

INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is **SLIDE "Chris Bar"** Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here. If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to 1 Corinthians chapter 4. 1 Corinthians 4. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet and literally Google search 1 Corinthians 4.

INTRODUCTION

So, today we come to the close of our first section in 1 Corinthians. Really, chapters 1-4 has been one big movement in this letter addressing divisions in the Corinthian church.

And after Easter we'll pick up chapter 5 which gets real messy real quick as Paul starts addressing sexual immorality in the church,

- and in the NIV translation of the Bible,
- the heading for 1 Corinthians 5 reads
- "Dealing With a Case of Incest"
- so...that should be a fun one!

But today, as we finish up chapter 4 we end this section on divisions in the church with Paul addressing SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY.

ILLUSTRATION: BAD AUTHORITY

Now, when many in our day think of spiritual authority, they tend to think of it as a bad thing. We tend to think of the abuse of spiritual authority. Or we think of some wacko stuff.

So, I've heard some crazy stuff in my time as a pastor that other church leaders have done in a move to exert their spiritual authority:

- One guy said, *"Our church leaders didn't let us wear jeans, because they believed that wearing blue-jeans gave the impression of rebellion."*
 - Cause nothing says rebellion like blue-jeans, right?
 - Here was their mind-set,
 - *"in the 60s, hippies started wearing jeans..."*
 - now we have terrorism...
 - cause, effect."
 - How do you argue with that?
- At that same church this guy brought a girl friend of his,
 - and an usher said,
 - "mam, women aren't supposed to wear pants."
 - To which she responded
 - by grabbing her belt loop
 - and started to pull them off...
 - and he was like, "No, no, no, no!"
- One gal said,
 - *"at my youth group you were not allowed*
 - *to wear black polo shirts.*
 - *Any other color was fine,*
 - *but black meant that you loved the devil."*
 - Ok???

- And one of my favorites was this: one girl said,
 - *“our church leaders would not let us trick or treat*
 - *on Halloween because it was ‘Satan’s birthday’.*
 - *Then one of our church leaders had a baby born on Halloween.”*

That’s perfect! Can you imagine? God’s just gotta be like, “Come over here guys, you’re gonna want to see this one.”

But then we hear of scandal from spiritual authorities, right?

- Leaders stealing money.
- Leaders having affairs.
- And goodness, even the whole Catholic church abuse scandal.

I mean,

- spiritual authority is AT BEST being questioned,
- if not outright rejected!

TRANSITION

But Paul has something to say about spiritual authority, and how it’s actually supposed to function. So, let’s get into it. 1 Corinthians 4:14

SLIDE 1 1 CORINTHIANS 4:14-15

[14] I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. [15] For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

EXPLAIN: FAMILY

So, Paul has been calling out the Corinthians for the last four chapters, and rightly so.

- They had been dividing over which leader they liked the best.
- They had been settling for the wisdom of the world,
 - rather than the wisdom of God.
- They had been boasting in themselves
 - rather than in the cross of Christ.

So, he's been going after them for 4 whole chapters.

And you know why? **Because they're family.**

- That's what he just said.
- **You are my beloved children.**
- **I became your father.**
- This is a concerned dad talking to his children...
- who are making some really bad life choices.

EXPLAIN: GUIDES

And he says they **have countless guides in Christ.**

- The word translated *guides* is actually
- the image of a slave in Greco-Roman society
- who was assigned the duty of
- leading a child to and from school,
- protecting them,
- and keeping them out of trouble.

But this character was often portrayed in Greek society as something of an imbecile. Essentially, this is a really crummy babysitter.

- And Paul is very likely referring to the church leaders
- who had come in after he and after Apollos
- to the church at Corinth,
- but who had misled them into divisions and factions.

But Paul is reminding them

- that he's their spiritual father.
- He's the one who brought the Gospel to them.
- He's the one through whom God gave them new life in Christ.

TRANSITION

So, he's building out this image of the church as a family.

- They were children,
- he was the father,
- there were some sketchy babysitters.

And just like every healthy family has authority, so does the church.

Healthy spiritual vitality is linked to healthy spiritual authority.

- And where a church has countless guides...
- who lead them in unhealthy spiritual authority,
- you will likely see unhealthy spiritual vitality.

TRANSITION

So, Paul starts the ending of this section by saying,

- *“Hey, all this dysfunction...*
- *all these factions...*
- *all these divisions...*
- *they’re linked to unhealthy views on spiritual authority.*
- *You’re following babysitters,*
- *who are misleading you.*
- *But daddy’s stepping back in.”*

And he goes on. Verse 16.

SLIDE 2 1 CORINTHIANS 4:16

[16] I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

POINT 1: URGE

Now, we’ll get to the *imitate* part of this text in just a minute, but I want to make my first point about spiritual authority in those first three words: I urge you.

Church, SLIDE 3 SPIRITUAL AUTHORITIES URGE...they don’t command.

True biblical spiritual authorities are not trying to boss people around. No, they are to urge those they lead into a deeper love and walk with Jesus.

Now, lest anyone thinks this sermon is self-serving— “of course the pastor wants us to follow spiritual leaders”—let me just say, we have many spiritual authorities to consider here. Ok?

- So, yes, your pastors and elders of your church are spiritual authorities.
- But I, as the lead pastor here, am under the authority of the elders.
 - They are my spiritual authorities.
 - Just as I am to them.
- We have staff members who are spiritual authorities in their respective areas.
- We have D-Group leaders who are caring for smaller groups.
- How about parents?
 - Moms and dads are supposed to be spiritual authorities in their homes.
- Maybe you’re simply further along in your walk with Christ,
 - and you’re discipling someone who’s not so far along.
 - You are an authority at some level.

Spiritual authority is all over the place.

But good spiritual authorities urge, they don’t command. Remember the parental analogy.

- This isn’t a harsh parent commanding their kids to obey.
- This is the loving parent urging their child to obey...
 - for their good!

ILLUSTRATION: ED

When I started in ministry, I started meeting with another pastor who was about 30 years older than I, and who had been pastoring for a long time. And he mentored me.

So, we'd meet at Starbucks,

- and we would talk life,
- and family,
- and church,
- and Jesus,
- really whatever.

We'd just sit and talk for an hour, once-a-month.

And we did that for years, and actually, we continue to do this now.

- He's now 70ish, and I just sit with him and let him speak.
- I did it this week on Zoom...
 - Don't you wish you'd bought stock in Zoom about a month ago?
- But I called him...
- Cause I just want to absorb what he's putting out there.

And there have been times where he has said hard things to me...

- things I'd rather not hear...
- about selfish ambition,
- or pride,
- or arrogance.

But the way he spoke,

- it was never in a domineering way.
- It was never to prove that he was right.
- It was never to put me in my place.

You see,

- I know he wants the best for me.
- I know he loves me.
- I know he cares about me, and Maryse, and Harper.

And so, he urges me towards the good...towards love...towards Christ.

TRANSITION

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITIES URGE US TOWARDS CHRIST...like a good father urging a beloved child towards the best life they can have.

That's the first point.

The second is in verse 16 as well.

SLIDE 4 1 CORINTHIANS 4:16

[16] I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

POINT 2: MODEL

So, on to *imitation*. And this is the second aspect of spiritual authority I want to point out. SLIDE 5 SPIRITUAL AUTHORITIES MODEL. They model Christ to us.

Now, don't let your mind go to pride here, ok? Paul isn't being prideful here, as if he's just haughty and saying, "*Oh, I'm so awesome. Imitate me.*"

Actually, back to last week's text: In 1 Corinthians 4:9-13 Paul had said these things of himself as a spiritual authority:

- we are last of all.
- We are fools.
- We are weak.
- We are held in disrepute.
- We hunger and thirst.
- We are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless.
- We're reviled.
- We're persecuted.
- We're slandered.
- We are the scum of the world.
- We are the refuse of all things.

Now, imitate me!

- Um...no thank you.
- I'd rather not.

You see, this isn't Paul boasting in himself, but making a point about spiritual authorities. They model Christ! Look at verse 17:

SLIDE 6 1 CORINTHIANS 4:17

[17] That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.

EXPLAIN: IN CHRIST

Now, why has Paul sent Timothy to them?

- To remind them of Paul's ways,
- what are those next two words?
- In Christ.

That's the key. Why can Paul have the audacity to say, "*Imitate me!*" Only because he is first imitating Christ.

- Paul is defaulting to a higher authority.
- Spiritual authorities model what it looks like to follow Christ.
- And that's because they are under Jesus' authority to begin with.
- The top leader in the church wasn't Paul...it was Christ.
- Jesus said as much in Matthew 28:18

SLIDE 7 MATTHEW 28:18

[18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

So, Paul, under the authority of Jesus Christ, says to the church, "imitate me!"

EXPLAIN: PERFECTION

Now, we can quickly think about this, and recognize a problem in this statement. **Imitate me.**

Question: anybody want to say that about themselves right now?

- Well...kinda...
- like, imitate me in some ways...
- but not in every way...right?

You see, the question becomes:

- how do you get to be one worthy of imitation?

Must one achieve some level of perfection to be worthy of imitation?

- No!

Was Paul perfect?

- No.
- He still had loads of stuff God was working on in him.

There is only one perfect person, and that was the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul doesn't say, "*just imitate Jesus.*"

- People say that all the time.
- "*Just act like Jesus.*"
- "*Just do what Jesus did.*"

And I get what they're saying. But the problem is,

- Jesus never sinned...
- and thus Jesus never needed to do what we do when we sin...
- Jesus never repented.
- He never had to!
- He was perfect.

- But we aren't.
- So, we have to imitate someone else when we do wrong.

TRANSITION

And that's what Paul is admonishing them to follow his lead on.

- I think Paul means that those worthy of imitation,
- or mimicking,
- or modeling one's spiritual growth off of
- are not perfect people,
- but they are faithful and repentant.

I think Paul's saying,

- *"what's worthy of imitation is not that I'm perfect,*
- *but I am walking with God,*
- *and when I fail to live up to that,*
- *I'm quick to repent,*
- *and work to change.*
- ***Follow Jesus.***
- ***But imitate me."***

Goodness,

- **the mark of a good spiritual authority is not one who never sins,**
- **but what one does when they sin.**

Verse 18:

SLIDE 8 1 CORINTHIANS 4:18-20

[18] Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. [19] But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. [20] For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.

What Paul is doing here is referencing back to those who are creating factions. And says,

- *“I’m going to come back and visit you,*
- *and we’ll see what kind of authority these people really have...”*

And then he ends the section in verse 21:

SLIDE 9 1 CORINTHIANS 4:21

[21] What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

POINT 3: GENTLE

And here Paul gives us the last point I want to make about spiritual authorities this morning. **SLIDE 10** SPIRITUAL AUTHORITIES ARE GENTLE.

Now, in this moment Paul is referring back to verse 15 and the spiritual guides he talked about, I called them babysitters.

- But these slaves who would supervise the children
- were often caricatured as stern taskmasters.
- And in pictures on Greek vases,
- they frequently have sticks in their hands.
- They were frequently recognized by the rod they carried,
- and would impose their authority with physical force.

And Paul is returning to this contrast with these spiritual guides and he as a spiritual father.

- The rod was an image of severe discipline,
- and Paul is saying that he comes as a good spiritual authority avoiding force,
 - psychological and physical,
- because it is contrary to the nature of the cross
- and the way of love.

Now, this is not to say that spiritual authorities don't ever discipline...

- but they never start with the rod.
- They start with gentleness.

Parents who are here will amen to this: no good parent likes to discipline their children.

Goodness, the hardest thing I have to do is disciplining my little girl.

- I love her.
- I don't EVER want to inflict her with pain.
- I do, at times, because I love her.

ILLUSTRATION: SPANKING

I remember one of the first times I had to give her a spanking.

- Yes, we spank.
- I know some of you don't.
- That's cool.
- We'll hook you up with a good counselor
- for you kids when they're teens.

But I remember one of the first times I gave Harper a spanking.

- Frankly, I can't remember what she did,
- but I told her that she was going to get spanked.
- And we went up into her room.
- And she was weeping and crying...
- begging me not to spank her.
- Pleading with me not to.
- But we had set the expectation for discipline.
- And so, I pulled her little pants down
- and I swatted her bottom.
- And she wailed,
- and cried...
- and I'm all teary...
- because on the day she was born I swore I would do anything to keep her from pain.
- **And the spanking was just that...**
- **to keep her from pain.**

But listen to me...

- after the spanking
- I was so quick to sweep her up in my arms.
- And hug her neck,
- and kiss her face,
- and wipe her tears away.
- Even when we must use the rod,
- we do so in a spirit of gentleness.

This is the way of Jesus. Matthew 11 says this:

SLIDE 11 MATTHEW 11:28–30

[28] Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

CONCLUSION

So, let me wrap this up.

- Spiritual authorities urge us towards Christ.
- They model to us Christ.
- And they are gentle like Christ.

And we all need to place ourselves under good spiritual authorities... especially in light of this COVID-19 crisis.

You see, we are all going through a very difficult season,

- and where you go for guidance and care
- will determine a lot about how you weather this storm.

I don't know about you, but this week I felt like the novelty of the quarantine wore off, and I felt this low-grade depression set in on my heart and mind. I just felt down. And I couldn't seem to shake it.

And I'll tell you, there are a lot of spiritual guides out there who want to give us advice on how to manage this stuff...but church, I want to urge you to consider who you have submitted to.

- Is it some social media guru?
- Is it some TV personality?
- Is it yourself?
 - Do you just *do you*
 - and whatever feels right and good
 - is the current way you go?

I'll tell you...this week, as I was really for the first time *feeling* this crisis personally, I started making calls.

- I called one of the guys who played a part in me coming to Christ.
- I called my mentor I just told you about.
- I placed myself under the spiritual authority of men
- who I knew would point me to Christ.

Under whose authority have you placed yourself when it comes to the things of God? I want to urge you to find spiritual authorities...

- goodness, call me,
 - call one of the elders,
 - call your D-Group leader,
 - maybe call a parent
 - or a friend you know to be further along than you...
-
- And follow them.
 - Imitate them.
 - Mimic the way they follow Christ.

You were never meant to follow Christ alone...but with a family.

Let's pray.

COMMUNION

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- First, every week we celebrate communion—The Lord's Supper—
 - We take a little bit of bread and juice, two common elements given to us by Jesus to represent his body and blood sacrificed for us.
 - When we eat and drink, we are remembering his sacrifice, and proclaiming once again that we believe in him as our Lord and Savior.
 - If you are a Christian here today please get your communion elements ready, as we'll all take communion together.

- If you are NOT a Christian, we ask you to abstain from taking communion, as this ordinance means you are a believer...and you are welcome at Fathom even if you are not.
- Second, we normally give of our tithes & offerings as a community. And this is still needed.
 - Church, even though we are not meeting physically, we are still practicing first fruits giving.
 - We give our first and our best because in Christ Jesus God gave us his first and his best.
 - So, if Fathom is your home church, and you regularly give in the offering boxes, please go to **SLIDE** fathomchurch.org/give or click the link at the top of the screen marked “Give” and give online.
- Third, the staff and elders are here to pray for you, and we are committed to continue this. So, if you have any prayer needs, please click on the screen and submit a prayer request, or go to **SLIDE** fathomchurch.org/prayer
- And finally, we always end with singing praise and worship to our God. Singing is an unbelievably important part of our gathering, and even as we are scattered in this season, let’s continue to worship through song together.

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

SLIDE Communion 1

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

SLIDE Communion 2

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

SLIDE Communion 3

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let's sing together.

BENEDICTION

Well, thanks church for gathering with us. We will be online next Sunday, as well, same time.

Remember, if you need anything this week, please reach out to us as we want to love and serve you well in this season.

I'll leave you with this benediction from the Hebrew scriptures:

SLIDE NUMBERS 6:24–26

[24] The LORD bless you and keep you; [25] the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; [26] the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Love you, church. Have a great week!