

A Father Figure . . . Part 2!

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?

Last time we looked at 2 of the 6 characteristics that Paul says must be a part of every “**father figure**”:

- **A father figure must warn and admonish those he is responsible for.**
- **A father figure also must genuinely love, with God’s love, those he is responsible for.**

Let’s pick this up but looking at the remaining 4 characteristics here and now . . .

A Father Figure Begets!

1 Corinthians 4:15 *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.*

In the natural realm:

- In natural fatherhood, procreation must occur before there can be love or admonition.
- In other words, a child must be born before he can be cared for and trained.
- Also, no child can have more than one natural father.

In the spiritual realm:

- The Corinthians had many “**instructors**” in Christ but only one spiritual **father**.
- **And** Paul was the “**spiritual father**” of most of them.

It is vitally important to note here that **HE WAS NOT SAYING HE WAS THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE!!!**

Rather, **HE WAS THE TOOL THAT WAS USED TO BRING THAT SPIRITUAL LIFE TO THE CHILD!!!**

Remember, 10,000 instructors does not literally mean they had 10,000 leaders . . . 10,000 was the largest number they recognized at the time so it just meant “endless”.

So what was an instructor?

Instructor = **παιδαγωγός** *paidagōgos* = A pedagogue. A child-tender. A baby-sitter. An elementary teacher.

They were usually slaves, who were responsible for the basic training and moral upbringing of small children. So they were not teachers in a formal sense, but were more guardians and helpers.

This should remind us of something . . . **IT IS THE PARENTS JOB TO RAISE YOUR CHILDREN . . . BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE HAS THE SAME ADMONITION AND LOVE!!!**

What Paul was saying was that he Corinthians could have had innumerable spiritual tutors of various sorts, and all of those may have been helpful to one degree or another . . . But he was uniquely their spiritual father.

And just so we can clear something up here, Let's go to Matthew chapter 23:
Matthew 23:9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Whys is Paul doing this if Jesus said not to call a man **“father”**? (*This is where context is huge!*)

Matthew 23:2-12 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi.’ But you, do not be called ‘Rabbi’; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Obviously what Jesus is addressing in context is men seeking the glory by placing **“titles”** on themselves. **“Rabbi”**, and **“teacher”**, and **“father”**, were all referring to the titles they would seek so that they could glorify themselves. **Clearly Paul is NOT doing that! How do we know that? JUST READ THE REST OF THE NEW TESTAMENT AND SEE HOW HE ALWAYS PUSHES PEOPLE TO JESUS AND NOT HIMSELF!!!**

- A father, by definition, is a man who has children.
- He is a person through whom God created a life.
- A man can be a man without having children.

- A man can even a husband without having children.
- But he cannot be a father without having children.
- And Christian cannot be a “**spiritual-father**” without being used by God to bring life to spiritual children.

Unfortunately, many Christians have never become “**spiritual fathers**”.

- They have never produced any spiritual offspring.
- They have never led a person to Christ and helped train him in the ways of God.
- A Christian is one who has been given new life in Christ.
- One of the most important characteristics of spiritual life is reproducing other believers.
- Yet many believers have never reproduced believers.
- We all should desire to be a “**spiritual father**”, or people who bring “**new life**” into the world.

Paul founded numerous churches and therefore was the “spiritual father” of many, and he cherished this:

1 Timothy 1:2 *To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Titus 1:4 *To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.*

Philemon 10 *I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains,*

Everywhere he went he led people to Christ, thereby becoming their spiritual father.

What Paul was saying was that he has a special relationship with the people he has lead to Christ and has mentored . . . **And the same is true for us!**

I cannot express to you the special feeling I have towards those Jesus has lead to himself through me . . . Especially those from my days as a youth pastor. Some are doing amazing . . . Some, not so much. **BUT I LOVE THEM ALL THE SAME AND WOULD BE THERE FOR THEM AT THE DROP OF A HAT IF THAT’S WHAT THEY NEEDED!!!**

Let’s continue . . .

A Father Figure Sets The Example!

1 Corinthians 4:16-17a *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,*

A parent’s teaching is only as effective as their example . . . **OTHERWISE YOU HAVE HYPOCRISY!!!**

Therefore, a “**spiritual father**” **MUST** set the example for his spiritual children!

So Paul could say with confidence, but without bragging, “**be imitators of me**”.

Imitate = **μιμητής** *mimētēs* = *To follow. To become like.*

This Greek word is where we get our word “*mimic*” from. In other words, He not only could say, “**Do as I say,**” but also, “**Do as I do.**”

“Often the hardest place to disciple is in the home. When we disciple those outside our families, they often see us only in ideal situations, where it is easy to act spiritual and mature. But our children see us in all of our moods, in all of our attitudes and actions. They know firsthand if we are living up to what we are trying to teach them. If we are not, most of our instruction and admonition will fall on deaf ears. Even if we sincerely love them, our children are more likely to follow what we do than what we say.” John MacArthur Jr.

Having godly children is required of an elder:

1 Timothy 3:4–5 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);

This is at least in part because it is a good evidence that the elder himself is godly. So it’s important that any servant in the church get this right.

In short, discipleship is more than teaching right principles; it is also living those principles before the ones being disciplined:

1 Timothy 4:12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

In fact, Paul was so successful as a discipler that he could entrust his discipling to those he had disciplined:

1 Corinthians 4:17 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.

- Timothy was so like Paul that he could be sent as a Pauline model.
- The apostle had done such a complete work as a spiritual father to Timothy that he could send Timothy to continue discipling the Corinthians on his behalf.
- In other words, **it was like Timothy was a replica of Paul!**
- That is the epitome of raising spiritual children: being able to send them to work in our place.
- When we are Christlike, those we disciple will be more likely to become Christlike and be able to help others become Christlike.

- This obviously provides a potentially great multiplication of ministry.

But it doesn't stop there . . .

A Father Figure Teaches!

1 Corinthians 4:17b as I teach everywhere in every church.

We cannot believe truths we do not know or live principles we have never heard of . . . **SO NEITHER CAN THOSE WE ARE MENTORING!!!**

A major part of discipling is teaching the Word of God, AND telling and explaining its truths!

- In the case of the Corinthian church, Paul had already taught them carefully for eighteen months. (*Acts 18:11*)
- They had been thoroughly grounded in the Word.
- Timothy's job was going to be to "**remind**" them of what Paul had taught and of the way he had lived among them.

In other words, Paul had taught the same truths "**everywhere in every church**", indicating that he is referring to doctrine rather than some specific advice, and Timothy's job was to reinforce those great eternal truths by his own teaching and his own example.

It is not enough to be correct in what we teach . . . **WE MUST ALSO BE UNDERSTANDABLE!!!**

"We must put aside our degrees, academic accomplishments, and theological jargon and simply speak the truth plainly and in love. If we love those we witness to and disciple, our objective will not be to impress them with our learning but to help them with theirs."

Bishop John Ryle was convinced that one of the keys to the 18th century revival in England was the simplicity of the preaching of such men as Wesley and Whitefield. He said, "They were not ashamed to crucify their style or sacrifice their reputation for learning. They carried out the maxim of Augustine, who said that a wooden key is not as beautiful as a gold one, but if it can open the door when the gold one cannot, it is far more useful."

Those we are teaching do not need sermonizing, nor homilies demonstrating cleverness, but sound, true doctrine out of Scripture to counter the wisdom of men: **1 Corinthians 2:1-8** **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. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive**

words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Jesus' teaching not only was the supreme model of power and depth but of simplicity. The great crowds to whom He preached were composed mostly of common, uneducated folk . . . Yet they enjoyed listening to Him:

Mark 12:37b . . . *And the common people heard Him gladly.*

So let's not making learning a chore!

Let's wrap this up . . .

A Father Figure Disciplines!

1 Corinthians 4:18-21 *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?*

There are times when “**spiritual fathers**”, like natural fathers, have to discipline their children.

- When a Christian slips into wrong doctrine or wrong behavior he needs correction.
- He needs to be told in love, but with firmness.
*“Your testimony is not what it ought to be.
You are not living by the Bible principles you have learned.
You need to change.”*
- Such confrontations are never easy . . . **BUT THEY ARE NECESSARY!**

Sadly for the Corinthians, some of them had not only slipped into sin, but had become “**puffed up**” about it.

- They thought they would probably never see Paul again, “**as though I were not coming to you**”.
- So they thought they could get by with doing as they pleased.
- They may have been so arrogant as to think Paul would not dare to confront them.

BUT BOY WERE THEY WRONG . . . AND WE HAVE THE WHOLE BOOK OF 1 CORINTHIANS TO PROVE HOW WRONG THEY WERE!!!

But contrary to what they hoped, Paul told them that he planned to see them again and **soon**. (**Uh-oh!**)

In spite of what they thought Paul might be afraid to do, **his first order of business was to call out those who were blatant in their backsliding!**

- He would not let their sinning go unchallenged.
- For their own sakes, as well as the gospel's, he could not fail to discipline them.
- An undisciplined child belongs to parents who do not deeply care about his welfare.
- Paul was too loving a “*spiritual father*” not to discipline.
- As he expected the Corinthians to follow his example, he would follow God's:
Proverbs 3:12 *For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.*

Hebrews 12:6 *For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”*

Revelation 3:19 *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

Talk is cheap and a person's true spiritual character is not determined by the impressiveness of their words but by the power of their life:

Matthew 7:21–23 *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*

So let's show our spiritual life by our character and be willing to correct and discipline, and be willing to be corrected and disciplined! *AMEN?!*

Let's pray . . .