

A Father Figure . . . Part 1!

Our Text: **1 Corinthians 4:14–21** *I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you. For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*

Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power. What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

So far throughout the Book of 1 Corinthians Paul has described the spiritual leader and teacher as:

- **A Servant** (1 Corinthians 3:5)
- **A Farmer** (1 Corinthians 3:6)
- **God's Fellow Worker** (1 Corinthians 3:9)
- **A Builder** (1 Corinthians 3:10)
- **A Galley Slave** ("servant," 1 Corinthians 4:1)
- **A Steward** (1 Corinthians 4:1)

But here, he now describes him as a spiritual "**father**", and he's going to use himself as the example.

So far in this letter, Paul has:

- Been Stern
- Used Sarcasm
- Rebuked The

And now he's going to tell them why . . . **BECAUSE HE LOVES THEM LIKE A FATHER LOVES HIS OWN CHILDREN!!!**

- He didn't want them to leave God's Word!
- He didn't want them getting hurt!
- He wanted them to have a full Christian life!

3 John 4 *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

Galatians 4:19 *My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,*
Philippians 1:23–27 *For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.*

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

So here he is going to tell them 6 characteristics of “*spiritual fathers*” which are necessary to disciple immature believers. Let’s dive in here . . .

A Father Figure Warns!

1 Corinthians 4:14a *I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.*

Paul was very clear here that he was not being harsh in his correction in order to **shame** the Corinthians. (*But let’s be honest . . . They had much to be ashamed of, and if they took the apostle’s words to heart they could not have helped being ashamed.*) But it was not Paul’s ultimate purpose to shame them . . . His purpose was to “**warn**” them.

Warn = **νουθετέω** *noutheteō* = *To admonish. To put into the mind.*

This presupposes that something is wrong and its intention is to correct, to make right. Its purpose is to bring about a change—in belief, attitude, habit, life-style, or in whatever way is needed.

We know that it is possible for a parent to correct a child in a way that tears down rather than builds up because we are warned about this in Scripture:

Ephesians 6:4 *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

In the name of discipline, sadly even Christian discipline, children can be provoked and abused in ways that leave permanent scars. They are often put down with criticism and punishment **but seldom lifted up with admonition and encouragement.**

A bad example is Eli in 1 Samuel:

1 Samuel 2:12-36 *Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD. And the priests’ custom with the people was that when any man offered a sacrifice, the priest’s servant would come with a three-pronged fleshhook in his hand while the meat was boiling. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; and the priest would take for himself all that the fleshhook brought up. So they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also, before they burned the fat, the priest’s servant would come and say to the man who sacrificed, “Give meat for roasting to the priest, for he will not take boiled meat from you, but raw.”*

And if the man said to him, “They should really burn the fat first; then you may take as much as your heart desires,” he would then answer him, “No, but you must give it now; and if not, I will take it by force.”

Therefore the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for men abhorred the offering of the LORD.

But Samuel ministered before the LORD, even as a child, wearing a linen ephod. Moreover his mother used to make him a little robe, and bring it to him year by year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. And Eli would bless Elkanah and his

wife, and say, “The LORD give you descendants from this woman for the loan that was given to the LORD.” Then they would go to their own home.

And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the LORD.

Now Eli was very old; and he heard everything his sons did to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the LORD’S people transgress. If one man sins against another, God will judge him. But if a man sins against the LORD, who will intercede for him?” Nevertheless they did not heed the voice of their father, because the LORD desired to kill them.

And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the LORD and men.

Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Did I not clearly reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh’s house? Did I not choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod before Me? And did I not give to the house of your father all the offerings of the children of Israel made by fire? Why do you kick at My sacrifice and My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place, and honor your sons more than Me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?’ Therefore the LORD God of Israel says: ‘I said indeed that your house and the house of your father would walk before Me forever.’ But now the LORD says: ‘Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days are coming that I will cut off your arm and the arm of your father’s house, so that there will not be an old man in your house. And you will see an enemy in My dwelling place, despite all the good which God does for Israel. And there shall not be an old man in your house forever. But any of your men whom I do not cut off from My altar shall consume your eyes and grieve your heart. And all the descendants of your house shall die in the flower of their age. Now this shall be a sign to you that will come upon your two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas: in one day they shall die, both of them. Then I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever. And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left in your house will come and bow down to him for a piece of silver and a morsel of bread, and say, “Please, put me in one of the priestly positions, that I may eat a piece of bread.” ’ ”

- Eli was high priest at the tabernacle in Shiloh.
- But he was an irresponsible father.
- Only after he was very old did he question his sons’ extremely sinful and wicked habits.
- At that point the sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were long grown and beyond his control.
- They abused the sacrificial offerings and committed fornication with the women who served at the tent of meeting.
- It seems that Eli was not even aware of what they were doing until told by some of the people.
- Scripture says that his own life and that of his sons ended tragically because he had not **“warned”** them as a firm, caring, loving father.
- He had honored his sons above God, and in doing so he failed God and failed them.

It is equally true that the failure to admonish spiritual children can be just as tragic!

If we have spiritual responsibility over another believer, especially if we brought him to the Lord, there will be times when we **MUST** warn and admonish!

As a spiritual father we must lovingly:

- Criticize wrong beliefs.
- Correct wrong behavior.
- All with the purpose of bringing spiritual change.

Matthew 18:15–20 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

1 Thessalonians 5:14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

We must not browbeat or humiliate or judge self-righteously. A loving father does not do such things . . . But a loving father will always admonish, reprove, correct, and even discipline when necessary. **He will do whatever he must that is right and proper for the welfare of his children!**

The tool for this is the Word of God:

2 Timothy 3:16–17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Doctrine = didaskalia (‘did-as-kal-ee’-ah) = Precepts that are to be taught and followed.

- **What is right.**

Reproof = elegcov (‘el’-eng-khos) = To prove or test something and bring it under conviction.

- **What is not right.**

Correction = epanoryosiv (‘ep-an-or’-tho-sis) = To restore to an upright state.

- **How to get right.**

Instruction = paideia (‘pahee-di’-ah) = The be trained educated and admonished to apply what is learned.

- **How to stay right.**

Knowing these things will make us complete!

Complete = artiov {ar'-tee-os} = *Finished and fit for perfection.*

1 Thessalonians 2:10–12 *You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.*

Let's look at one more . . .

A Father Figure Loves!

1 Corinthians 4:14b *but as my beloved children*

Paul has already referred to the Corinthians as his “**brothers**” several times:

1 Corinthians 1:10 *Now I plead with you, **brethren**, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*

1 Corinthians 2:1 *And I, **brethren**, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.*

1 Corinthians 3:1 *And I, **brethren**, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ.*

But now he calls them his “**children**”, which represents an even deeper relationship. In fact, they are not merely children but “**beloved children**”, especially **dear to their spiritual father-figure!**

Let there be no mistake about it, It is absolutely clear from what Paul has been saying far in this letter to them that they were:

- **Not Obedient**
- **Not Moral**
- **Not Doctrinally Sound**
- **Not Mature**

BUT THEY WERE LOVED NONE-THE-LESS!!!

Beloved = ἀγαπητός *agapētos = Dear. Worthy of Love.*

- **This refers to the strongest kind of love,**
- **It is the deepest kind of love.**
- **It is more than brotherly love.**
- **It is more than a tender affection.**
- **It is a love that is determined and willful.**
- **It's one purpose is serving the object of that love.**

Paul was even going to remind them of his deep love for them years later in his second letter to them:

2 Corinthians 12:14–15 *Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.*

The Corinthians did little to deserve Paul's love. But that's the with this type of love . . . It's not a matter of "**deserving**" . . . **THEY HAD IT IN FULL MEASURE ANYWAY!!!**

His love for them gave everything and asked for nothing! It was self-sacrificing, far reaching, and lasting. **A TRUE PARENT ABSOLUTELY UNDERSTANDS THIS!!!**

- A loving father wants to *understand* his children as deeply as possible.
- He wants to know where they hurt so that he can help heal.
- He wants to know when they are afraid so he can help dispel their fears.
- He wants to know where they are weak so he can help strengthen them.
- He wants to know their needs so he can help meet them.
- **Paul loved the Corinthians in that way!**
- **He loved them, understanding their situation and their needs!**

A loving father is also *gentle*.

Jesus was the example:

Matthew 11:29 *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

So Paul sought to treat the Corinthians with the same heart:

2 Corinthians 10:1 *Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you.*

Spiritual children, like natural children, grow slowly. They are not born mature and must be trained lovingly and gently, as well as carefully and sometimes sternly: ***1 Thessalonians 2:7–8*** *But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing 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 dear to us.*

So as those under us are growing, and maybe slower than we would like, let's seek God's face and **WARN** as Jesus warned, and **LOVE** as Jesus loved . . . **AMEN?!**

Let's pray . . .