



PART 2

PAUL IN CORINTH: LEADERSHIP UNDER FIRE

Chapter Six

PAUL DEFENDS HIS SINCERITY

RELIABILITY THAT STEMS FROM CLEAR
CONVICTIONS

TENDERNESS THAT IS EXPRESSED IN CLEAR
COMMUNICATION

So rather than immediately coming to them “with a rod” (cf. [1 Corinthians 4:21](#)), he decided to see if he could correct them by letter first.

[1 Corinthians 4:21 \(NASB\)](#)

²¹ “What do you desire? Shall I come to you **with a rod**, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?”

And immediately we encounter another major principle all leaders need to bear in mind: *A leader does not abuse his authority.*

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE #15

A LEADER DOES NOT ABUSE HIS AUTHORITY

Paul had legitimate apostolic authority over the Corinthians. It was clear, God-given spiritual authority, confirmed by undeniable signs and wonders ([2 Corinthians 12:11–12](#)). But he used that authority in a pastoral, not an authoritarian, style.

[2 Corinthians 12:11-12 \(NASB\)](#)

¹¹ “I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most



eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

¹² **The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.”**

He might well have written to the Corinthians the same thing he said to the church at Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 2:7-11 (NASB)

⁷ **“But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.**

⁸ **Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.**

⁹ **For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.**

¹⁰ **You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;**

¹¹ **just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children.”**

Paul had set his admonitions down for the Corinthians in a clear and carefully worded letter, and he sent that instead of going to them in person. Until he received word that they had responded well to the written communication, he was not going to cast a pall over his relationship with them by another sorrowful personal visit.

It was a wise approach. It epitomized the very best traits of Paul’s leadership style: loyalty, empathy, compassion, tenderness, clear communication, and unvarnished honesty. **That’s why it was especially ironic that his enemies had seized on this incident to accuse him of insincerity, of all things.**

Paul was torn. His personal hurt was real and intense. Perhaps the lowest point of Paul’s life was when he wrote this epistle. He even said in [2 Corinthians 2:12–13](#) that when he went to Troas, he found an open door for the gospel, but he was so troubled in spirit over the Corinthians that he left Troas and went to Macedonia instead, in hopes of finding Titus and getting a good report about the church at Corinth from him.

2 Corinthians 2:12-13 (NASB)

¹² **“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,**

¹³ **I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.”**

In fact, the entire book of [2 Corinthians](#) is colored by passion that arose from Paul’s personal disappointment over the Corinthians’ response to him. He had been severely wounded in the house of his friends. He had been devastated by the very people to whom he had most given of himself. Near the end of the epistle, he wrote, “



2 Corinthians 12:15 (NASB)

¹⁵“I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?”

He was overwhelmed by pain and depression over the disloyalty he experienced at the hands of people whom he loved and to whom he had given his life.

That is the price of leadership. It is a costly, lonely, and often thankless calling.

Jonathan Edwards ministered faithfully in Northampton for twenty-four years. He pastored his people through the remarkable revival of the Great Awakening (which Edwards’s own preaching and writing had in no small way helped to ignite). Then his church dismissed him by an overwhelming vote, because he taught that only those who have made a credible profession of faith in Christ ought to partake of the Lord’s Table.

At the end of his life, **Charles Spurgeon**, possibly the most effective Baptist preacher who ever lived, was censured by the Baptist Union in England because he opposed the encroachment of modernism in that organization.

But the leader must nonetheless remain gentle, compassionate, empathetic, and humble. If he becomes resentful, repressive, or ruthless in his treatment of his people, he will lose his effectiveness as a leader.

Who can do all that? Who has sufficient character to meet the high standard Scripture sets for leaders? In the chapter that follows, we will explore how Paul answered that question.