

1 Cor 4:3-21

[Pro 27:5-6 NKJV] 5 Open rebuke [is] better Than love carefully concealed.  
6 Faithful [are] the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy [are] deceitful.

It is this sentiment that frames Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

"The people who love you the most are the ones who don't flatter you. They're the ones who encourage you, yes, but also rebuke you in love, caring about you enough to point out your weaknesses. Treasure the friends that occasionally wound you. If you don't receive their correction correctly, they will stop giving it. And you will be the poorer." - Courson

-Workers in God's field take heed with how you build, your work will be tried as by fire

-Faithfulness is required of stewards

Continuing in that context we find Paul take a bold turn with his beloved church plant in Corinth. We see him bare his teeth a bit. Get a little riled up. We don't often like to imagine our church leaders in this way but he has great cause.

v.3-5 - a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. - the implication is that the Corinthian church had begun to denigrate Paul's service towards them in some fashion though we don't have all of the details. As they began to partition themselves off into factions no doubt

those people popped up in the body who, with a hyper critical eye, began to pick away at Paul's ministry and spread that poison to others.

[Act 20:29-31 NKJV] 29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

Be careful with your criticisms. Our words of "venting" can be the beginning of cancer in the body.

Paul, says this doesn't bother him. He wasn't overly concerned with their judgment because he understands the principle of telling a tree by the fruit that it bears - an idea he will develop here in the coming verses.

I do not even judge myself, for i know of nothing against myself - Paul operated with a clean conscience. \*example - keeping visitors\* ALSO, if one is striving to serve Jesus then more often then not their eyes are not enamored with their own work. They don't have time to primp in the mirror and say, "come everybody, see how good I look." No way, head's down, rowing away - that tenacious under rower.

I think we were made too pretty

We're caught up in a stare we cannot break

If we are the body  
How did pretty men get so ugly  
How'd he get all these spaces between each limb  
And if there is one thing bigger than my head  
That's the distance i've been misled

YET, I am not justified by this - Paul knew that simply because his conscience was clean did not mean he was justified. Justification comes by Jesus Christ. Ultimately Jesus Christ will judge all people. And, as mentioned in 3:13

[1Co 3:13-15 NKJV] 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on [it] endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart - take heed those so called ministers - your secret motives will be revealed. It's hard for us to see inside each other's hearts isn't it. We can only look at the fruit on your branches. BUT all things will be made plain and evident at Christ's judgment.

Then each one's praise will come from God - as opposed to man - don't labor for man's approval, don't become a hireling, bending to the whims of fickle people, be steady, be faithful, working as unto the Lord.

[Col 3:23-24 NKJV] 23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

v.6 - Paul uses himself as an example - with his illustrations of stewards, and under-rowers, builders, workers, etc. - this is a figurative way to illustrate the role of God's servants in His church. To your leaders (servants) resemble this or do they resemble Lord's or kings?

not to think beyond what is written - God's word is the standard for conduct, not our own vacillating opinions - ESPECIALLY when it comes to measuring God's servants.

that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other - instead of seeing somebody as a great orator, or really great at running logic, let's use God's words instead of getting all puffed up and arrogant over what is considered human qualification or credential.

v.7 - all of your qualifications - your very faith or from God alone - don't act like you earned it or like you didn't receive it. It's a gift - be a good steward of those gifts.

Similar thought: [Rom 12:3 NKJV] 3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think [of himself] more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

v.8 - not really though - this is Paul addressing their attitude regarding their position as a baby church. Your full! Rich! Reigning as kings! - not in a good way. They have become arrogant and forgotten that they are the product of Christ's grace and the tireless effort of God's workers. In fact, they were previously enemies of God, but were brought close by the grace of Christ poured out on them.

Don't forget your place - this is an all too common condition of churches.

To the Laodiceans: [Rev 3:17-21 NKJV] 17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked-- 18 "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, [that] the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21 "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

As many as I love....this is Christ's heart and Paul's heart

v.9 - the condition of apostles - suffering saints, joyfully, knowing they were appointed to death - and they all were killed with the exception of John.

to angels and men - the “whoa” moment! both angels and men look upon such devoted people with astonishment - what could move people to give up their lives? Self preservation is supposed to be the fiercest human instinct, the fight for staying alive, but faced with death these men laid theirs down. Why? Because they had seen the risen Lord - it’s all true! They became the keepers and progenitors of the singular way for humanity to escape death - eternal life with God by faith alone.

v.10-13 - their position painted them as fools for Christ’s sake in direct opposition to how the Corinthians viewed themselves. Bottom of the barrel in man’s eyes - it’s hard for us to identify with this. We probably live in a society that has more in common with Corinth than we would like to admit.

v.14 - not to shame you but to warn you - be careful! This is serious business. Complacency kills. Before they know it they have compromised on their faith and become fat, happy, complacent, lukewarm. No fruit on the branches but a really great facade - the story of the Pharisees which Paul knew well having been one.

v.15 - ten thousand instructors - aint that the truth - I have found that people feel supremely qualified to opine on matters of the bible, faith, no matter what. we have thousands of instructors walking around - saying, “what you need to do is...” Everybody wants to chip in on what your faith means.

[Mat 23:8-11 NKJV] 8 "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 "And do

not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

You want instruction? I'm happy to be here - but listen, I'm a servant, minding the flock of God as He allows...One is your Teacher, but you need to spend some time with Him!

Be careful with who you let bend your ear.

[2Pe 2:1-2 NKJV] 1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, [and] bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

\*you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you - Paul's heart as a father toward them, he's not saying call me father, he is behaving as a father toward them in love, and correction, with a big heart - I have begotten you - He probably remembers well their conversion moments.

v.16 - imitate me - big words - [1Co 11:1 NKJV] 1 Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ.

v.17 - Timothy's role - the good son, maybe that will rub off - also to remind them, to instruct them as a Pastor.

v.18-20 We are all in this family together - we are going to bump into each other. Paul was going to see them again and would see just what their spiritual condition was. In God's kingdom it's not about words but about power. Not just yapping, but walking and serving and getting low.

v.21 - what do you want - a rod or gentleness? Wait what? He can say that? Yeah he's like a father to them. His care for them is of eternal importance to him. Better a little correction and a secure soul than to watch our kids perish! \*the pool\* - I will tear you up.

We like to imagine this bold minister offering correction but not very often do we imagine ourselves in the chair of being corrected. We are always doing the correcting - we all too often fall into the "ten thousand instructors" category. Listen, one is your teacher, if you need some correction then bear it for your own good. Christ is ever faithful to His kids and his concern is not always our comfort but our well being. He's a good good father.