Series: Together Toward Maturity

Inductive Bible Study Guide: 1 Corinthians 4:14-21



Step 1: Observation – What does the passage say?

Read 1 Corinthians 4:14–21 a few times. Pay attention to Paul's heart, his tone, and the contrast between his authority and his fatherly care for the Corinthians.

Observation Prompts:

- How does Paul describe his relationship to the church?
- What words or images show Paul's tone?
- What commands or appeals are made?
- What contrasts does Paul use?

Read the passage and note what you see:
What does Paul say about why he is writing? (v.14)
How does Paul describe his relationship with the Corinthians in verse 15?
What does Paul urge them to do in verse 16?

Who does Paul send to help them, and why? (v.17)		
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What issue does Paul mention in verses 18–19?		
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What is the difference between words and power in verse 20?		
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What choice does Paul lay before them in verse 21?		
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Step 2: Interpretation – What does the passage mean?

Paul has been correcting arrogance, division, and pride in the Corinthian church. Here, he balances correction with fatherly love, reminding them that his goal is not shame but growth. His tone is both tender and firm.

Questions to Explore:
Why does Paul say he is not writing to shame them, but to admonish them? (v.14) What's the difference between shame and loving correction?
What does Paul mean by calling himself their "father in Christ Jesus"? (v.15) Why is this significant for understanding his authority and care?
Why does Paul send Timothy? (v.17) What role does Timothy play in reinforcing Paul's teaching?
What does Paul mean that the kingdom of God is not in talk but in power? (v.20) How does this challenge empty words or prideful boasting?

•	ose with a question about coming "with a rod or with love"? (v.21) eal about discipline in the church?
♀ Word Study	Suggestions:
• Admonish	(v.14): Greek <i>noutheteō</i> — to warn, instruct, or correct out of love.
• Imitate (v.	16): Greek <i>mimētēs</i> — to mimic, follow as an example.
• Power (v.2	0): Greek <i>dynamis</i> — strength, God's active power at work.
• Rod (v.21):	a symbol of discipline, authority, and correction.
Paul's words remin	lication — How should I respond? Industry that true spiritual leadership is marked by love, humility, consistency, and—not just words.
Personal Reflect	tion:
Do I receive correc	tion as shame, or as loving admonishment from God and His people?

Who are the "spiritual fathers or mothers" in my life? How can I learn from them?		
What does imitating Christ through godly examples look like for me right now?		
Am I more focused on words, appearances, or opinions than on living in God's power?		
If Paul wrote me a letter, would he come with a rod or with gentleness? What needs to change?		

Summary Truths:

- Spiritual correction should be done in love, not shame.
- Leaders are like spiritual parents—called to nurture and guide.
- Imitation of godly examples helps us live out the gospel.

- The kingdom of God is about power, not empty talk.
- Discipline is sometimes necessary, but it is rooted in love.

Optional Memory Verse:

"For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

— 1 Corinthians 4:15 (ESV)

Prayer Prompt:

"Father, thank You for placing spiritual leaders and mentors in my life. Help me to receive correction in humility and to imitate godly examples. Teach me to live in Your power, not just words, and to build others up in love."

For Further Study:

- Hebrews 12:5–11 God's loving discipline
- Philippians 3:17 Following godly examples
- 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12 Paul's fatherly approach to believers