

# Maturity in Christ

## 1 Corinthians 4:8-21

Pastor Guy Gray

### Learning to Follow in the Way of Christ

The Christian faith is more than a set of beliefs to be understood and believed. It is a way of thinking and living. This way of thinking and living is what we are calling the "Way of Christ". This way of thinking and living goes contrary to the wisdom of this world, because it is characterized above all by the Cross of Christ. This was the crucial lesson the Christians at Corinth needed to learn so that they could move toward real maturity in the Christian life. This is the greatest need for our lives and our church as well. But how can we learn to follow in the Way of Christ? We do it by learning from the lives of others who are leading the way for us by their example. This is why Paul tells the Corinthians to imitate his life (1 Corinthians 4:16). This is also why he sends Timothy to them. Timothy was going to be a living example in their midst of someone who was following in the way of Christ, just like Paul (4:17). Can you see the importance of having a relationship with someone who can be an example for you of what it really looks like to follow Christ—to live a Christ centered, Cross centered life? What about becoming that example to someone else? Maturity in Christ is the goal for the whole body of Christ. Each one of us needs to become a model of what it means to think and live like Jesus.

### The Struggle of Following Christ in a Fallen World

When Paul tells what it means for him to follow in the way of Christ, he writes about the hardships he has experienced (1 Corinthians 4:8-13). He does this, not because the Christian life is supposed to be one big story of misery! Paul often speaks of the overwhelming joy he has as a believer in Christ. But the Corinthian Christians were starting to think and act like the Christian life was about how rich, beautiful, smart, successful, happy and healthy a person of faith should be. So Paul makes a point by emphasizing the difficulties that come with following Christ, while living in this fallen world. The bottom line is—we aren't in heaven yet. We are living in a world that is filled with evil and pain. We are living in a world that crucified Jesus, the Lord of Glory. We are following the Lord Jesus, so we must expect that we will experience the struggle of life in this fallen world just like Jesus did. This is what Paul experienced in the life of faith and following Jesus. What about the Corinthians? What about us? What are our expectations of the Christian life? What is our attitude when things get hard?

### Receiving the "Admonition" of Those Who Care

In verse 14, Paul says that he does not want to shame the Corinthians, but rather to "warn" them. The word "warn" is often translated "admonish". It is a word of challenge that focuses in on attitude or thinking as it affects behavior. It literally means "to put in mind." This is a key to understanding what is going on in the Book of 1 Corinthians. Paul wants to get into their heads—get into their thinking. Not just to change their intellectual ideas, but to change how they live. This is "admonition" and it is so important that we are open to receive this in our Christian life. See Acts 20:31; Colossians 1:28 & 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and Romans 15:14 (where the word admonish is translated "instruct" in the NIV). Are you open to admonition? Do you value it? Do you admonish others in love? Why or why not?

### This is not an "Optional—Extra" of the Christian Life

The final paragraph in 1 Corinthians 4, verses 18-21, is intense! Paul is not going to back down on this. He is going to return to Corinth and confront this whole issue in person. It's not that he wants to—he knows that he has to! Everything is riding on this. The Corinthian Christians have got to get the message. This is not an "optional—extra" in the Christian life for those who are extra spiritual or super committed. Following in the way of Christ (the Way of the Cross) is the life calling of every Christian man and woman. When a Christian community begins to live this out in real life, the power of the Gospel begins to work in and through that church. Amazing things begin to happen. May the Lord help us to be that church!

### Questions for Reflection & Discussion

Read 1 Corinthians 4:8-21 again. Spend some time reflecting on this passage.

### The Way of Christ

What have we learned so far in our study through 1 Corinthians about what it means to follow in the "Way of Christ"? How is it different from what the Corinthians were pursuing? (See verses 8-13)

### **Imitate Who?**

Why does Paul state in verse 16, "Therefore I urge you to imitate me"? How do you feel about this statement? Doesn't it seem a bit audacious? On what grounds could Paul say something like this? And why does Paul tell them he is sending Timothy?

Who has been a significant example for you of living a Christ-centered life? How did this person impact your life?

What opportunities has God given you to be an example for someone else of what it looks like to follow Jesus?

### **Coming Up**

#### **11/2-11/10 El Salvador Trip**

River West is sending 22 people on Friday to El Salvador to minister to the families in the village of Nuevo Renacer and to help with projects for the Enlace organization. While they are there, they will be building the foundation for a Community Center and building relationships with the villagers. Please pray for them while they are gone that their hearts would be prepared for the journey ahead and their travels would be safe.

#### **October Outreach**

During the month of October we have shopping carts in the foyer where you can bring food and goods that will benefit the people at Dinner & a Movie, Community House and The HOTEL Ministry. Contact, Donna Scales @635.5139

#### **"Forgiven & Set Free"**

Bible study to start soon. Have you had an abortion? Are you living with shame and guilt? Has it been difficult to accept the promises and the grace and the unconditional love of God in your life? Please call Sheri Harkavy 503 887-7080 or Raffa Scanlon 503 449-1316 (personal lines) to get more information about this completely confidential study.