

Paul Reminds Them, and Us by Carl McMurray

1 Cor 4:16-17 ESV, *I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 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.*

Three things jump out at me when I read the above passage. Did you notice them as well?

First, Paul wanted the Corinthians to imitate him. In 1 Cor 11:1 he adds, *as I am of Jesus Christ*. That's a bold statement of one's understanding, obedience, and commitment. Paul wasn't being arrogant however. He said in another place that he buffeted his body daily lest he should be castaway. He also stated that he reached forward to what was ahead, he did not consider himself as having arrived yet. Paul is a great example of mankind that knows the pain of failure and sin and is humbled by it while at the same time appreciating the ever present possibility of forgiveness and eternal life granted to one by mercy and grace. No excuses, nor arrogance, but confidence in the promise of a savior who loves us enough to die for us. Can you encourage others to imitate your life in Christ?

Second, he says that imitating him and his way in Christ was the goal he set before them. It was important enough that he sent Timothy to them to remind them of this effort. That tells me that no matter how clearly a spiritual goal is communicated, and no matter how important that goal may be, and no matter whether I think I have it in mind or not, I can still use a reminder now and then. In this case it was in the person of Timothy. In my case it may come in the person of the Bible class teacher, the elders, the preacher, or the words of some other brother or sister. Although I hate to admit it and dislike receiving it, I still need rebuke, reproof, and exhortation; the very things the apostle told Timothy to be ready to give, 1 Tim 4:1-2. How well do you take reminding?

Third, and lastly, the apostle speaks of his consistency. The old law was cultural to the Jews, shaping it and working within it. The gospel is not. North or south, the same gospel of the kingdom needs to be taught in love. Whether it's the United States, Colombia, Africa, Ukraine, Philippines, Russia or other parts of the world, in every place and every church the same saving gospel of Jesus needs to be preached to seekers of God. Sometimes people will listen and sometimes they won't, but it needs to be preached in the same form and fashion and context that the apostles preached. When people finally stop listening then the "leavening principle" says that the Lord will come and judgment will be rendered. But until then we have the first century power of God given in clay vessels to be freely imbibed by a 21st century culture. Let's remember to keep teaching ourselves and others to imitate the apostles as they imitated Christ, everywhere and in every church.