

"How to Get to the Cross Centered Life" 1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Introduction

- I don't know about you but I think last week may have been a watershed moment for this congregation. For those of you who weren't hear last week we talked about how, generally speaking, our lives as Christians look no different in appearance than people who live their lives without Christ. Statistic after statistic after statistic shows that Christians are living just like the rest of the world. Our lives as Christians should look different than they look and yet they don't. We've lost our distinctiveness. It was the Corinthian problem. And it's our problem. So in the passage we looked at last week we talked about how Paul urged the Corinthian church to imitate him, to live differently, to live like he did. And the kind of life Paul lived, in fact, the kind of life God expects all Christians to live is the life of the cross. That's what makes us different. God expects us to die to self in every way and live for him—that's cross centered living.
- And when Paul described his circumstances—*to this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world*—he wasn't prescribing of how every Christian must live—every Christian must do these things be hungry and thirsty and homeless and brutally treated. But he was describing, given his circumstances and his calling, the fruit of applying the cross to his life. For Paul, to live like Christ, to pick up his cross and follow in Jesus' footsteps, meant hardship and trial. When you die to self there's going to be hardship and trial but the specifics of that cross centered life will be different for each person. We each have our own cross to bear.
- The key question for us this week is pretty simple. We have a credibility gap between where we need to be and where we are. The key question is how do we get from point A to point B? If last week you were convicted that your life is not different enough, that you're too much like the world, then how do you move from where you are at to where you need to be?

Transition

As I've thought and prayed about this question all week, as I've reexamined my own life in light of last week's message, and as I've studied the verses for this week, I know how we can get from point A to point B. Accountability. I think one of the major causes of Christians living like the rest of the world is the widespread loss of accountability.

Proposition

- **Lack of accountability keeps us from living cross centered lives**
- Just think about your own life for a second. Who in your life is keeping you accountable? Who in your life do you have to tell you when your spending priorities are out of whack? Who in your life do you have to tell you when you're being too selfish with your time? Who in your life is able to speak those hard, truthful, honest words each of us needs to hear in order to stay on the straight and narrow? Who knows you well enough to be able to even

Speak like that? Do you have anyone in your life who loves you enough to rebuke you? *Better is open rebuke than hidden love, right?* Proverbs 27:5. Who do you have in your life who will point blank tell you when your actions or your behaviors or your attitudes are un-Christ like? I can say with almost 100% certainty, if you don't have this kind of person in your life, you can't, you won't, you aren't living a cross centered life. Without accountability, your life will look just like the rest of the world. **Lack of accountability keeps us from living cross centered lives.**

- In 2001 Minnesota Vikings offensive lineman Korey Stringer died from a heatstroke during football conditioning drills in 108 degree heat. Four years later NFL teams began offering their players radio pills to swallow. Teams pay between \$30 and \$40 apiece for the pills, which last 24 to 36 hours. A crystal sensor in each pill has a frequency geared to the player's body temperature. When the player's body temperature rises, so does the frequency. A trainer punches in a player's jersey number and waves a digital device in front of him to determine if the player is getting too hot and needs intervention.
- Like athletes who don't know they have overextended themselves and need intervention, Christians who live life with no accountability will stray from God and be oblivious to their spiritual condition.¹ Accountability is the intervening scan before it's too late. If we're serious about living cross centered lives, if we want to regain our distinctiveness, we need others to keep us accountable. We've got to take the pill of accountability.

Transition

Are you ready to look at the text? I want you to see from scripture how important accountability is to cross centered living. Turn to 1 Corinthians 4:14-21. In this passage there are...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two components to biblical accountability**

Transition

Paul describes his cross centered life, he says imitate me and then he models for the Corinthians the kind of accountability needed to get them where he wants them. Here are the two components in case you're taking notes. Component number one. From **verses 14-17**. **In order for accountability to work someone in your life must have the freedom to admonish you.** Component number two. From **verses 18-21**. **Accountability will only work if you respond with a teachable spirit.** If we're serious about imitating the way of the cross then we've got to be accountable. Listen again to verses 14-17. *I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*

Main Points

¹ Jim Corbett, "Core Matter," USA Today.com (8-10-05); submitted by Rick Kauffman, McDonald, Pennsylvania.

- One of the former presidents of the EFCA, [Paul Cedar](#), was quoted as saying his most painful experiences in life were when he had a problem and no one loved him enough to tell him about it.² How I wish we could become the kind of church that's built up enough relational trust with one another that we'd be able to admonish one another in love. Component one. **In order for accountability to work someone in your life must have the freedom to admonish you.** And that's exactly what Paul does here with the Corinthians. He loves the Corinthians enough, his *dear children* he calls them, to admonish them. Their way of life doesn't match the way of the cross and so he admonishes them. The NIV says *warn* but a better translation is admonish. To admonish someone means to have a corrective influence on them.³ He corrects them. He's not trying to *shame them*, verse 14, but hold them accountable for their actions.
- And the reason Paul takes this attitude toward them, this attitude of a loving, correcting father, is because he has a right to do so. He's their spiritual *father through the gospel*. He has a right to speak truth into their lives because he birthed them into existence through his ministry. Inherent in the father child relationship is the right to admonish and discipline if necessary. They should heed his injunctions. They should be accountable to him. Sometimes parents need to discipline their kids for their own good.⁴ And that's what Paul does here.
- To make his point Paul uses the illustration of a guardian. That word *guardian* in [verse 15](#) is the word *paidagwov*". From it we get our word pedagogy—to teach. The *paidagwov*", as [Gordon Fee](#) explains, "was a slave, a personal attendant who accompanied a boy, took him to school and home again, heard him recite his 'lines', taught him good manners and generally looked after him; he was entitled to respect and normally received it. But there was no comparison between his relation to the boy and that of the boy's father."⁵ The Corinthians had a myriad of guardians but only one father. And given the choice of who to listen to, either Paul or the guardians, Paul reminds them that he is their father. "Listen to me," he says. "Imitate me," he says. He has more of a stake in their wellbeing than a *paidagwov*", than a mere guardian.
- So he sends Timothy, [verse 17](#). Paul can't go himself. He's stuck in Ephesus. So he sends his apprentice Timothy, his faithful son. And Timothy's job is to lay out doctrine, right?⁶ No. Timothy's job is to carry out the admonishment by *reminding the Corinthians of Paul's way of life in Christ Jesus*. Timothy's job is to hold the Corinthians accountable so that they live out the way of the cross. How do you get from point A to point B? Accountability. Why do our lives look just like the rest of the world? **Lack of accountability keeps us from living cross centered lives.**
- Author [Donald Miller](#) in his book [To Own a Dragon](#) tells the story of a friend who loved him enough to keep him accountable. He writes, "I lived for a time with my friend and mentor [John MacMurray](#), where the first rule is to always tell the truth. John and I were sitting in the family room one night when he asked about my new cell phone. 'I got it free,' I told him. 'How did you get it for free?' he asked. 'Well, my other one broke, so I took it in to see if

² Paul Cedar, pastor, *Leadership*, Vol. 5, no. 3.

³ Fee, p. 184.

⁴ Thisleton, p. 369.

⁵ Constable, p. 41-42 quoting Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*. New Century Bible series. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, Oliphants, 1971, p. 51.

⁶ Carson, p. 110.

they could replace it. They had this new computer system at the store and they didn't have their records. They didn't know whether mine was still under warranty. It wasn't, I knew, because it was more than a year old. The guy asked me about it, and I told him I didn't know, but it was right around a year. Just a white lie, you know. Anyway, the phone was so messed up they replaced it with a newer model. So, I got a free phone.'

- 'Did you ever see that movie *The Family Man* with [Nicolas Cage](#)?' John asked. 'There's this scene where Nicolas Cage walks into a store to get a cup of coffee. And [Don Cheadle](#) plays the guy working at the counter. There's a girl in line before Nicolas Cage, and she's buying something for 99 cents, and she hands Cheadle a dollar. Cheadle takes nine dollars out of the till and counts it out, giving her way too much change. She sees that he is handing her way too much money, yet she picks it up and puts it in her pocket without saying a word. As she is walking out the door, Cheadle stops her to give her another chance. He asks her if there is anything else she needs. She shakes her head no and walks out.'
- 'I see what you're getting at, John,' I say. 'Let me finish,' he says. 'So Cheadle looks over at Nicolas Cage, and he says, 'Did you see that? She was willing to sell her character for nine dollars. Nine dollars!''
- After a little while, I spoke up. 'Do you think that is what I am doing with the phone? Do you think I am selling my character?' And to be honest, I said this with a smirk. 'I do,' John said. 'The Bible talks about having a calloused heart. That's when sin, after a period of time, has so deceived us we no longer care whether our thoughts and actions are right or wrong. Our hearts will go there easily, and often over what looks like little things—little white lies. All I am saying to you, as your friend, is, watch for this kind of thing.' Miller writes, 'I went back to the store the next day. It cost me more than nine dollars, but I got my character back.'
- If we're serious about living cross centered lives, where we die to self and live for the glory of God, each of us needs a Timothy-like person, who will speak truth into our lives, who will rebuke us when necessary, who will admonish us, who will remind us of the way of life in Christ Jesus.
- Frankly, I don't see how that will happen unless we are all involved in some kind of smaller group where trust can be built, where we can radically commit to the welfare of each other, and where we can hold each other accountable. If we're serious about living the way of the cross and if accountability is part of that then we're going to have to change the way we do church in order to make it happen. It won't happen naturally. Early Methodism had the "class meeting" where each believer was asked the following questions upon entrance into the Christian community:
 - Does any sin, inward or outward, have dominion over you?
 - Do you desire to be told of your faults?
 - Do you desire to be told of all your faults—and that plain and clear?
 - Consider! Do you desire that we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear concerning you?
 - Do you desire that in doing this we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?
 - Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart, without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

- What are we doing to keep each other accountable? Colossians 3 says we're to *teach and admonish one another*.⁷ Hebrews 3:12-13 *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.* Did you catch that? Our loving involvement in someone else's life may be the very thing that keeps them from being hardened by sins' deceitfulness. I envision the day in the not too distant future where this kind of behavior is the norm in this church. I envision the day when every single one of us is relationally connected in a smaller network of believers who will love each other enough to live out this mutual accountability that is absolutely critical to living a cross centered life. May it happen quickly Lord Jesus.

Transition

There is one thing that will keep this change from happening. Arrogance. Which brings us to the second component of biblical accountability. Look at [verses 18-21](#). **Accountability will only work if we respond with teachable spirits.** Listen. *Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?*

- The enemy of accountability is arrogance. The problem with the Corinthians was that they thought they were unaccountable. *Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you* or in other words as *if you were unaccountable*. [David Garland](#) says, "Their arrogant self-importance is like that of little children who have the house to themselves when the parents have slipped out for a minute."⁸ But they were accountable. First to God but also to Paul as their spiritual father in Christ. And by their response to Paul's loving admonishment the Corinthians determined the next step. If they accepted his admonishment, through Timothy and with a teachable spirit, then he'd come to them *in love and with a gentle spirit* as [verse 21](#) says. If they didn't. He'd come with a *whip* in order to exercise stricter discipline. *What do you prefer?* He says to them. What Paul was asking them to be was teachable. They had a choice to either remain arrogant or humble themselves with a teachable spirit and accept his correction and admonishment.
- The only way mutual, shared accountability will work among a group of sinful people is if the people in that group are humble and teachable. Are you teachable? We need more FAT Christians. Are you familiar with that acronym? FAT. Faithful. Available. Teachable. Some of you are FA Christians. You're faithful and available but you're not very teachable. You don't listen to correction. You're like snapping turtles. Just let that image linger.
- And if you're of the mind to refuse accountability, if you think you don't need to be kept accountable for the way you live, you're arrogant. As Christians, the choice is not between accountability and no accountability. There is no choice in the matter. Christians are accountable. And if the accountability isn't accepted. If the response is arrogance with no humility, with no teachable spirit. Then the accountability, for the good of the church, must switch from gentle reproof to stricter discipline—the whip Paul says in [verse 21](#).

⁷ Colossians 3:16

⁸ Garland, p. 148.

Conclusion

- When you look at the early church in the book of Acts, I think the reason it had so much influence was because its distinctiveness as the new community of God was preserved by means of ultra-high accountability. Do you remember in Acts 5 of the story of Ananias and Sapphira? Acts 5:1-11. *Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. 3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6 Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him. 7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." 9 Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." 10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events. High accountability.*
- As we close this morning, I want to give you the opportunity to respond to what you've just heard in much the same way as last week.