

Discipling as a Father
1 Corinthians 4:14-21
November 15th, 2020

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. Fathers _____ without intending to shame (4:14a)
 2. Fathers correct out of _____ (4:14b-15)
 3. Fathers _____ what their children should imitate (4:16-17)
 4. Fathers _____ when needed (4:18-21)
1. Why does Paul use the language of a father and his children to describe his relationship with the church in Corinth? What are the strengths and weaknesses of using that language to describe a discipleship relationship within the church today?
 2. Is shame always a bad thing? When might shame be appropriate or inappropriate? (4:14)
 3. What truth is there behind the cliché, “People don’t care what you know until they know that you care.” How is that perspective displayed in Paul’s relationship with the Corinthians? How should it be displayed in our relationships in the body? (4:14-15)
 4. Is it prideful to ask others to imitate you? In what other contexts do we expect or exhort others to imitate us? (4:16)
 - a. How does 1 Corinthians 11:1 clarify Paul’s exhortation for the Corinthians to imitate him?
 5. Who are some believers that have modeled different aspects of the Christian life for you? What did you learn from them that it would have been difficult to learn from a book or a sermon?
 6. What hinders us from learning from each other in the body? What steps can you take to be more involved with others as both an “imitator” and an example for others to imitate?
 7. How does the example Eli and his sons illustrate the damage that comes when a father doesn’t correct his sons? How is the damage increased when they are spiritual leaders? (1 Samuel 2:12-17; 2:22-24; 3:11-13) How does that relate to Paul’s stern language of discipline in 4:18-21?

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Big idea: Discipleship should follow the model of fathers who love, admonish, model, and correct their children.

Intro –

Crisis of fatherlessness in America

70% of long-term prison inmates grew up without a father in the home. Young men who grew up in homes without fathers are twice as likely to end up in jail as those from two parent homes, even when other facts like race, income, and parent education were held constant.

One professor who specializes in the effect of fatherlessness added other statistics: “Sixty-three percent of youth suicides, 90 percent of all homeless and runaway children, 85 percent of all children who exhibit behavioral disorders, 71 percent of all high school dropouts, 85 percent of all youths sitting in prisons, and so on, all have fatherlessness in common.”

He defines fatherlessness this way: “Fatherlessness is not defined as children with *deceased* fathers, but rather children with *absent* fathers. Men who are absent physically, emotionally, and spiritually from the lives of their children are everywhere and all contribute to the pathologies related to fatherlessness.”

Men, your children need you. They need you to be active, involved fathers.

Do they need mothers? Of course. Are children of single-mothers destined to a life of crime and destruction? Of course not.

You might be wondering, why are we yelling at dads today? I thought we only did that on Father’s Day?

1 Corinthians 4:14-21 uses the language of fatherhood to explain Paul’s discipleship relationship with the Corinthians.

We see how a godly father should interact with his kids, and it mirrors how discipleship happens within the body.

1. Fathers warn without intending to shame (4:14a)
 - a. After using sarcasm to point out the folly of their positions, he clarifies that the point is not to shame them.
 - i. They may indeed *feel* shame if they realize they have been boasting about themselves and not living as servants and stewards, but that wasn’t the intent.
 - b. A good father should never seek to shame his kids as some type of end goal to make them cower before him.
 - i. Fathers are warned about not provoking their kids to anger in Eph. 6:4. When a dad intentionally tries to embarrass his kids by public discipline and ridicule, that’s wrong.
 - c. However, a good father should warn his kids when they are going down a destructive path.
 - i. That’s the idea behind the word “admonish”
 1. Admonish means literally to put in mind – with the purpose of warning and reproof. Presupposes something is wrong and its intention is to correct.
 2. It includes counsel that is designed to correct while not provoking or embittering.
 - ii. The goal is not shame – the goal is maturity – but the short term effect might be a sense of shame.

- iii. A father might point out to a teenage daughter that it was rude of her to spend the whole evening on her phone when other people were over. The daughter may feel shame as she considers her actions, but that *shame* wasn't the fathers point. If it is, that's emotional abuse. But he should want her to realize her behavior is wrong so she can correct it.
 - iv. The home should a learning environment.
 - d. Likewise, the church should be a learning environment in which people of all ages are growing into spiritual maturity.
 - i. A leader who seeks to emotionally manipulate people, especially if they do so by "exceeding what is written" (v. 6), is acting like an authoritarian. Same with any believer who is trying to help another grow.
 - ii. Romans 15:14 says that believers should "admonish one another," so this is not merely a leadership principle.
 - e. We should listen well before we correct to make sure we understand the situation.
 - i. **Proverbs 18:13** He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him
 - f. We should correct privately rather than publicly whenever possible
 - i. **Matthew 18:15a** "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private;
- 2. Fathers correct out of love (4:14b-15)
 - a. As if to emphasis the point even further that his goal isn't shame, he refers to them as beloved children and affirms his fatherly care for them.
 - i. Fathers should build into the relationships with their kids as they spend time together, play games together, go on walks, make late night runs to get ice cream when moms asleep, play music together.
 - ii. Fathers should affirm their love to their kids with verbal and physical affection.
 - b. You've probably heard the statement, "people don't care what you know until they know that you care."
 - i. Love is shown not just declared.
 - c. "Tutors" at their time were guardian, often a slave, who watched over a child, taking them to and from school, even exercising some authority. But the tutor doesn't replace a father.
 - i. Their "tutors" might refer to the other teachers that have come through their lives at the church in Corinth. But he feels a particular affection and responsibility for them because he first shared Christ with them.
 - d. He became a "spiritual father" to them through the gospel.
 - i. The gospel is his concern from beginning to end. He doesn't want the gospel to get hidden or obscured through their emphasis on fancy language and human wisdom.
- 3. Fathers model what their children should imitate (4:16-17)
 - a. Vocationally, sons followed in the career of their father.
 - i. If dad was a baker, so was his son. Farmer, shepherd, carpenter, etc.
 - ii. The son was expected to carry on the family name and heritage.
 - iii. That was the way it was in pretty much every preindustrial culture – sons "imitated" their father.

- iv. Young men, your career track would have been chosen for you. Look at your dad's job, that would have been your future job. The career counselor was not needed.
- b. Even more fathers are to model the behavior they want to see in their children.
 - i. Far more is caught than taught.
 - ii. A sure fire way to provoke a child to wrath is blatant hypocrisy.
- c. The same thing is true of discipleship.
 - i. Craig Blomberg, "Progress along the road to sanctification demands that new believers have consistent, positive, mature Christian models to imitate in all aspects of daily life. This, in turn, implies that more mature Christians must make themselves accessible and transparent to younger believers around them."
 - ii. Paul is not merely teaching them – either when he was with them or from a distance – but modeling how to live out the implications of the gospel in daily life.
 - iii. He will say even more clearly in 11:1 "Imitate me even as I imitate Christ."
- d. We need to see other believers live out the Christian life so that we know what to do.
 - i. One missionary in a difficult country said people have offered to send over books and resources, and that's great. One man even offered to send over a "seminary in a box" that contained great resources for studying the word. The missionary said what the believers need and are asking for is for people to come and show them how to live it out. Show them how to love their wives like Christ loves the church. Show them how to function as a church. Show them how to bring their kids up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
 - ii. Isn't that what we need also? Isn't that why church needs to be more than a lecture once a week? The church functions by providing lots of opportunities for interaction and learning from one another and following the godly examples of more mature believers.
 - 1. **1 Peter 5:3** nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.
 - 2. **Philippians 3:17** Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.
 - 3. **1 Thessalonians 2:8** 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.
 - 4. As a college student I learned about shepherding little kids by spending Friday nights at the Pettit's house. I learned about how a husband can love his wife in day-to-day ways at their home as well as another married couple that was on staff with the college ministry. I learned about budgeting from another friend at church who was about 10 years older than me.
 - iii. What does this type of ministry require of all of us?
 - 1. Accessibility, teachability, durability
 - 2. People need to have access to our lives and homes
 - 3. We need to be teachable so that we can learn from each other.
 - 4. We need to have durable relationships – not easily offended by a careless comment, canceled activity, personal disagreement.

- a. Sometimes we love the idea of others more than we actually love the people themselves.
 - 5. Don't be afraid to seek out a mentor. Don't be afraid to ask someone that you respect in the body if you can grab coffee with them. Ask them questions. Ask to read a book together and discuss it.
 - e. We need other believers at close range. And that's exactly what COVID has made more difficult.
 - i. **1 Peter 4:9-10, 12** Be hospitable to one another without complaint. ¹⁰ As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. . . . ¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;
 - 1. v. 9 advocates for hospitality
 - 2. What possible role does having people over to your house for dessert on a Friday night have in battling against a fiery ordeal of suffering?! Fellowship. Learning from the example of others. Watching other parents with their kids. Learning from singles who have walked a path of loneliness before.
 - f. Because Paul can't make it in person right then, he is sending Timothy to model and teach.
 - i. Timothy was a dearly loved traveling companion of Paul's. He pastored in Ephesus for several years, receiving the letters of 1 and 2nd Timothy to guide his pastoral role.
 - ii. Paul had confidence that Timothy could model and teach what they need to learn.
 - iii. He must have been nervous that they wouldn't receive him well because he tells them at the end of the letter:
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 16:10-11** Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid, for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. ¹¹ So let no one despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.
 - g. Help should come from teaching AND from life-on-life example.
 - i. That's why we need more than online instruction. That's why although we might listen to other pastors from all over, it's important to have roots in a local fellowship where you can know and be known by other believers.
 - ii. That's why you will struggle if your only interaction with other believers is in and out on a Sunday morning but not letting your life encounter their lives. It doesn't need just to be leadership, certainly not just the senior pastor. All the elders are called to be "examples to the flock."
4. Fathers **discipline** when needed (4:18-21)
- a. A father who only speaks encouraging words but never corrects and disciplines falls short of his responsibilities as a dad.
 - i. **Proverbs 13:24** He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.
 - ii. Loves shows up in discipline. Why? Is it because the father enjoys punishing? I hope not! That would be similar to the father who enjoys shaming his kids. But it's because he wants what is best for his kids.
 - b. Paul wants what is best for the church in Corinth.

- i. They have been focusing on their words – their rhetorical skills, human wisdom, powerful personality, etc. Paul turns once again to the substance – the power of the gospel.
 - 1. **1 Corinthians 1:17-18** For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. ¹⁸ For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.
- ii. What they are focusing on won't build a resilient church as describing in chapter 3.
- c. Coming with a rod is a reference to a sharper rebuke or even the practice of church discipline that chapter 5 will discuss.
 - i. It's still loving because he wants what is best for them. Just like a father who spans his child can be doing so out of love to change his child's behavior, but it would be much better for the child if he would just change his behavior without his father having to spank him.

5. Conclusion

- a. The journey of discipleship starts with new birth. Paul says he became their father "through the gospel."
 - i. **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,
 - 1. The gospel is a divine plan
 - a. It was according to scripture
 - 2. The gospel is a historical event
 - a. It's not a myth to teach a truth. It's not a legend. It wasn't a spiritual reality. He died and rose again with a real body and ate fish with his friends.
 - 3. The gospel is a divine achievement
 - a. He covered our sin by substituting Himself.
 - 4. The gospel is an offer received by faith
 - a. It's something received, held fast to, believed in
 - 5. The gospel is an application of divine achievement to you when you believe.



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