. That's supposed to be a time off, right, when you kind of just let your mind go and you don't think about anything. What does that tell you about a single minded person? It doesn't matter what he's doing in his life. It doesn't matter if he's at work or if he's at play, what's going on in his life. There's a single focus and that's Paul and I think that's what we would pick up if we would follow after Paul.

Paul says, this is the one thing I do. And, by the way. How does he maintain that focus? Look at the text. Forgetting what lies behind. Do you know why we get tripped up? We can't forget what lies behind. We can't forget what we've done; what we've said; what someone else has said; what someone else has done; someone else has said. And we become paralyzed by our past. I don't think Paul is saying that he forgets the past. I don't think that he's saying it's not relevant. I think what he's saying is you've got to use it only at a guide. But you can't let it stop you. You have to, the text says, strain forward to what lies ahead. Strain forward is

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a compound word. It literally means the stretching of muscles. He stretched everything for the cause and passion of Christ.

Now where do we see this show up in the life of Paul and where can it show up in our lives? It's the second thing I want us to look at this morning. I think if you would follow Paul around you would see that Paul was a forgiving man. A forgiving man. Now why is that so essential? I mean, he's an Apostle for crying our loud. You would assume that he would be a forgiving person. But just look back to 1 Corinthians with me and look halfway through verse 12 and notice what he said about his own experience. He says, when reviled, we, the teachers, the apostles, he himself – bless. When persecuted we endured. When slandered we entreated, which means comforted. He forgave. In fact, he not only taught it and you can read this in Ephesians 4 or Colossians 3. He modeled it. He models personal forgiveness. Galatians 6:17 he says, I bear in my body the marks of Christ. What is he saying? I think he's saying he bears the physical marks of persecution. So when he was persecuted what did he do? He forgave. He didn't retaliate. He didn't have this vindictive side to him.

Have you ever been around a situation where someone slanders you or slanders someone you love like your spouse or your children? Don't you find it extremely hard that when you see that person not to feel some type of vindictive feelings towards them or want to lash out and do the same to them? That's just human nature, right? We have to struggle against these actions. Sometimes we are great at holding grudges. We're great at making a molehill into a mountain and it just changes everything. We get angry. We get mad. We get vindictive. Paul said I'm not going to go there even with those who are physically abusing me.

Now, we have to ask how and why? How did Paul develop this idea of being a man of great forgiveness and why? I think to understand why you have to go back to his life. You have to really understand who he is, who he was. He was Paul the Christ follower. But, before he was Paul he was who? Saul of Tarsus. For those of you who don't now the story think of it this way. Before he was Paul the Christ follower. Before that he was Saul, the Christian killer. You see he came from a Pharisaical background who had a no tolerance policy of who they believed God was. When Jesus hit the scene He began to proclaim that he was God; He was the Messiah; He was the fulfillment of prophecy. It landed Him on the cross but it had a ripple effect for all of us who are His followers because now, all of us who follow Him proclaim Him as God. The problem with that particular culture and that day in Judaism was that if you were Jewish and you proclaim Jesus as God you would be considered a blasphemer and you should be taken out back and should be stoned; they literally take rocks and they throw them at you until your dead.

In fact, Paul rallied the first mob to martyr the first believer whose name was Stephen. You can read about it in the book of Acts, Acts chapter 7. I actually want you to turn to Acts chapter 8. I want you to see the post highlight of this persecution and ultimately martyrdom of Stephen. I want you to see what happens in verse 1 of chapter 8. It says this. Saul, that's

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Paul approved of his, Stephen's execution and there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Now, follow this line. Stephen, persecuted. Mob rallies around; Jewish mob rallies around him. Stones him to death. Paul's leading that mob. The further outtake of this is all of these Christians are hearing about this; watching this and they're starting to flee from Jerusalem. They're going out any where they can. Who are they hiding from? They're hiding from Saul – Paul. They're hiding from this man who would go into their home, drag them out and put them before an angry mob. That's Paul.

Now, flip over to chapter 9 and we see just how laser focused Paul was in those days at persecuting believers. But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the thigh priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, why? Well, that's where all the Christians were fleeing to. So that if he found any belonging to the Way, that's believers, men or women he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now what was he going to do with these people bound bringing them back to Jerusalem? Same thing he had done to Stephen. They were going to be stoned to death. The story doesn't end there. In fact, most of you probably know what happened next. Verse 3, now as he was on his way he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me? And he said, who are you, Lord? And the voice answered back, I am Jesus who you are persecuting. Most of you realize that this is the story of the greatest conversion that is recorded in scripture. Here was a man who was a murderer, a persecutor of the church who become a prominent leader of its movement, of the Church of Jesus Christ.

But, if that's all you know or if that's all you think about you missed the radical nature of what happened in this conversion because once Paul became converted he became an island. He became a man without people, family, a country. He could not go back to those who were the Pharisaical roots. He could not go back to them because he was a follower of the Way. Nor, was he welcomed by believers. Why? Well, think about it. I mean, if there was a man who was running around town persecuting us would you want to buddy up to him if all of a sudden he said that he became a follower of Christ? You have to remember that these people were personally persecuted by Paul. You have to remember that they knew people that were persecuted by Paul.

Now, what do you think of when you think of the Apostle Paul? Most of us think of a gentle, stately, elderly man. Kind of like the artist's rendition don't we? We think about Rembrandt's picture of Paul, which is ironically a self portrait of Rembrandt so Rembrandt actually painted himself as Paul. Or Divinci's portrait of Paul. This old man who seems like he wouldn't have ever hurt a person. Paul was the poster child for church persecution. You need to think of him in light of like an SS Guard chasing down Jews. Most people, when they write of Paul's past most theologians write of him in terms of monster-like characters. This is the reputation that would have followed him around.

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In fact, you can read about it in chapter 9. Just look over in verse 26. And when he had come to Jerusalem. This is Paul. When he had come back to Jerusalem, after his conversion he attempted to join the disciples and they were afraid of him for they did not believe that he was a disciple. In other words, they were going to think that he was just going to bait and switch, right? Paul was alone until, verse 27, Barnabas took him, brought him to the Apostles, declared to him how on the road he had seen the Lord. He spoke to him and at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. Really, Barnabas is the unsung hero of the life of the Apostle Paul. He forgave him when no one else would forgive him. I would imagine Barnabas knew people Paul had persecuted. Maybe Barnabas himself was persecuted by Paul. We don't know. But he opened a flood gate of forgiveness. See, without Barnabas there would not be an Apostle Paul. There wouldn't be a book of Romans or a book of 1 Corinthians or any of the Epistles. Why? Because he would have been shunned and pushed out. That's what was happening. And so one man forgave him?

What do you think that this did to Paul for the rest of his life? Alone. No where to turn. Someone personally forgives him. It changed the trajectory of his life. He became a forgiving person.

He often writes about how we ought to forgive because the Lord has forgiven us. Do you know why Paul, if we were around him we would pick up this sense of a forgiving spirit. Do you know why? I think this was a part of who he was. It goes back to what I said in the beginning about his passion. Paul was so passionate about Christ he would not allow anything to derail his pursuit of Christ. And if someone who needed forgiving would be the catalyst for him to grow closer to Christ then he would quickly forgive. You see that if we followed Paul's words, imitate me and think carefully. We don't necessarily become Paul-like. We become Christ – like.

Next week we'll pick up here and we'll add a few more to our list. Let's pray together.