

Week of July 8-14

A LETTER FROM DAD

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Corinthians 4

Paul wrote I Corinthians, in part, to respond to a negative report he had received from a family in the church (1:11). The report from Chloe's household (and probably from the church's delegation – 16:17) indicated that problems were many in the church: division, immorality, lawsuits, idolatry, pride, self-centeredness just to name a few. It would be understandable if the church's founder lambasted the church for its deplorable ways. Paul, however, chose to write with a different heart and attitude. He wrote as a spiritual father to his wayward children. *"I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel."* Such an attitude was characteristic of Paul towards the churches he founded. Consider what he told the Thessalonians (I Thess 2:11-12): *"For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."*

As a father, Paul first modeled proper behavior for his spiritual children: *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (I Cor 11:1) and "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice" (Philippians 4:9).* Paul understood how crucial it was to walk the talk. He couldn't "father" them properly if he told them to "do as I say but not as I do." Paul must have known the old adage that "we teach what we know but we reproduce who we are." He wanted to live in such a way that his "kids" could see Jesus in him.

He also took time to instruct them in righteousness: *"I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat" (I Cor 5:11)* as well as to answer their questions: *"Now for the matters you wrote about..." (7:1).* Paul knew the importance of faithfully teaching truth and providing godly answers to the questions of his spiritual children. Finally, he provided correction when they strayed off course. I Corinthians 1:10; 11:17ff. are just a couple of the many examples we find in Paul's letter.

Modeling, teaching, training, correcting, encouraging, comforting and urging are all part of the package when it comes to fathering a child. Paul understood this and that's why he made such a great spiritual father to his many "children." Whenever we read his letters, we benefit from "dad's" wisdom too!

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Instead of seeing I Corinthians simply as a sterile theological treatise, read it as a letter from father Paul to encourage your spiritual growth. In your prayer time today, pray for a receptive heart to receive I Corinthians with anticipation as a letter from dad.

Take-a-way: *I Corinthians...enjoy it as a letter from "dad."*