

The Apostle Paul's Guide



to Helping Carnal
Christians Mature

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As always, if we can help you in any way, please contact the church here at
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to be "sold" for any price (2 Corinthians 2:17, Matthew 10:8).

No one would argue the "hopelessness" of it. Trying to bring a group like those folks from Corinth to maturity in Christ? Not possible. That immoral city just down the road from Athens is world-renowned for its drunken depravity. And the "church" there? Well...there have been many magnificent successes,¹ but there is still so much junk still lurking in the background. What to do? How would Paul respond to the news from Chloe that things weren't well in the church in Corinth?

How would you respond to a brother or sister who has been a Christian for maybe a couple of years—and still has a problem with vices and self-indulgence? What about brothers who are bickering with their brothers and sisters, and, believe it or not, taking them to court? What are we to think of those who are still so callous to sexual immorality that they decide to ignore it rather than oppose it? How would you respond to a brother or sister like that? Write them off? Blow them away? Back off and "not waste your time"?

Paul, no doubt, had to come to grips with some of these same possibilities.

It is worth paying very close attention to the fact that whatever it was Paul did... worked! Within six to nine months after he addressed the problem, he could write to the Corinthians and say, "At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter," "you were all obedient," "I have boasted about you, and you have not embarrassed me," and "I am glad that I can have complete confidence in you" (2Cor.7:11-16). That is pretty phenomenal success!

¹ 1Cor.6:9-11

Let's consider this idea of successfully making disciples of Jesus men and women who are still living weak, and even ungodly lives. Yet, while you read and pray through these thoughts from the life of the apostle Paul, bear in mind that the secret of Paul's success was not in "what he did" as much as in "who he was." Thus, you will find that many of the changes may need to be wrought in your own life if you are to be a suitable vessel for God to work through to bring about a miracle in someone else's life.

There is no formula, only God's ability to create out of nothing, to bring life from death. Many times God will let the one that you are praying for and helping to "teach to obey" Christ's commands, your "Lazarus," stay in the stench of death for a long time—just to clearly demonstrate man's inability to raise anyone from the grave. God delights to glorify His name by rolling back the stone in front of our stained-glass mausoleums and accomplishing the impossible in our lives. There is no magic formula, only the I AM. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to make your heart a means of transportation for the Eternal God in mercy and power.

So, what is the Apostle Paul's heart in dealing with still-worldly brothers and sisters?

Get Out The Big Guns, Right? Nuke Them!

It is definitely true that Paul dealt severely with "...anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater (job, possession, recreation or family worshiper) or a slanderer ("doing God a favor" by constant criticism and complaining), a drunkard or a swindler" (1Cor.5:11). He had such courage and conviction of God's Truth that he could state very boldly "...for your meetings do more harm than good." (1Cor.11:17) And "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly—mere infants in Christ" (1Cor.3:1). He had the courage to take a stand and speak out against disobedience and perpetual babyhood. Your usefulness to God will be determined by whether or not you too are willing to pay the price of stepping forward and not idly letting men and women defame the name of the Lord of Glory, carelessly ignoring His Holiness and presuming upon His grace. Like Paul, our brother, "a man like us," we must dare to get involved.

Now before we jump headlong into "Holy Spiriting ("exhorting," "warning," "admonishing") one another daily so that none are hardened by sin's deceitfulness" (Heb.3:13, 12:15), we must carefully examine the heart that Paul had for his family in Corinth. That, as it turns out, is by far the most important factor in growing others up into the Head.

Remember, "you who are spiritual should restore one caught in a sin gently" (Gal.6:1). "Spiritual" does not mean that you are smart enough to lead a Bible study, or that men made you a deacon, or that you brought twelve people to Christ last year, or that you preach at seminars (or on the street) "real good." It means that you have progressed far along the untrampled path of being "conformed to the family likeness of the Son" (Rom.8:29; 1Cor.2:16). You are very much like Jesus in personality, thought life, patience, prayer life, servanthood to the least of your brothers and sisters, and attitude towards material things. "This is how we know we are in Him: Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did" (1John 2:5-6).

The Holy Spirit says: "You who are spiritual (filled with the Spirit of Jesus) should restore such a one." The point is not that you must be perfect in order to help someone mature in Jesus. It is just that it is essential to first examine your own heart, "get the log out of your own eye" and make certain that you have a heart that God can use to perform miracles through.

The Heart of One Who Helps Make Disciples

Here is the heart of Jesus in a human named Paul—a heart that God could use to do the impossible:

1. "So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you." (2Cor.2:1-4)

“Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye and went on to Macedonia.”

(2Cor.2:12-13)

“For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within. But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your affection, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever. Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while.”

(2Cor.7:5-8)

Notice this about a man who God can use to transform not merely external actions, but hearts—yes, it was necessary to confront them, but he hated it! It did not make his day and give him an ego trip. Yes, he did rebuke them soundly. And to read only those parts of his letter, we might likely judge him harsh and unloving. But the fact is, that to catch your children playing in the freeway without getting the belt out is proof that you don't love them (Heb.12:5-11). Nevertheless, a loving parent (or under-shepherd in Jesus, or fellow-christian) will hate every minute of the issue of discipline. They would never dream of bragging about how they did such a marvelous job challenging this rebellious one. It will likely remain their secret. That's love (1Cor.13:4-7).

Paul was virtually devastated by this encounter with the Corinthians, even though they seemed well deserving of harsh rebuke. Though they must do it to stay in Fellowship with God and the saints (1John 1:3-7), a man or woman of God will hate the idea of laying a charge down on the doorstep of a fellow pilgrim—regardless of how much they may seem to need it. Paul said that the writing of the letter was extremely “agonizing” to him. It caused him “great distress” and he literally wept “many tears” as he tried to pen this letter of rebuke and instruction.

Paul, if you recall, was given an “open door” to preach the gospel in Troas (2Cor.2:12). Yet, he was so distraught by his fear that the family

in Corinth would reject his word from the Lord, his “oracle of God,” in his letter (1 Peter 4:11), that he finally turned his back on the “open door” to go find Titus to see how his rebuke had been received. He had “no peace of mind,” “no rest,” “conflicts on the outside, fears within,” and even regretted having issued the rebuke. All of this pain was not diminished until, at long last, Titus reported to Paul that they still loved him and had “ardent concern” for him. Best of all, the great sorrow that his rebuke brought to the Christians in Corinth led them to a wonderful repentance and “innocence at every point” within six to nine months after he had written them concerning their worldliness.

Here's the point: Of course, we have no right to be passive while others are jeopardizing their relationships with God and selling their Destiny in Him. Yet, if we can casually demolish someone, even concerning the most obvious sins, without weeping and anguishing, we're not fit to say a word to them. Test your heart carefully. If you don't have at least a desire to have compassion, then you do not have God's permission to speak, whether you are “right” or not. “If I can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not unconditional love, I am nothing” (1Cor.13:2). Amen?!

2. “I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.”

(2Cor.1:23)

“So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you.”

(2Cor.2:1)

Paul, and every man or woman that God will work through, knows when to be wise and not press. Paul knew that there was much to do in this wicked city and in this worldly, immoral group of Christians². He also knew when to bite his tongue. There came a point where Paul knew that he must not “exasperate his children.” He elected to not return and make “another painful visit” to the church there, even though, at that time, he still had no report that they had repented of the sinful areas that they were engrossed in.

The moral of the story is that there may well be things that we can say, observations that we can make about another brother or sister—true things, accurate things—and, yet, it might actually be sinful to say one

word to them about it. Paul knew, as Jesus did, as we must learn, that when we are one with the Father through Jesus, we will not speak one word on our own. Ever. (John 14:10-11, 24; 8:28-29; 17:21; Gal.2:20; Eph.6:19-20; Col.1:9; 1Peter 4:11) All things that are true are not necessarily right or good to be addressed at that moment in time. Resign yourself to God that you are willing to do whatever He wants: to lovingly address the situation now, or bit by bit over six months, or that you are willing to never confront it at all and simply pray continually that God will use some means to help them leave that sin. You are not God's policeman. Our God is like any good Father—He'll not have others randomly disciplining His children (Psa.50:21, Oba.1:12). There is a time to rebuke—possibly in front of all of the brothers (Gal.2:11-14; 1Tim.5:20; Acts 5:1-11). There is also a time to quietly wash the feet of even a known thief like Judas, as Jesus did, letting him continue as treasurer until the last minute. While remaining true to God's Word and your commitment to representing God's everlasting government, please be kind and tolerant and generous (Rom. 2:4; 2Tim.2:25-26; 1Thes.5:14; Luke 6:37-38). Learn, as Paul, to bite your tongue at times.

3. "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm." (2Cor. 1:24)
"Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity." 1Cor. 16:12)

Watch this mighty miracle-working Apostle who had seen Christ and, then, several years later, had been transported to a part of heaven

² NOTE: Luke 14:33; Luke 9:57-62; Matt. 10:32-39; Acts 3:22-23 are not contradicted by 1 Cor. 3:1. The Corinthians' response to truth is the key. See 2Cor. 7:8-16. This is a true disciple's response to convicting truth—not argument, three more years of Greek word studies, and a yawn. Please read these verses carefully and you will discover that it is absolutely impossible that one who calls himself/herself a Christian could remain unchanged when challenged with the Word of God.

itself (Acts 9; 22; 26; 1Cor.15:8; 2Cor.12:2). Even the Apostle Paul, himself, refused to put words in anyone's mouth, make people conform or do things just the way he wanted. Certainly God's principles were never compromised (Gal.2: 14; Titus 3:10; 1Cor.5:9-13), yet, the mechanics and "how to's" were not dictated. This is illustrated above by Apollos' refusal of Paul's strong directions (1Cor. 16:12).

Also consider the strong warning and pleadings of an acknowledged prophet of God named Agabus, along with a doctor (who penned a Gospel) named Luke—that were refused by Paul (Acts 21:10-15).

The principle is, of course, that we are not to dictate man-made rules about any spiritual area ("dating," shorts, Bible study quotas, etc.)—no matter how logical they might be. Jesus, Himself, would not be an "arbiter" of externals (Luke 12:14). As Paul said: Rules "lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence," they bring "death," and they have no ability to change a person's heart, but only to modify their actions to conform to an accepted norm (Col.2:23; 2Cor.3:6).

Because God is the judge of the intentions of the heart, even if the actions are fine (Mat.5:27-28), it is senseless to focus on behavior modification. Paul cried out with anguish to the Christians in Galatia: "Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?" (Gal.3:3).

Paul reminded the Corinthians very clearly that he had not and would not "lord it over" their faith, but rather, he had offered himself as a tool for them to enjoy and utilize in their pursuit of a deeper faith in Christ and more full walk in Him (2Cor.1:24). Certainly "authority" is not an unbiblical idea by any stretch of the imagination (Heb.13:17,7; 1Cor.16:15-16; 2Cor. 13:10; 1Thes.5:12-13), but the objective of anyone investing in the lives of others spiritually is to be a tool for them to find their own faith, not a hammer to make them after one's own kind, as the Pharisees did (Mt.23:15). By all means, give all a crystal-clear example that is worth emulating (1Thes.1:6; 2:10,14; 1Cor.11:1; Phil.3:17, 4:9; 1Tim.4:11-16), but remember the words of Jesus, "You are not to allow yourself to be called teacher, father ("discipler"?, etc.) for you have ONE TEACHER—AND YOU ARE ALL BROTHERS" (Mt.23:5-12).

4. “I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.”
(2Cor.2:3-4)

“Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. I do not say this to condemn you; I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged, in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds.”
(2Cor.7:2-4)

“I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well. ...I am glad I can have complete confidence in you.”
(2Cor.7:14, 16)

Can you imagine having “complete confidence,” “great pride,” “great encouragement” and “refreshment” in a man who gets drunk during the Lord’s supper and wallows in selfishness, boasting and materialism? How would you feel about a person like that? What about a congregation that seems to be characterized by a wonderful spirituality like that? Would you write them off? Would you “shake the dust off your feet”?

Or, would you be so totally confident in them as to turn around and brag about them to others even before you had heard whether or not they had given those things up? (2Cor.7:14-16). If you have the heart of Paul, who often had the heart of Christ, you will not criticize and complain about others’ shortcomings—but will actually BRAG about your family to others and be wholly confident in their future. God does good work! How are you doing? Will others see this quality in you? I have “complete confidence” that they will!

5. “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”
(2 Cor. 1:21-22)

“He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (1Cor. 1:8)

Here was a guy, named Paul, who had a lawyer’s education and background, knew the scriptures backwards and forwards, had received personal instruction from the Resurrected Jesus, participated in numerous miracles, and brought thousands of men and women to Christ (Phil.3:5, Acts 26:24; 23:6, Gal. 1:14; Rom.15:18-19; Acts 20:35). All of that, and yet he quickly conceded that he was personally unable to accomplish anything in anyone’s life.

Only God can create and cleanse and empower. Paul counted on God to turn his words of stone into the bread of life for his brothers and sisters. Paul knew that only Christ Himself could really reveal the Father and that only the same God who had made him strong could make them strong (Mt.11:24, 27; Phil.3:15, 2Tim.2:7; Col.1:9-11; Eph.1:17-19; 3:16-19; Acts 20:30-32; 1 John 5:20). He entrusted his brothers and sisters entirely to the One who could “keep them strong to the end” and “complete that which He had begun in them” (Heb.12:2, 11; 13:20; 1Thes.5:23-24; 2Thes.3:3; John 3:21). Paul’s job was to faithfully plant seeds and water and certainly do all that he could do to lay down his life for them (1Thes.2:8), yet, he humbly recognized that his theology, argument, persuasion or rhetoric could do nothing to transform or mature a soul (John 1:1-12; Rom.12:3). All he could do was bring the seed of truth in the vessel of a broken and pure life (2Cor.4:6-7; 2 Tim.2:20-21) and pray that the Lord of the Harvest would give increase in open hearts.

As for you and I? How could it be any different? Let us be faithful, faith-filled, courageous, relentless, and pure as the precious lamb—and prayerfully lay our burdens for others at the feet of the “Great Shepherd of the sheep.” He will “equip them with everything good for doing His will and work in them what is pleasing to Him” (Heb.13:20-21).

6. “Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.”
(1Cor.4:2)

“We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are

brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.” (1Cor.4:10-13)

“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?”
(2Cor.2: 15-16)

There is no question that this courageous involvement in other’s lives, spiritually, is very expensive. There is no question whatsoever that the price of being useful to our God before He returns may leave us brutally treated, cursed, slandered or even hungry and thirsty (Luke 6:24-26). There is no question that if we are “fools for Christ” rather than staunch or “preppy” or a franchise of religious machinery... that we will pay a high price.

Is it acceptable in practical terms in your life that you willingly “make yourself nothing,” “the scum of the earth”? If you dare to get involved in the impartation and serving others into the life and truths of God, you will certainly be a sweet aroma to those with good hearts. It is also true, if you’re really involved in God’s Business of changing lives and drawing them near to Him, then you will be the stench of death to those with unrepentant hearts. And that will cost you, as it did the Son of Man. As the mighty apostle, himself, exclaimed, “Who is equal to such a task?!” He did not, and we do not, take it lightly.

It is an awesome thing to be involved in warfare with the “powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (2Cor.10:3-4; Eph.6:10-12).

Now honestly, when you read the title of this booklet, you had in mind that you would find a formula that would make possible this impossible task of maturing carnal Christians to Christ. Right? My prayer is that you will fully recognize that the “secret” lies in one thing alone: That your heart is hidden in Christ and that you are willing to die even for “the least of these”—“while they are yet sinners.” Your

heart is as Jesus’: to purchase men for God, even with your own life, if necessary. There is the secret. Make that your full focus. Crave the God of the Word, the “Alive and active” Word of God, and the People of God, and you will have no more problem than Paul did in maturing carnal Christians. Prepare your heart.

As you forge ahead in laying down your life for your Lord and your brothers and sisters, risk the impossible and unpopular and let it be said of you in heaven, as it was of another mere man: (Acts 13:36)...

“THIS ONE SERVED THE PURPOSE OF GOD IN HIS OWN GENERATION.”

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