# The Tyranny Of Tolerance

Long Beach Alliance Church • March 15th, 2009 • Pastor Chris Lankford

> **For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.**
> **~1st Corinthians 4:20 (NASB)**

I) Spiritual Fatherhood

A) Like a father, Paul calls on followers of Christ to "imitate" (lit., "mimic"), Paul's own followership of Jesus Christ. (1st Corinthians 4:15-16).

B) With this in mind, Paul has already sent Timothy (although there is some doubt as to his arrival, cf. 16:10), who is like an older brother, and also a great example of a faithful son (Philemon 2:22).

C) Paul is wrestling against a pervasive arrogance (note NKJV, "puffed up") which exists within the followers of Christ (1st Corinthians 4:18), which sounded right and good ("words," 4:19), but lacked the actual power of God (4:19-20).

D) By modern standards, Paul's warning amounts to "you're full of hot air, and I am coming to pop your balloon to see of what you are really made…" He warns them to change, letting them know "Dad is coming home, I recommend you get it together…" (4:21).

E) At first blush, Paul's "rhetoric" seems heavy handed and manipulative*. However, Paul's measure of the followers of Christ in Corinth was not in their words alone, but in their actions also, which we are about to find out were shocking!

## 2) It's Always Better To Tell Dad Yourself...

A) Note that Paul is responding to those things he has heard from his trusted companions ("it is actually reported," 5:1), and will respond to the Corinthian inquiry later (7:1). Paul's tone is more aggressive because the Corinthians appear to be sharing "half the truth" in their "arrogance" (5:2).

B) Paul hammers the followers of Christ in Corinth for their toleration of both sin and sinner (5:1-2), proving that with their arrogance there has also come a "who cares" attitude about personal practices and public perceptions.

C) The people were so busy "doing church" they set aside their own holiness, the call to purity and submission to the self-sacrifice of the cross. Toleration of sin is proof of arrogance and a loss of submission to Jesus Christ!

*In some capacity, this passage must be read within the cultural context of Greco-Roman society, where a parent had an authoritative role over children which was complete, even to the point where children were considered property. However, to stop here would be to miss Paul's point of I$^{st}$ Corinthians 1:1-4:21 entirely, and miss what Paul means when he speaks of "power." Further, "we cannot doubt that Paul has a more positive attitude toward "order" and institutional cohesion than the more freelance, egalitarian "freedoms" demanded at Corinth. He does indeed want "to hold together" a corporate Christian identity founded on the death and resurrection of Christ, which applies Christ and the cross as a criterion and critique of freelance claims to be "spiritual persons," or "people of the Spirit." But he seeks neither uniformity, nor self-interest, nor any desire to exercise authority apart from a wider network of apostles and co-workers who not only hold together individual Christians within one local community, but also a range of local communities as the one people of God in Christ." This problem has an entirely contemporary flavor! "Is the local church a loose federation of self-styled "spiritual people," or does it derive its identity from a common reality identified by the cross as criterion? Is the wider church no more than a loose federation of independent congregations, or does some larger corporate identity permit an appeal to an adherence to traditions "everywhere in every church" (I$^{st}$ Corinthians 4:17), or observed "in all the churches" (ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις πάσαις, 7:17, and similar wording in 14:33)." It is important to note that Paul, with the most positive image of Christ's church under the criterion and critique of the church manifesting "Christ crucified" in both belief and practice, appeals to "all churches in all places," to lay a foundation of a shared corporate identity "which later became known in dogmatic or systematic theology as the four "marks" of the church: as universal (i.e. catholic), apostolic, holy, and one." Thus, power in these passages has to with the effectiveness of the gospel in life, and is not simply rooted in some sort of rhetorical manipulation (a great example of the difference between "hot air" and "the power of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified). Much of this discussion and further discussion of this can be found in Anthony Thiselton's excellent commentary on I$^{st}$ Corinthians in The New International Greek Testament Commentary, pages 371-373.