

“Paul’s Sarcastic Rebuke”

1 Corinthians 4:8-21

Rev. Dustin Largent

March 15, 2026



SERMON TRANSCRIPT

A couple of weeks ago—I think it’d be three weeks ago now—we were in 1 Corinthians, and Paul was challenging the Corinthians on their boastful pride. I don’t know if anybody remembers that. They were boastful and prideful. Here is the problem with boastful pride: if you’re boastful and you’re prideful, you’re deceiving yourself. You’re lying to yourself. You think that you’re something that you’re not. You think you’re holier than you are. You think you’re better than you are. You think you’re more righteous than you are. You think you’re superior. When you are filled with boasting and pride, the problem is that it’s unrealistic. You’re boasting yourself and making yourself something that you really aren’t.

And so when people come out and they say, "Let’s have a whole pride month. Let’s have a whole month about pride, being prideful. Prideful about who we are," you’re deceiving yourself into thinking that you’re righteous or that somehow what you’re celebrating is good or right. That’s not good. And so the Corinthian church, that was them, and they needed to be knocked down a peg. I don’t know if you’ve ever been there where somebody needed to be knocked down a peg. I’ve had some experiences in my own life where somebody knocked me down a peg, or where I knocked somebody else down a peg because they needed to.

This is why Paul is doing this. I put this in your notes; you can follow along. It says: "Paul knows and demonstrates in his own life that humility is vital for every authentic Christian life." Let me say that again. Paul knows and demonstrates in his own life that humility is vital for every authentic Christian life. Just look at the great Christians, the great fathers of our faith, all these great men and women that made an impact on the world. If you look at Abraham, in **“Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27)**. Those are not the words of a prideful man.

Or if you go and look at Peter. Peter is called by Jesus and He says, "I’m going to make you fishers of men." But he’s called and he sees this miracle that Jesus does with all the fish, and he says, **“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8)**. If you look at Paul, Paul reminds the elders in Ephesus of how he lived when he was with them, and he says this: **“serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19)**. These are the examples of godly men. These godly men were all humble. They knew who they really were and they lived in humble reality.

It’s important that we understand as a church: if we’re going to grow and become what God wants us to be, it’s going to be because we recognize that we are sinful people. Just look at your day. I get up in the morning and I’m like, "Man, I have no reason to boast." Except for the fact that God is really, really nice to me and loves me. And I don’t even deserve that. I don’t have the power even to do any of the great things He wants me to do. But understanding that I don’t have that power, I’m not going to interfere. I say, "God, use me however You want." That’s what Paul did and that’s what Peter did.

To hopefully get them to realize how misguided they are in their pride, this chapter is hilarious. I don’t know if you’ve read this chapter. The end of this chapter is really funny because he is as sarcastic as you

can possibly get. You need to read it understanding that what he is saying is filled with sarcasm. Otherwise, you'll think that he's really saying the truth.

Everybody understand what sarcasm is? I'll give you an example. So I'm playing softball, right? And I get to the plate and the ball comes through and I just give it a real rip, and the ball dribbles down and goes three feet in front of me. And Rob yells out, "Pastor, you really got a hold of that one!" And I say, "You are incorrect. I actually only barely grazed the ball and that's why it was propelled only but a short distance." And he looks at Cody and Cody says, "This guy doesn't understand sarcasm." He doesn't understand how sarcasm works.

So let's just listen together. We're going to jump in here; we'll listen together to what he says in 1 Corinthians. We'll start in verse eight. Follow with me and listen to him. I'll try to say it with some sarcasm too so that you can catch it. He's talking to the Corinthians:

“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men... You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things” (1 Corinthians 4:8-13).

It's sarcastic, what he's doing. This is all sarcastic because what he's saying isn't who they really are. They aren't really kings. They haven't really arrived. They aren't really these holy people. Here is the problem: a lot of them have a problem with Paul. They say, "Oh, well, we're not about Paul. We're about Apollos." So if Paul and Apollos had different churches in town, they would have gotten up and left Paul's church and gone over to Apollos's church and said, "Well, you know what? We're more holy than Paul because we're going to follow the great Apollos over here."

"Why are you leaving our church?"

"Well, because with Apollos, we know better about God and about the church and how it should run. And Apollos, we think he's doing a better job. So we're going to pick up and leave and go over and be in Apollos's church because not only is Apollos superior, but because we follow him, we're superior to you as well. Not really what's going on—we're just superior to Paul."

We're going to judge what Paul says and say, "Well, Paul's wrong." And so watch what it says. It says here in verse 8: ***“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings!” (1 Corinthians 4:8).*** In other words, what he's saying is that your pride has you believing that you've already arrived spiritually. Like you're done with the sanctification process. There's no need for you to become more holy; you've already arrived. As a matter of fact, it says "kings." What he's saying is you think that you're in the millennial kingdom, that the sanctification process is over, and that you guys have just arrived and you're so holy and you're so righteous.

And what he does—here is the weird part for Paul—he says, isn't it kind of weird that you guys have arrived and you guys are so holy, yet the apostles, we have nothing? We're humiliated. We have no riches. We have no comfort. We have no power. We don't even have any respect.

And that seems to be all that you guys in Corinth care about: that everybody likes you, and everybody respects you, and everybody thinks that you get along with all the people of the world—even the people who worship idols and do all these detestable things. They all like you. That's more important to you. But we, the disciples, we're preaching the gospel and we're terrorized and we're being beaten and we're disrespected over and over. I mean, you Corinthians act like you are already reigning with Christ, and that's prideful. Like you finished this sanctification process.

And so Paul says, ***“And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!” (1 Corinthians 4:8)***. In other words, I wish that you were reigning with Christ, because if you were, that would mean that Christ had returned and now we are all reigning together. I wish that was the case, but we're not there yet, and you think we are.

Here is the problem. Here is the problem for you Corinthians, and any of you Christians anytime who think that somehow you have arrived, and you've got it all figured out, and you don't need to go to church anymore because—well, I've heard that one: "I've heard the Bible so many times, I already know the Bible." You hear that one? "Why would I go to church? All he does is talk about the Bible. Well, I've already read the Bible a couple of times, so why would I even go back? It doesn't make any sense. I already know it. I know it all." No, you don't. What are you doing?

And so here is what Paul does. He says you're delusional. This puffed-up belief about yourself isn't reality. What you need to do is I need to hold up the genuine article up against you. In my sarcasm, I'm going to hold up your life and the way you live, and then I'm going to hold up the apostles as the example of what it should be, and we'll just compare and see if you measure up.

The problem is that not only are the Corinthians prideful, but they're embarrassed of Paul's weakness and humility. We see that today, too. I want you to see this isn't irrelevant just because it happened a couple thousand years ago. This is relevant today. Why are they embarrassed about Paul? They're embarrassed because Paul looks weak. He's not really weak, but he looks weak. He doesn't have good positions. He's not like the head of the denomination. He's not highly respected in the community. When people talk about the people that have power and the people that are important, they don't talk about Paul.

You see, the Corinthians came from a culture that cares about power, riches, and respect—the kind of people who, if you don't do what they say, they bring the hammer down on you and force you to submit. That's not Paul, because Paul is following the example of Christ. And so they're embarrassed because they're still valuing the culture around them. They're valuing pride, power, strength, and wealth. They're valuing eloquent speakers like they had during that time. The Corinthians cannot reconcile Paul with a weak and suffering leader. Why would we want a leader that's going to lead us that nobody likes?

And so you go out into the church today, and you'll find 80%—it might be higher than that now—of the churches are based on leaders leading people to follow what the world does and putting a Christian stamp on it. Why? Because we want people to like our church. We want people to love us. And so the

Bible—what's taught in Scripture—well, that's not going to win us any people. It's not going to win us a lot of folks coming to God. If I start telling people that the way they're living and their lifestyle is sinful, I'm not going to be liked. Our church is going to be hated. People aren't going to come here in order to love us and join us.

But what we want is to lead from a position of power. So we'll get positions that are high, get on the city council, and position ourselves in a place where everybody will like us and respect us. It happens all the time. As a result, you've got so many churches now—and I don't like to dog on churches, because the churches that are preaching the gospel, I love them all. But when they've rejected the gospel in order to follow the world and lead everybody else to follow the world, they're no longer following God; they're following Satan. I hate to say it, but there are churches in our country that are "Christian" churches that are leading people toward hell.

Great question: how do you know the difference? Because the church that is leading people to God looks at this book, God's Word. If a church is teaching what is contrary to this over and over, they're leading you away from the Word of God. They're leading you away from God.

I'll give you an example, and this is a big one in our area. If you're in a church that is telling people that they should go get an abortion—they're promoting that—there are churches within our town in Geneseo that promote abortion. I know; I've talked to the pastors. That is completely contrary to Scripture. If you are in a church that says, "You know, not only do we think that homosexuality is not wrong, we don't think there should really be gender. Everything's gender-fluid. God didn't create them male and female. He created them—yeah, maybe they gave them certain parts, but it's all relative."

That is completely contrary to Scripture. Scripture is very clear in Genesis, right? That **"He created them male and female" (Genesis 5:2)**. They were created with different roles. He didn't create one better than the other; He didn't create one more important than the other. He created them with different roles and He said, "These are your lanes. This is where you live and I created you that way."

But the problem is a lot of churches—what has happened is the world has said, "Well, we think it's this way and what you're saying doesn't seem fair," and eventually we just kind of break down and break down until, "Okay, we'll just get rid of the whole gospel and we'll just say that this book is just about love, okay? And we can define love however we want." We want to love people. Jesus loved people. That's true; Jesus did love people. But I'll tell you: every time Jesus came to somebody in sin and He came to them in love, He would heal them of the destruction that was caused by their sin and then He would say, **"Go and sin no more" (John 8:11)**.

He didn't say, "You know what? Your sin got you here, now let's throw a party to celebrate it. Let's make a cake to celebrate the fact that this sin is now fine. We'll create a whole month to celebrate this sin." Jesus said, "Go and sin no more," because that sin is what's destroying you as people. It's the reason I had to die upon the cross.

And I got really, really off-topic. So here is what Paul does. Here is his mindset. If you go to 2 Corinthians, we get this picture of the Corinthian church's mindset. It says: **"For they say, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account'" (2 Corinthians 10:10)**. That's the way they viewed him. "Yeah, he might be an apostle, but he's weak. We're not following no

weak apostle. We're not following no weak leader, because real leaders are strong like our Corinthian leaders."

If you've got your notes, you can write this: "Paul sets the humble life of the apostles as the example of truly following Christ in contrast to the culturally influenced Christianity the Corinthians were exhibiting." Let me say that again. Paul sets the humble life of the apostles as the example of truly following Christ in contrast to this culturally influenced Christianity the Corinthians were exhibiting.

Look at verse 9. It goes on: **"For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men" (1 Corinthians 4:9)**. So he's saying that the disciples—us apostles who are really doing what God called us to—we are a spectacle. We're on display. It's like we're in the Coliseum and they've put us right in the middle to be eaten by lions. We are a spectacle, and not only are the non-Christians watching us, but angels are watching. Good angels and bad angels are watching us suffer for Christ, but it's all worth it because it's for Jesus.

The picture being laid out here is a parade. Whenever there would be a huge victory—like the Romans winning a victory—they would come back into town and there'd be this big parade. It's kind of like the entering of the city—well, like a Super Bowl parade, too—but when Jesus comes into town riding on a donkey, that's supposed to be a symbol of this: "I'm the big king and I win the battle." What do I do? I line up and I have this huge parade. I've got all of my soldiers. I'm going to be at the front of the parade, and people are throwing things at me and saying, "Yeah, you're fantastic!"

Behind me are my soldiers, and they're marching. Behind them, I've got all the booty that I've taken—gold and animals we've taken because we won. And at the very end, we've got the people we took prisoner. Those people are in chains and they're walking, and we're on our way to the Coliseum, because when we get to the Coliseum, we're going to watch them get eaten by lions. The picture is that of the apostles at the back being led to the slaughter. But you Corinthians? You're at the front. You're at the front claiming victory. That's the picture he's laying out. He's saying, "You've got to check yourself, man. Corinthians, check yourself."

Sunrise, we need to check ourselves against this apostolic example of humility. Verse 10 says: **"We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:10)**. We don't want to be fools, but we're willing to be fools to the world for the sake of Christ. They don't have to think you're wise for you to be wise in Christ. It says: **"We are weak, but you are strong" (1 Corinthians 4:10)**. In other words, be willing to be considered weak and recognize your weakness, and know that the power that affects things in your life comes from God, not from you.

It says: **"You are held in honor, but we in disrepute" (1 Corinthians 4:10)**. If I'm following Jesus, and if that burns my reputation, then flame on! That's what I say. I'd rather be disrespected by the world but honored by Christ, because this is only for a moment. Christ is forever. It says: **"To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless" (1 Corinthians 4:11)**. The Corinthian Christians wanted to avoid all of these unpleasanties at all costs.

"And we labor, working with our own hands" (1 Corinthians 4:12). See, the Greeks held that any kind of manual labor was only for slaves. They didn't want a person who was unwilling to get their hands dirty. He

goes on and says: **“When reviled, we bless” (1 Corinthians 4:12)**. How do most people handle it? When somebody reviles them, they revile them back. "They hate you? Well, I'm going to hate you back." No, it says here, "When reviled, I bless." **“When persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat” (1 Corinthians 4:12-13)**.

The Corinthians saw a leader who didn't fight back as a wimp. They looked at Paul, and Paul's not fighting back, and they say, "Well, we can't follow this guy. He's a weenie." He says we are **“the scum of the world, the refuse of all things” (1 Corinthians 4:13)**. That word in the Greek means "offscouring." You ever have a scouring pad? You take that thing—it's rough on one side—and you scour the tub. It was nice and green before you got in there. Then after a while, you look at it and it's nasty stuff. The offscouring is the junk on the scouring pad after it's been used. He's saying, "We're garbage. That's how people see us."

And this is convicting. I'll just be honest: as I read through this, it's really convicting. I want to be popular. I want people to like me. As a general rule, I want people to say, "Oh, that guy is an okay guy. He's a decent guy." I don't want people to say, "Stay away from him." I want people in Atkinson and Geneseo to like me. When people disrespect me or say bad things about me, that hurts. It's going to hurt you. When we do things as a church and then people criticize me on the outside for it, that hurts me. But it doesn't mean we stop.

I don't like being the butt of jokes or the object of slanderous lies, but we cannot compromise the truth of God in order to be liked and accepted by the world. Our church cannot compromise the truth of God's Word in order to get people to like us and raise attendance. And I'll tell you something that's true: the churches that are dwindling in numbers around the country are the ones that are not following the gospel of Christ. If you go to the liberal churches, people are running away from them. They're no different than going to a country club or being part of a political party. They're not preaching the gospel. They're not preaching about Jesus. So what good is it? I can endorse sin outside of the church—that's what I did before. Why do I need a church to help me endorse what is sinful?

So what your church teaches better be counter-cultural. It better oppose murder. It better oppose sexual sin. It better oppose pride. It better value humanity. It better value humility. And it better trust God's Word above man's wisdom. Verse 14 goes on: **“I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children” (1 Corinthians 4:14)**. Well, I'll take your word for it, Paul, but I think there's a little bit of shaming going on here! "I didn't write this to make you ashamed, but if that happens, it's okay." But look at how he corrects them. Instead of just ridiculing them with sarcasm, he comes back and says, "You're my children. I love you." When we correct somebody, it's important that it comes from a place of love.

“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. I urge you, then, be imitators of me” (1 Corinthians 4:15-16). You see, if you're going to follow somebody, they need to be someone willing to do what they say they're going to do. That's not arrogant. That's Paul saying, "Listen, I am your father." As a dad, you don't say, "I'm going to do whatever I want, but you do differently than me." No, I'm going to do what I can to be the kind of man I want you to grow up to be. I want my son to want to be like me.

He says you have a lot of people you would call "guides"—or babysitters. Apollos is a babysitter. Peter is a babysitter. A special speaker comes in? That's a babysitter. But they're not your dad. The word used here is *paidagogos*. This was a slave who supervised a child; like a nanny. He doesn't teach the kids anything, but he takes them to school. If the kid acts up, he slips him around a little bit and says, "Hey, stop that! Your dad wouldn't like that. Why did you get an F? Stop messing with your sister." He disciplines, but he's not the parent.

Paul is saying, "You have a lot of people like that, but they're not your dad. I am. I am the one who spiritually brought you into this world. I brought the gospel to you." When the babysitter can't figure out what to do because you're acting a fool and saying, "I can't control your kids," who do they go to? They go to Dad. And Dad says, "Not anymore."

Paul says, "You only have one dad and that's me." Watch how he says this: ***"That is why I sent 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" (1 Corinthians 4:17)***. Timothy is a babysitter Paul sent to watch his spiritual kids in Corinth. But verse 18 says: ***"Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you" (1 Corinthians 4:18)***. You see the picture? The Corinthians have a babysitter with them, so they just do whatever they want. They're tearing up the house, staying up until one in the morning, not doing what they ought to do. They think they can act a fool because Dad is never coming home.

"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. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?" (1 Corinthians 4:19-21). Yeah, you talk a big game when the babysitter is there and I'm not. Well, talk is cheap. When Dad comes home, he's going to come with more than just talk; he's going to come with power.

He's saying, "I'm coming back to Corinth, even if you don't think I am. And you're not acting like Christians at all." You can just hear Paul talking to the kids on the phone: "I'm coming back. Now, when I get back, it can go one of two ways. I can come back with a rod, ready to whoop, or I can come back gentle. It depends on how things go between now and then. If you're going to humble yourself and realize you don't have it all figured out, and you fall back in line with what God's Word says, I'll come back gentle. But if not—and I get there and you're hanging off the ceiling and still doing all this sinful stuff—watch out. I'm not playing."

Humble yourself. I'm giving you a choice. Humble yourself and I'll treat you gently, or keep talking, and it's not going to be pleasant. I ask this—and this is the main point: Where have we allowed cultural pressure to keep us from faithful obedience to Christ? Where have you, as an individual, allowed culture to morph what you do in a way that makes you disobey God? Has culture caused us to not be as bold because we're afraid of what people say? Has it caused us to lay off on things we know are sinful because we want to be liked? Has the desire for money and security kept us from living a life of faith because we feel we don't need it anymore?

The point is this: to grow spiritually, we've got to humble ourselves and learn from His Word. Are we ready to do that? This is the end of this intro section. Next week, we get into some messed up stuff—a guy having sex with his father's wife. Things get real. And if you're the kind of church that thinks that's fine, you

think sin is fine. The way we get away from that is by falling in line with the Word of God and keeping each other accountable regardless of the cost.

God, I thank You for Your Word. I thank You for Paul and his sarcasm. When we say we want to follow You, we aren't being sarcastic at all; we say it from the bottom of our hearts. We don't want to be a church driven by culture; we want to be Christians driven by the Word of God and the Spirit of God within us.

God, give us boldness. Give us the ability to hear Your Word. Help us make hard choices and do what is right when it's easier to do what's wrong. I pray that as we do this, You would glorify Yourself. May people say, "God gets the glory from those people; they are the genuine article." Do this in our midst. In Jesus' name, Amen. Thank you so much. We'll see you all back here next week.