

1 Corinthians – Lesson 6

SECTION OUTLINE THREE (1 CORINTHIANS 3)

Paul again reminds the Corinthians not to elevate teachers of the Word of God over the Word itself.

- I. THE “BABY” CHRISTIANS IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (3:1–10): Paul addresses some squabbling believers in this assembly.
 - A. **Paul’s criticism** (3:1–2)
 1. *What he hopes to do* (3:1): The apostle wants to give them the solid meat of the Word.
 2. *What he has to do* (3:2): Because of their carnality and immaturity, he can only feed them milk.
 - B. **Paul’s correction** (3:3–10)
 1. *Their sinful view of Christian leaders* (3:3–4): They are looking to men (like Paul and Apollos) instead of to Christ.
 2. *His scriptural view of Christian leaders* (3:5–10)
 - a. What the leaders do (3:5a, 6a, 7a, 8–10): They can only sow and water the spiritual seed.
 - b. What the Lord does (3:5b, 6b, 7b): God alone can cause the crop to grow.
- II. THE BEMA JUDGMENT AND THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH (3:11–23)
 - A. **The works** (3:11–15): Paul says all believers will someday stand before an elevated platform (called a “bema”) to be tested in regard to their service for Christ.
 1. *The objects in this test* (3:11–13): Our works here are classified as gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, and straw.
 2. *The outcome of this test* (3:14–15)
 - a. The owner of the gold, silver, and jeweled works will receive a reward (3:14).
 - b. The owner of the wood, hay, and straw works will receive no reward (3:15).
 - B. **The warning** (3:16–23)
 1. *Don’t defile your temple* (3:16–17): God regards our bodies as temples.
 2. *Don’t deceive yourselves* (3:18–21): Paul warns not to depend on earthly wisdom or human leaders but on God himself.
 3. *You belong to Christ as Christ belongs to God* (3:22–23).¹

(Notice that Paul does not use the word “bema” [βῆμα] in 3:11-15. He doesn’t use this Greek word in his letters to Corinth until 2 Cor. 5:10. This word is used for “judgment seat” in Acts 18:12-17. Also, note the error of II B 1 above. Here the Holy Spirit is calling the church the temple of God. Paul will make the point that our physical bodies are temples in 6:19.)

4 Let a man (ἄνθρωπος) so consider (λογίζομαι) us, as servants (ὑπηρέτης) of Christ and stewards (οἰκονόμος) of the mysteries (μυστήριον) of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards (οἰκονόμος) that one be found faithful (πιστός). 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged (ἀνακρίνω) by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge (ἀνακρίνω) myself. 4 For (γάρ) I know of nothing against myself, yet (ἀλλά) I am not justified (δικαιόω) by this; but He who judges (ἀνακρίνω) me is the Lord. 5 Therefore (ὥστε) judge (κρίνω) nothing before the time

¹ Willmington, H. L. (1999). *The Outline Bible* (1 Co 3). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

(καιρός), until the Lord comes (ἔρχομαι), who will both bring to light (φωτίζω) the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts (καρδία). Then each one's praise will come from God.

4:1-2 – As Paul begins chapter 4, he continues the argument he began in 3:5 to answer the question of who or what is Paul or Apollos. This will continue through verse 5. But in this verse, he sets forth how a man should regard Paul, Apollos, Cephas or any other evangelist. In 3:5, Paul had stated that they were servants or ministers (διδάκονος). Once again, he says they are servants but this time – by inspiration – he uses a different word. Here he uses the Greek word ὑπηρέτης which literally means an “under rower”. The word developed from oarsmen on triremes – Greek ships developed around 650 B.C. Triremes had three tiers of rowers (about 170 total oarsmen) and ὑπηρέτης referred to those rowers on the lowest level. It came to mean a servant who serves under a master – in Paul's case Christ. Interestingly, of the 20 times this word appears in the New Testament, this is its only appearance outside the gospels and Acts. They are also stewards of the mysteries (μυστήριον – a word we encountered in 2:7) of God. (Gordon Fee's comments on “mysteries” are useful: Most likely, as in 2:7, it reflects again Paul's own semitic usage, in which he, as one who has the Spirit, has been given to understand God's plan of salvation, long hidden to human minds but now revealed in Christ. Thus the “mysteries of God” mean the revelation of the gospel, now known through the Spirit and especially entrusted to the apostles to proclaim.²) The word for steward (οἰκονόμος) refers to one – often a slave – who is entrusted with managing a household (οἶκος) which adds to the metaphor of building. This word οἰκονόμος is used nine other times in the New Testament but its usage in *Titus 1:7* and *1 Peter 4:10* is particularly instructive. Paul continues his thoughts about stewards – those entrusted with the mysteries of God – that they must be trustworthy or faithful (the most common translation of πιστός in its 67 appearances in the New Testament). Note the use of πιστός οἰκονόμος (“**faithful steward**”) in *Luke 12:42*. Paul and Apollos must be faithful to their master Christ. Although they are servants to the Corinthians, their master is Christ – not the Corinthians.

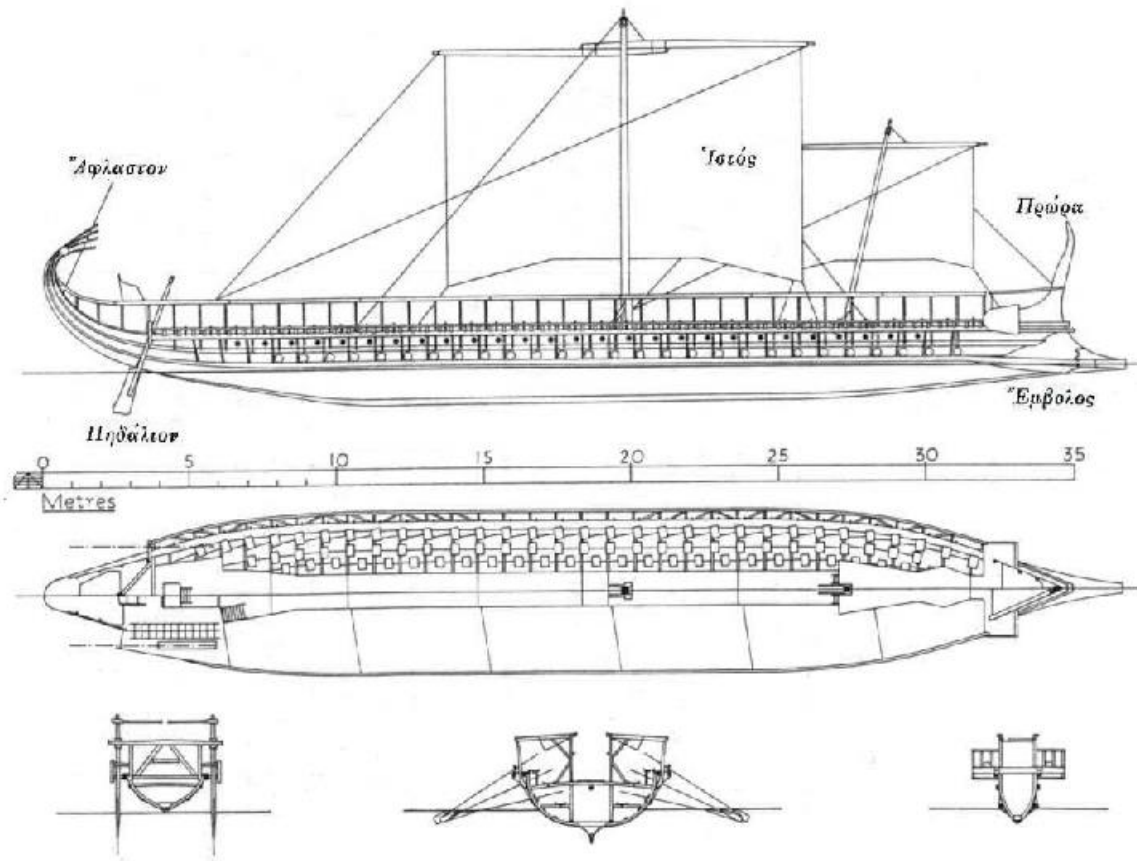
4:3-5 – “**But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you.**” It's not just a very small thing but Paul uses a superlative – it is the least. See Paul's use of this same term in *15:9* and *Ephesians 3:8*. The word for judged (ἀνακρίνω – *ahn-ah-kree'-no*) is the same word used in *2:14-15*. It is a legal term referring to the questioning in judicial hearings – “the examination” – not the handing down of a verdict. Man's judgment is rendered “human court” in the NKJV. Literally, the phrase is “day made of man” (ἀνθρώπινος ἡμέρα). We would say something like “to have one's day in court.” Richard Oster makes this observation about the use of “day” in Greek for “court”: The word translated “court” in 4:3 is simply the typical Greek word for “day” (ἡμέρα, *hēmera*); thus, in 4:3 when Paul makes reference to the human “day,” he does so as a contrast to the day of the Lord, which he referred to in 3:13 and alludes to in 4:5.³ Paul concludes verse 3 by stating that he does not even judge himself. This doesn't mean that Paul doesn't go through a self-examination which we all must do – but Paul is looking farther ahead. In which case, Paul's judgment would be irrelevant. Even if Paul did judge himself, his conscience is clear. Yet that alone would not be enough to establish his innocence and render him justified. It is the Lord – the Master of His house – Who will judge His steward

² Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament (p 160). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

³ Oster, R. (1995). *1 Corinthians* (1 Co 4:3). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

– His οἰκονόμος. Paul is looking ahead to the final judgment as expressed in 2 *Corinthians* 5:10. Paul reaches the conclusion of this paragraph with a strong prohibition: “Stop judging!” Here, the word κρίνω (*kree´no*) refers to reaching a verdict. This is the same word used in *Matthew* 7:1. Paul tells the Corinthians to stop judging until the proper time – that being when the Lord comes again. On that day – the day of the Lord, everything will be exposed – each man’s work will become manifest (3:13). Then men shall have the commendation or praise of God – not men. This is when the servant receives his wages – his reward (3:8, 14).

Greek Trireme



4

6 Now (δέ) these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred (μετασχηματίζω) to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that (ἵνα) you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written (γράφω), that (ἵνα) none of you may be puffed up (φυσιόω) on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who makes you differ (διακρίνω) from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast (καυχάομαι) as if you had not received it?

4:6 – 1 *Corinthians* 3:5-4:5 was an entire discussion devoted to answering the questions: “Who is Apollos?” and “Who is Paul?” 1 *Corinthians* 4:6 begins with a conjunction (δέ – *deh*) in Greek (although it is the second word in the sentence) which serves to connect this verse with what has preceded it. Μετασχηματίζω (*met-ah-skay-mah-tee´zo*) is a

⁴www.hellenicaworld.com/Greece/Technology/en/Trireme.html

word used only by Paul in the New Testament for a total of five times. In the NKJV, it is translated “transform” every time except in this verse. Here it has the unique meaning to show a connection or bearing of one thing on another, **“figuratively transferred to”**. Paul has applied all these things – the three metaphors of agriculture, building and stewardship – to himself and Apollos in order to teach the Corinthians (his brothers and sisters in Christ) two lessons. He did it for them. First, that they should not evaluate and esteem teachers according to their human standards of wisdom and eloquence – going beyond what God has ordained in scripture. Richard Oster comments on going **“beyond what is written”**: “While there are several interpretations of what Paul has in mind with this phrase, it seems that the clearest interpretation is one that sees this as a reference to Old Testament citations which he has been using in the Corinthian correspondence.”⁵ Paul doesn’t cite anything from the Old Testament here but provides a total of 17 quotations in this first epistle. When anyone uses human standards for judgment, they are putting men above God and His word. The second lesson for the Corinthians is not to be arrogant or puffed up – **φυσιόω**. This Greek word is found seven times in the New Testament and only in Paul’s writings – six of those in this letter. (The other occurrence is in *Colossians 2:18*.) It derives from the Greek **φῦσα** meaning “a pair of bellows” and thus came to mean “to puff or blow up” – “to inflate”. The Corinthians are not to take pride in one teacher over another going back to the divisions mentioned in *1:12*.

4:7 – Paul introduces three rhetorical questions in this verse with an explanatory **“for”** (**γάρ**) after the closing phrase of verse 6 regarding being puffed up against one another. Each question is aimed at the individual who is puffed up – indicated by use of the second person singular. The first question is extremely difficult due to his use of **διακρίνω**. Of the 19 times this word appears in the New Testament, Paul uses it five times – all in *1 Corinthians*. The basic meaning of the word is to make a judgment that there is a difference between things or to discern. The implied idea here seems to be “Who distinguishes you from anyone else?” Or “Who makes you superior to anyone else?” All of us must ultimately admit that our talents and abilities are given to us by God. Thus, the second question asks: **“What do you have that you did not receive?”** What do you possess that did not come from God? And, finally, if you received a gift, why are you boasting as if it weren’t a gift? This is the fifth and final use of this Greek word for “boast” or “glory” (**καυχάομαι**) in *1 Corinthians* (*1:29*, *31[2]*, and *3:21*).

8 You are already full (**κορέννυμι**)! **You are already rich** (**πλουτέω**)! **You have reigned as kings** (**βασιλεύω**) **without us—and indeed I could wish you did reign** (**βασιλεύω**), **that we also might reign** (**συμβασιλεύω**) **with you!** **9 For** (**γάρ**) **I think** (**δοκέω**) **that God has displayed us, the apostles** (**ἀπόστολος**), **last** (**ἔσχατος**), **as men condemned to death** (**ἐπιθανάτιος**); **for we have been made** (**γίνομαι**) **a spectacle** (**θέατρον**) **to the world** (**κόσμος**), **both to angels** (**ἄγγελος**) **and to men** (**ἄνθρωπος**). **10 We are fools** (**μωρός**) **for Christ’s sake, but you are wise** (**φρόνιμος**) **in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored!** **11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands** (**χείρ**). **Being reviled, we bless** (**εὐλογέω**); **being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed** (**βλασφημέω**), **we entreat** (**παρακαλέω**). **We have been made as the filth of the world** (**κόσμος**), **the offscouring of all things until now.**

⁵ Oster, R. (1995). *1 Corinthians* (1 Co 4:6). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

4:8 – In the previous verse, Paul addressed the puffed up or arrogant as an individual; now he addresses the entire congregation with the second person plural. **“You are already full!”** “You are full” translates the Greek phrase **κορέννυμι εἰμί** which is a participle + “to be”. **Κορέννυμι** (*kor-en'-nyoo-mee*) means to be satiated or filled and is found only twice in the New Testament. The other occurrence is in *Acts 27:38*. **You are already rich!** The Corinthians don’t need anything! These remarks are similar to the warning made to the church at Laodicea in *Revelation 3:17*. You have become kings (without Paul and Apollos)! Leon Morris mentions the following: Moffatt appositely cites the Stoic catch-cry (taught by Diogenes): ‘I alone am rich, I alone reign as king.’⁶ The Greek philosopher Diogenes died in 323 B.C. – the same year as Alexander the Great. Paul seems to be bursting with sarcasm as he wishes they were kings so Paul and others could reign with (**συμβασιλεύω**) them. Again, Paul uses a Greek word used only twice in the New Testament – here and in *2 Timothy 2:12*. Some have viewed Paul’s comments from an eschatological perspective – that the Corinthians believed they had arrived spiritually and were already reigning in the kingdom. However, this is an unwarranted assumption.

4:9 – We must realize that Paul is not accusing God with bitterness but is stating a fact based on the attitude of the Corinthians. He is simply contrasting his position and that of his fellow laborers with that of the Corinthians’. Evidently, Paul is using “apostles” in the broadest sense to include Apollos. The NIV translates: **“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena.”**⁷ Gordon Fee explains: The NIV, on the other hand, understands them in terms of the Roman triumph, in which a conquering general staged a splendid parade that included not only his armies but the booty as well. At the very “end of the procession” were those captives who had been “condemned to die in the arena. In that way they became a spectacle for all to see.”⁸ Paul’s use of the adjective **ἐπιθανάτιος** (“men sentenced to death”) is unusual since it is an *hapax legomenon* as far as the New Testament is concerned. Paul says it appears that they are sentenced to death because he and the other evangelists or apostles had become a spectacle (**θέατρον** – source of our English word “theater”) to everyone. This is an interesting word for Paul to use since it only appears here and also twice in *Acts 19* – verses 29 and 31. Could he have written this just after the riot in Ephesus? They are a spectacle to the world. The entire universe can see what is happening on this stage for both men and angels are watching.

4:10 – As if to define what he meant by being made a spectacle, Paul sarcastically lists three contrasts between the apostles and the Corinthian Christians – quite different from his assertion about them in *1:26*. Gordon Fee’s explanation seems to fit: The majority of the Corinthians are not among the “wise, powerful, or honored”; but they are acting as if they were.⁹ The apostles are fools (or “morons”) for Christ’s sake but the Corinthians are wise. Up to this point, Paul has used **σοφός** for “wise” but now he uses a synonym to perhaps put “some difference between his readers and the worldly-wise he has

⁶ Morris, L. (1985). *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 80). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁷ The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Co 4:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (p. 174). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁹ Fee, G. D. (1987). *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (p. 176). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

castigated earlier.”¹⁰ Notice he says they are wise in Christ. Four times in chapter 1 Paul has referred to being in Christ. He then used it once in chapter 3 and now this is the first of four times it is used in this chapter. Once again it shows that Paul considered the Corinthians as his brethren. Next, he states that the apostles are weak (**ἀσθενής**) but the Corinthians are strong (**ἰσχυρός**). Paul had addressed this theme of strength versus weakness in 1:25 and 2:3-5. Interestingly, the inspired apostle used the same Greek words for “weak” and “strong” in the latter half of 1:27. Finally, Paul reverses the order of the contrast and declares the Corinthians are held in honor. The Greek adjective **ἐνδοξος** literally means “in glory”. The apostles, on the other hand, are held in dishonor or disrepute (**ἄτιμος**). This is the same Greek word Jesus used in *Matt. 13:57* and *Mk. 6:4*.

4:11-13 – Paul now switches from his sarcasm or irony to some very plain talk. Rather than focusing on the distant past, he describes conditions as they exist at the moment – to the present hour. Paul reiterates this point in verse 13 when he writes “**until now**”. The apostles hunger and thirst as opposed to the Corinthians who have all they want (verse 8)! Paul and the apostles are poorly dressed! They are buffeted (**κολαφίζω**) which means they are beaten or struck with fists as Jesus was in *Matthew 26:67* and *Mark 14:65*. (See also *1 Peter 2:20*.) And the apostles are homeless (**ἄστατέω** – a Greek word found only here in the New Testament) – although Jesus predicted this for potential disciples in *Matthew 8:20*. Hungry, thirsty, poorly dressed, beaten and homeless! Compare these terms with Paul’s description of his mistreatment in *2 Corinthians 11:23-27* – especially verse 27. Next, Paul asserts that he and the other apostles labor (**κοπιᾶω** – a word which denotes hard work to the point of growing weary) – working with their own hands. We know from *Acts 18:2-3* that Paul worked as a tentmaker in Corinth. Even before arriving there, he was working hard (*1 Thessalonians 2:9*; *2 Thessalonians 3:6-10*) to provide for himself. He reiterated his work ethic to the Ephesian elders in *Acts 20:33-34*. Paul may be giving us a preview of one of the problems he faced with the Corinthians. The Greeks disdained physical labor and believed that should be done by slaves. While working with his hands seemed to be Paul’s practice, this was evidently a point of contention with the Corinthians as found in *1 Corinthians 9:1-18* and again in *2 Corinthians 11:9*. Paul now addresses the apostles’ reaction to their mistreatment with three antitheses. When they are reviled, they bless (**εὐλογέω**). Of course, this is the example Jesus left us according to *1 Peter 2:21-23* and was taught by Him in *Luke 6:28*. It is also urged on us in *1 Peter 3:8-9* and *Romans 12:14-18*. Secondly, when they are persecuted, they endure it. Jesus taught this in the Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew 5:10-11* and certainly demonstrated it throughout His life but especially in the events surrounding His crucifixion. Finally, when they are defamed, they entreat (**παρακαλέω**). The Greek word translated “defamed” is used only here in the New Testament and literally means “to speak injury”. Their reaction is to entreat or “to call to one’s side”. This versatile word (**παρακαλέω**) appears 109 in the New Testament and most often is translated with the idea of urging or exhorting. But it also is translated “to comfort” or “to encourage” as found in *Matthew 5:4* and *Acts 16:40* respectively. Paul now sums up this paragraph with his vivid description of the apostles: they have become and are like “the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things.” His conclusion is very similar to *Lamentations 3:45*. The two Greek words translated “filth” and “offscouring” are almost synonyms; however, there are subtle differences. **Περικάθαρμα** which is rendered “filth” is a compound word referring to what is left when one cleans around. For example, the

¹⁰ Morris, L. (1985). *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 81). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

trash you sweep up. **Περίψημα**, translated “offscouring”, comes from a compound word meaning “to rub around” and refers to what you get when you do such cleaning. In our language today, it would refer to what you get when you scrub a dirty bathtub. Either way, Paul and the apostles are trash to be thrown out with the garbage – at least in the minds of the Corinthians!

14 I do not write (γράφω) **these things to shame** (ἐντρέπω) **you, but** (ἀλλά) **as my beloved** (ἀγαπητός) **children** (τέκνον) **I warn** (νουθετέω) **you.** **15 For** (γάρ) **though you might have ten thousand** (μυρίος) **instructors** (παιδαγωγός) **in Christ, yet** (ἀλλά) **you do not have many fathers** (πατήρ); **for in Christ Jesus I have begotten** (γεννάω) **you through the gospel** (εὐαγγέλιον). **16 Therefore I urge** (παρακαλέω) **you, imitate me** (μιμητής ἐγώ γίνομαι). **17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved** (ἀγαπητός) **and faithful** (πιστός) **son** (τέκνον) **in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach** (διδάσκω) **everywhere in every church** (ἐκκλησία). **18 Now some are puffed up** (φυσίω), **as though I were not coming** (ἔρχομαι) **to you.** **19 But I will come** (ἔρχομαι) **to you shortly, if the Lord wills** (θέλω), **and I will know** (γινώσκω), **not the word** (λόγος) **of those who are puffed up** (φυσίω), **but** (ἀλλά) **the power** (δύναμις). **20 For** (γάρ) **the kingdom** (βασιλεία) **of God is not in word** (λόγος) **but** (ἀλλά) **in power** (δύναμις). **21 What do you want** (θέλω)? **Shall I come** (ἔρχομαι) **to you with a rod** (ῥάβδος), **or in love** (ἀγάπη) **and a spirit** (πνεῦμα) **of gentleness** (πραΰτης)?

4:14 – Verses 14-21 comprise the concluding paragraph to a discourse begun in 1:10 against sectarianism. After some very heated rhetoric in the preceding paragraph (verses 6-13), Paul now states that he is not writing these things to make them ashamed (as he will do in 6:5). Rather – and the use of ἀλλά (“but”) shows the sharp contrast – Paul is warning or admonishing them as a father does his children. The Greek verb translated “warn” (νουθετέω) is a strictly Pauline word in the New Testament – once as he spoke it in Acts 20:31 and seven other times in his epistles (e.g., Colossians 3:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12). The noun form of this verb is νουθεσία and is used only by Paul in the New Testament (three times) – most notably for us in Ephesians 6:4. Notice the lexicon’s definition: counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct.¹¹ This admonition is designed to correct without provoking or embittering.

4:15 – Paul now begins his explanation of why he can warn them as his children with an explanatory γάρ (“for”). He allows that they have countless (μυρίος) instructors or guardians (παιδαγωγός) in Christ. Again, we have two exclusively Pauline words in the New Testament: μυρίος (moo-ree-’ose) is used only here and in 1 Corinthians 14:19. Παιδαγωγός is found only here and twice in Galatians 3 – verses 24-25. Although our English word pedagogue derives from this Greek word and means a teacher, this was not its original definition. Gordon Fee explains: The “guardian” was ordinarily a trusted slave, distinguished from a “teacher”, to whom a father turned over his children (usually sons), whom the guardian was to conduct to and from school and whose conduct in general he was to oversee.¹² So, even if the Corinthians have countless guardians or

¹¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 679). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹² Fee, G. D. (1987). The First Epistle to the Corinthians (p. 185). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

instructors in Christ, they have only one father in the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) and that is Paul. With another explanatory γάρ, Paul explains how he became their father. The last part of this verse literally reads: *through the gospel I begot you*.

4:16 – Because Paul is their father in the gospel, he uses the inferential conjunction οὖν (oon) to make his next plea. Although this conjunction never appears at the beginning of a sentence in Greek, I believe the NKJV correctly translates it “therefore” and properly places it at the start of the verse. Once again, Paul uses the beautiful word παρακαλέω as he did in verse 13 to encourage them to action. Here he urges them to be imitators (μιμητής – meem-ay-tace) of him. This is not an arrogant appeal. Paul will clarify this in 11:1. “Like father, like children.”

4:17 – Because Paul is their father in the gospel and wants the Corinthians to imitate him, he sent Timothy from Ephesus to Corinth. Timothy is not included in the greetings of this letter and is probably traveling through Macedonia en route to Corinth with Erastus – Acts 19:21-22. Timothy is Paul’s beloved son in the Lord just as the Corinthians are his beloved children in Christ Jesus in verses 14-15. Timothy is also “faithful (πιστός – pees-tose) in the Lord” – a requirement of stewards in verse 2. There is no doubt in Paul’s mind that Timothy will conduct himself in both words and deeds as Paul would. Timothy will remind the Corinthians of what they already knew – Paul’s ways in Christ. These are the same things Paul teaches (διδάσκω – dee-doss’-ko) in every church.

4:18 – Some of the Corinthians are arrogant or puffed up (φυσιώ [foo-see-o’-o] – also in verse 6) thinking that Paul is afraid to come in person.

4:19 – But Paul says he will visit them soon – if the Lord wills (θέλω). (Paul will give his plans for visiting Corinth in 16:5-9.) He will find out not only how the arrogant persons are talking but also what power (δύναμις) they have. Keep in mind that some of the Corinthians didn’t like Paul’s way with words. When he comes, the arrogant may have words of human wisdom but Paul knows who has the power as he sets forth in the next verse – and previously in 2:4-5.

4:20 – With another explanatory γάρ, Paul explains that the kingdom of God does not exist by eloquence of words. It came into existence by the power of God (Mark 9:1). God’s kingdom was manifested with power as promised when it came on the apostles on the day of Pentecost – Acts 1:4-8 and 2:1-4.

4:21 – Paul closes this paragraph and this first part of the letter by putting the ball in the Corinthians’ court. Paul’s travel to Corinth depends on what the Lord wills (θέλω) or desires and now he asks the Corinthians what they want or desire (θέλω). He can come to them in two different ways as their father in the gospel: with a rod of correction (Proverbs 22:15) or with love in a spirit of gentleness (πραΰτης). This Greek word translated “gentleness” and sometimes “meekness” is used by Paul nine of its 11 times in the New Testament. It is a fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:23 but notice the identical phrase in Galatians 6:1. Paul’s question to the Corinthians is much like other parents to their children when they are misbehaving: Do you want me to come in there with my belt, switch, paddle, etc.? This ends the section begun in 1 Corinthians 1:10 on divisions and boasting.