

ANSWER ELEVEN: SEEING AND UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRIT OF GOD'S MINISTER 1 CORINTHIANS 04:14–21

Introduction

This passage is the eleventh answer to division within the church. Paul has discussed the subject of division thoroughly, and his discussion leaves any church without excuse for allowing itself to become divided. This is a section of Scripture that needs to be preached and studied time and again to protect the fellowship and mission of the church. The eleventh answer to division is the need to see and understand the spirit of God's minister.

- I. God's minister does not shame, but he warns his people as children (v. 14).
- II. God's minister shows a fatherly spirit, not an instructor's spirit (v. 15).
- III. God's minister sets an unmatched example (v. 16).
- IV. God's minister provides for the growth of his people (v. 17).
- V. God's minister wishes to be with his people (vv. 18-21).

I. 1 Corinthians 04:14 Minister's Style of Warning

The spirit of God's minister does not shame people, but it warns them. Paul had been strong with the Corinthian church (cp. Chapters 1-4). Some people were about to split and destroy the church; its very life and witness for Christ were threatened. Strong warning was necessary, for some were running the risk of facing the severe judgment of God (1 Cor. 3:17). But note: the warning was not given to shame the guilty, but to warn them. The warning was given in the spirit of a father — in the very same spirit that a father warns his sons of the consequences if they continue to do wrong. The father is firm and decisive, and he means exactly what he says, but he still loves his sons. He warns them to keep them from destroying their lives, not to shame and embarrass them.

Thought 1. All ministers and congregations desperately need to understand the true spirit of a genuine minister.

- (1) No genuine minister would ever fail to warn his child of the consequences of misbehaviour.
- (2) No wise child (congregation) would ever reject or attempt to silence the warning of a loving and caring father (minister).

Isa 62:6 *I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest.*

Jer 6:17 *I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.'*

Ezek 3:17 *"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me."*

Ezek 33:6 *'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.'*

2 Cor 2:16 *To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?*

Heb 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

II. 1 Corinthians 04: 15 The Fatherly Spirit of the Minister

The spirit of God's minister is that of a fatherly spirit, not that of an instructor's spirit. The "guardian or instructor" (paidagogous) of Paul's day was a trusted slave who was placed in complete charge of a child's welfare and growth. He was even in charge of escorting the child to school and seeing that no harm came to him. He was responsible for the growth and development of the child until he was grown. Paul says that the Corinthian church had an unlimited number of capable instructors and teachers, but he alone was their spiritual father. He was the one who brought them to Christ Jesus for life, and gave birth to the church. He was the one whom God had been using and was still using to oversee the growth of the church. Paul was stressing that he as the minister of the church bore more concern, tenderness, and care for the church than others.

Thought 1. The church must have many instructors, true teachers who take new and immature believers under their care to make sure they grow and develop. However, the minister of God must be more than an instructor who makes disciples. He must be a minister with the *spirit of a wise father*, a spirit that shows...

- love, but also justice.
- interest, but also self-development.
- acceptance, but also disapproval.
- care, but also discipline.
- giving, but also demands.
- praise, but also warning.

Jer 23:4 *"I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.*

Jer 3:15 *Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.*

John 21:17 *The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."*

Acts 20:28 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

1 Pet 5:2 *Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve.*

III. 1 Corinthians 04:16 Minister Sets an Unmatchable Example

The spirit of God's minister sets an unmatchable example. "Therefore I urge you to imitate (mimetai) me." Every father should live such a life that his children could follow in his steps. This is what Paul was saying. He had lived a life of commitment and self-denial for the Lord Jesus Christ. He had given all he was and had to Christ. He was saying: "Follow me — imitate me! Commit your life to Christ; deny yourself completely — give all you are and have to Him. Help me in evangelizing and meeting the desperate needs of the world for Him. The world is starving and dying from sin, hunger, disease, cold, heat, loneliness, and purposelessness; and they are doomed to die in both this world and the next. Follow me! Help me to reach this world for Christ Jesus our Lord."

1 Cor 11:1 *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*

Phil 3:17 *Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.*

Phil 4:9 *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*

1 Th 1:6 *You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*

2 Th 3:7 *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you.*

2 Tim 1:13 *What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.*

IV. 1 Corinthians 04:17 Minister Provides for the Growth of his People

The spirit of God's minister provides for the growth of his people. Note the stress of this verse. Paul says, "Timothy will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus." Paul was being attacked by some within the church who represented both the right and the left. The right included those who were *strict traditionalists and conservatives*, those who followed

and exalted Peter as the epitome of preachers. The left included those who were more liberal minded and interested in the wisdom of the world, those who followed and exalted Apollos as the greatest of preachers.

It must be noted that the preachers themselves were not personally involved in the division. None of them were at Corinth when the arguing and divisions within the church began. The controversy concerned them, but they were not and would not have been involved in it. They were right where they should have been: out on the highways and byways of the world witnessing for Christ. (See outline and notes, 1 Cor. 1:10-16.)

Thought 1. What a contrast between the preachers and their so-called followers! The so-called followers were professing the merits of the preachers, but were not following their example! How easy it is to profess and not to do.

Straightening out the mess within the church was in the hands of Paul, who was, so to speak, their present minister. He was away on a mission tour at this particular time, but he was responsible for the church and its welfare. Being unable to leave the mission tour, he did the next best thing. He sat down and wrote the church, dealing with their divisions; and then he sent his letter with one of his ablest assistants, Timothy. *Timothy was to stay with the church* until the divisiveness was eliminated and Christ was once again enthroned in His rightful place in the believers' hearts and lives.

Thought 1. Every minister of the gospel must be driven to provide whatever is needed for the growth of his people. Every true believer has been chosen by God to serve Christ Jesus the Lord. Therefore, if there is anything in the life of a believer that hinders his growth and service, the matter is serious to God. It must be dealt with and straightened out no matter what it is. But note: it is not only the minister's duty to provide for the growth of the believer. He can do nothing unless the believer will receive his ministry. The believer must be a humble follower of God who loves his minister and who is vitally interested in serving his Lord. (To be honest, any person's profession of Christ that comes short of being committed to and obeying Christ is suspect. The genuineness of the divisive person's conversion is even questionable. Within the church, as among any two persons, differences and problems arise; but genuine believers still love each other and work through the problems — rather quickly.)

John 21:15-17 *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."*

Thought 2. Note the kind of minister Paul provided for the Corinthian church.

- 1) Timothy, a “Son whom I love”: a young minister who loves and is willing to learn just as the son of a father (older pastor) is willing to learn.
- (2) Timothy, faithful in the Lord: a young minister who is faithful...
 - in prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-2).
 - in the study of the Word (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:15-17).
 - in witnessing (2 Tim. 1:7-8).
 - in service and ministry (1 Tim. 1:18-19; 4:14-16).

V. 1 Corinthians 04: 18–21 Minister's Call: To Be with his People

The spirit of God's minister is to be with his people. Remember the situation in the church. The church was divided into four cliques (see notes, 1 Cor. 1:10-16). It was the kind of situation that many desire to flee and ignore or overlook. Keep in mind that Paul himself was under attack (see note, *Paul, Accusations Against*, 2 Cor. 1:12-22). Note the words of this verse: “Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.” Apparently they felt the criticism and accusations against Paul were true, so he would not dare face them. However, note four points.

1. Paul has a longing to be with his dear church and people and to help them through this troublesome time. He says forcibly: “I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing.” He is the Lord's servant, so he has to go where the Lord leads him. But his prayers will be pleading for God to let him return to Corinth so that he can do all he can to help them.
2. Paul expects to deal with the troublemakers, to exercise whatever discipline is necessary. False charges were being made against him, and as always, rumours were flying (see note, *Paul, Accusations Against*, 2 Cor. 1:12-22 for a complete list of the accusations and rumours). Paul says this: when he arrives, he will not be interested in the accusations of his accusers, but in their power, that is, in what they can back up and prove with evidence. He will expose the accusers and their carnal, worldly character — expose them for what they are: troublemakers.
3. Paul gives the reason why he will discipline the troublemakers: because the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power. That is, the Kingdom of God, the rule and reign of God within a life, does not exist within a man because he says it does. When God rules in a life, it is in power. The old life that makes accusations and spreads rumours about people has been put to death. God's rule of love reigns in a life.

The point is direct: the accusers were professing to be citizens of God's kingdom, to have surrendered their lives to Christ, but their profession was word only — only a false profession. The power of God's kingdom, of His rule in a life, was not seen in

their lives. They were not demonstrating love and peace nor the building up of God's church and its minister, but the very opposite. They were gossiping, causing rumours, making accusations, disturbing people, causing division, and about to destroy the church. Therefore, Paul says that he will not flee the problem. Rather, he will deal with it. In fact, the Kingdom of God, the very welfare of the kingdom, demands it. God's kingdom and its rule of love must reign in the church and be kept as pure as possible.

4. Paul appeals for self-correction: "What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?" The decision is always up to the troublemakers and the church. Disturbances within the church must never be allowed to fester and continue. They must always be dealt with and solved, so that the church can *concentrate* on its mission to reach and minister to a world that is lost and dying in hunger and thirst both spiritually and physically. The world's people must be reached and given life both in this world and in the next. The glorious gospel of salvation must be carried to them. Therefore, the church must straighten itself out so that it can be about its task. If it does, Paul says that he will come to them in love. If it does not, then he will come in discipline.

Thought 1. Paul loved the Lord, and he loved the people under his care. He existed only to serve the Lord and the Lord's people. Therefore, his heart reached out to help believers no matter their state or circumstances. If they rejoiced, he rejoiced with them; if they hurt, he hurt with them. No matter what they were experiencing, he was upon earth to help believers through whatever they faced: differences, divisions, immaturity, weaknesses, poverty, danger, persecution. His sole purpose for living was Christ and people: to serve Christ by reaching and ministering to people. He was the minister of God; therefore, Paul did not run from problems. He simply lengthened and intensified his prayers, and he searched the Word of God and the Spirit for answers. Then he arose and walked out of his study and prayer closet to deal with the problems. He walked out under the assurance, confidence, security and power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, he knew that whatever happened was under the control and will of God. If the people responded to God's will, God would bless and honour them; if they rejected God's will, God would judge them. In either case, God would take care of his dear minister, for His minister had done his duty.

John 15:16 "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."

2 Cor 4:1-2 *Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

2 Cor 5:18 *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:*

***Eph 3:7** I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power.*

***1 Tim 1:12** I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

***2 Tim 1:11** And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.*

Thought 2. Note that the love of a minister is just like that of a father. True love is not a thing of indulgence and license that allows selfishness and wrong, dirt and ugliness, sin and shame to run loose and rampant at will. True love cares about the consequence of a person's behaviour; therefore, true love exercises firm correction and discipline that is sure to save and keep the loved person from harming himself. ■