

Comments Regarding Lenski's Presentation of 1 Corinthians 4:21

This is not a rebuttal to Lenski's remarks concerning apostle Paul's dilemma. This is framed, rather, with an observation of the circumstances that compelled Paul to offer the Corinthians the choice between the rod or love in the spirit of meekness:

“What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and *in the spirit of meekness?*” (1 Corinthians 4:21)

Interestingly, I was just discussing this with one of the young men in our congregation two days ago. Paul's option to use “the rod” is both legitimate and sanctioned by the Word of God. Its use is warranted, especially when nothing else has worked, especially for our children.

Proverbs 13:24 tells us that “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”

Scripture reinforces our understanding that if we don't make necessary corrections that we are actually neglecting what's needful.

Why would Paul even consider the use of the rod? To fully understand why, one would need to consider the original circumstance of what Paul was addressing. This is revealed by the very next scripture following 1 Corinthians 4:21:

1 Corinthians 5:1 “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.
2) And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.”

The critical nature of the problem in the Corinthian church warranted and possibly even demanded the use of the rod. But Paul's merciful nature was still opting for a less painful solution. Paul might be paraphrased this way, “Do you want me to correct you harshly or gently?” Apparently asked rhetorically, the answer preferred by any of us should be obvious.

Any parent—any pastor that enjoys administering the rod is a sadist. Administering the rod for every single minor infraction is cruel. We shouldn't want to come to that end every time there's a need for discipline. But sadly, the fact remains that there are times when we can't escape the duty that binds us to the rod's administration.

The caution that I am considering here is my absolute need for God's guidance for discretion and sound judgment. Is the rod being administered indiscriminately or judiciously? Does the crime merit the punishment? It seems as if Paul is trying to soften the pain of correction in 1 Corinthians 4:21 and offer the pending rod as an incentive to do better. Can I be as gracious as Paul? It's worth considering.

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June 14, 2021