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Sermon Notes

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The Elements of a True Spiritual Father

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

I. Paul Was a True Spiritual Father

A. Paul Uses Many Metaphors for the Ministry

1. Servants/slaves

1 Corinthians 3:5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe-- as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

2. Farmers

1 Corinthians 3:6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

3. Master Builders

1 Corinthians 3:10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder

4. Stewards

1 Corinthians 4:1-2 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ² Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

5. Witnesses

1 Corinthians 15:15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

6. Shepherds

Acts 20:28 Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

7. Heralds

2 Timothy 1:11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.

8. Ambassadors

2 Corinthians 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

B. Here is the most poignant... FATHER

1 Corinthians 4:15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

C. A Picture of Committed Love PLUS Authority

1. Paul is laboring to reestablish his spiritual authority to speak into the lives of the Corinthian Christians
2. They had already been questioning him, minimizing him by comparing him to Apollos and Peter
3. Even worse, there were some there who were false teachers and were openly attacking Paul... much of 2 Corinthians is his defense against their attacks, but we have a sense of that sharpness even in this passage today
4. So Paul must reestablish his right to give them commands, because God has positioned him in a special ministry as their apostle, their founding pastor, and their spiritual father... and if they refuse to submit to his spiritual authority, they will be in deep trouble in their souls
5. Paul has many other things to write to them, and in order for them to listen properly and take to heart his words, he must reassert his God-given right to command them in love as a spiritual father
6. Beyond Paul's unique role, we have a lasting pattern for being a spiritual father to new disciples that all people can follow... a role that I yearn to see multiplied in FBC Durham, to take maximum opportunity of the thousands of people pouring into the Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill area... only by spiritual MULTIPLICATION will we be able to make the full impact on this region for eternity
7. So all of us, whether men or women, boys or girls, need to understand this pattern of being a spiritual father... parent

II. A Spiritual Father Has Spiritual Children

1 Corinthians 4:15 Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

- A. The Term "Guardians" = slave in a large household entrusted with the responsibility to train the growing son in the home to get him ready to inherit the

estate... he would teach him, guard him, train him in all the skills necessary... but he was just a servant...to be the FATHER was a much higher relationship

1. So the Corinthians had Apollos and many other teachers
 2. BUT they had only ONE FATHER!!
- B. Paul laid the foundation for the church by preaching Christ
1. Paul is not claiming to be their Savior... but rather the HUMAN INSTRUMENT by which Christ saved his people
 2. Christ, not Paul, shed his blood for them on the cross... Christ, not Paul, was raised from the dead for them
 3. Furthermore, only the Holy Spirit can make someone be born again

John 3:5-6 "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

4. God saves sinners by his SOVEREIGN POWER... AND he uses the gospel, the written and proclaimed word of God
5. But he uses human servants to work his will in the lives of the elect
6. Paul gives full credit to Christ and to the gospel... BUT he also rightly claims to have been their FATHER in the gospel

C. Paul Fathered MANY Spiritual Children

1. He uses childbirth language with the Galatian church

Galatians 4:19-20 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, ²⁰ how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

2. He is the spiritual father of many churches...

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God

3. He also is the spiritual father of many individuals
 - a. Onesimus, the runaway slave while he was in Rome

CSB Philemon 1:10 appeal to you for my child, whom I fathered while in chains-- Onesimus.

b. Timothy and Titus are both his SONS in the faith

4. Paul, by faithfully preaching the gospel, was privileged to lead COUNTLESS SOULS to Christ

5. He became their spiritual father

D. Application: WHAT ABOUT YOU?

1. Spiritual leadership involves fruit in evangelism... to have people that we have actually led to new life in Christ

2. Every Mother's Day, we celebrate the new babies born in the life of the church over the past year; and our church is VERY FRUITFUL!!

3. How delightful it would be to have just as many SPIRITUAL BABIES, new Christians, needing to be trained in the gospel by their spiritual parents!

III. A Spiritual Father Loves His Children

A. Tremendous Tone of Affection for them!

1. Throughout both these letters—1 and 2 Corinthians—we see again and again how DEEPLY he loved these people!

2. They were a truly DYSFUNCTIONAL CHURCH—messed-up in many ways

3. But his affection for them is obvious

2 Corinthians 6:11-13 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. ¹² We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. ¹³ As a fair exchange-- I speak as to my children-- open wide your hearts also.

2 Corinthians 12:14-15 After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well

B. The Opposite of 3 John

3 John 4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

1. Paul is the opposite here: NO GREATER ANGUISH than to hear that his spiritual children in Corinth are NOT walking in the truth

C. Spiritual Fathers MUST Be Motivated by a Genuine LOVE for their spiritual Children!

1. They have to be willing to knit their hearts together with the people they have led to Christ

2. These new converts will struggle; they will relapse into sin; they will have massive ups and downs
3. Through it all, a spiritual father must be totally committed to them in love; willing to SPEND all that you have, and SPEND YOURSELF as well

IV. A Spiritual Father Does Not Shame, But Warns His Children

1 Corinthians 4:14 I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children.

- A. Part of the Role of a Wise Spiritual Father: Be Willing To Speak Hard Truths When Needed, but also know when ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!
- B. Paul Has Laid Into Them in this Chapter
 1. He uses extreme sarcasm to expose their deep-seated worldliness

1 Corinthians 4:8-13 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings-- and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! ⁹ For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. ¹⁰ We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! ¹¹ To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. ¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; ¹³ when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

The sarcasm is overwhelming!!

2. BUT then, he BACKS OFF

I am NOT writing this to shame you, but to WARN YOU as my dear children

3. This is a remarkable statement
 - a. Shame is one of the most powerful forces in the human world
 - b. Everyone is afraid of being put to shame

Shame is a BURNING sense of embarrassment, of being exposed, especially in the eyes of people you really cared about, whose opinion really mattered

Shame has a ROLE in our sanctification, like physical pain has a role in our lives here on earth

When we sin, we are supposed to take it seriously and feel that burning sense of having let Christ down

Like when Peter denied knowing Christ the third time, and at that exact moment, the rooster crowed, and Jesus turned and stared RIGHT AT HIM! His look must have burned into his very soul! Then immediately, Peter went outside and WEPT BITTERLY!

That feeling he had at that moment was SHAME

c. Paul is WILLING to use this tool from time to time... even later in this book

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. ² And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief {YOU OUGHT TO BE ASHAMED}

1 Corinthians 6:5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers?

1 Corinthians 15:34 Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God-- I say this to your shame.

4. So... why does Paul say he is NOT trying to SHAME them?

a. Well, I think he means he doesn't want them to be overwhelmed in shame... but to heed the warning to turn from worldliness

C. A Godly Father Knows How to Mix Strong Persuasion with Wisdom and Knowing When ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Lots of fathers are either too soft, neglectful, and tolerant, allowing their kids to do whatever they want OR harsh, abusive, denying them affirmation and love

You see this a lot in the sports world, as the abusive father tries to live out his dreams through his son... reading about baseball player Rafael Palmeiro's father Jose, who never commended his son, but pushed him relentlessly

When Rafael was in high school, he hit a long line drive that hit the fence 396 feet away; it was a double. His father came out onto the field to berate his son—"If you were a real man, you would have CLEARED that fence!" That's the way he was all through his son's career...

History was filled with abusive fathers who poured acid on their kids verbally, deprived them of affection, provoked them to wrath

Paul wasn't that kind of a spiritual father; he knew when to back off

D. On the Other Hand... he NEEDED TO WARN THEM!

1. He wasn't a soft, indulgent spiritual father who failed to warn his children of the dangers
2. And the dangers of their WORLDLINESS were extreme!
3. If they didn't repent of their worldly desires for comfort, ease, prosperity, the praise of the pagans... they would be destroyed

V. A Spiritual Father Sets the Example for His Children

1 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

A. So Much of Life is Caught as Well as Taught

1. You watch a role model do it a certain way, and then you know what to do
2. So it is with Christianity; Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from our sins, and he could have died on the cross in an afternoon
3. BUT He also came to give us an example of a holy life:

1 Peter 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

B. Paul Knew the Importance of Example as Well

1 Corinthians 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

1. Paul set up his lifestyle as an example for the Corinthians to follow
2. No one in history has ever suffered as much for the gospel as the Apostle Paul; no one could truly and perfectly follow his example
3. BUT he wanted them to follow aspects of his life... his otherworldly perspective, his willingness to give it all for Christ

C. So a Spiritual Father is Willing to Set His Lifestyle Before His Children as an Example

1. Children see right through HYPOCRISY... parents who say "Do as I say, not as I do!"
2. They know all your deep secrets, your pet peeves, what you're like when you're tired or roughed up by difficult circumstances

D. Paul Practiced What He Preached... He Was Not Allured by the Temptations of this pagan world

Paul was so confident of his role modeling that he was willing to send Timothy, his prized son in the faith to continue their training

1 Corinthians 4:17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus

VI. A Spiritual Father Teaches His Children

1 Corinthians 4:17 [Timothy] will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

A. There is a Clear Marriage of Doctrine and Lifestyle

B. Doctrine is VITAL... the Word precedes all true Christian living

1. Christ's most powerful ministry to the crowds was not healing them or feeding them, but teaching them the word of God

Mark 6:34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

C. The Essence of Being a Spiritual Father is a TEACHING Ministry

1. Children come into the world perfectly ignorant of everything... no one naturally knows the Bible... so a spiritual father needs to patiently explain and unfold the Word

Acts 20:20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.

Acts 20:27 I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

D. You Fathers... are you POURING the Word of God into your children?

E. You disciplers... are you just meeting for coffee and having friendly conversations about current events and sports and hobbies... or are you feeding your disciples the fullness of the Word of God??

VII. A Spiritual Father Disciplines His Children

A. The Passage Ends on a Very Serious Stern Note

B. Listen to the Severe Threats He Uses

1 Corinthians 4:18-21 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. ¹⁹ But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will

find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. ²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. ²¹ What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?

1. There were “anti-Paul” people there in Corinth... some were even false teachers, “servants of Satan” masquerading as angels of light

C. Paul here is CHALLENGING THEM TO A SPIRITUAL DUEL!!

1. What kind of power do you have?
2. The kingdom of God is a POWERFUL THING!! It’s not just talk
3. Like the time Jesus’ enemies were angry when he forgave the sins of a paralyzed man... TAKE HEART, SON, YOUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN... they said HE’S BLASPHEMING!

Matthew 9:2-8 Jesus said, “Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins....” Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." ⁷ And the man got up and went home.

4. The TALK is easy... but is there POWER behind it???

D. The Threat Here is Supernatural Discipline from the Lord

1. True fathers discipline their children
2. They do not merely allow them to coast happily into sin
3. Paul is a true spiritual father to them

Hebrews 12:5-6 "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

4. Paul is directly challenging his detractors

E. The Threat: Paul’s ROD (NIV has whip)

1. Apostles have amazing power
2. Remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira... how the Apostle Peter spoke by the Holy Spirit and they dropped down dead?
3. So also Paul with the false teacher Elymas the Sorcerer... God struck him BLIND at Paul’s word (Acts 13:9-11)

F. The Reason for this TOUGH TALK?

1. Paul is not on some kind of ego trip here
2. Rather, Paul knows that Jesus Christ has raised him up to teach the details of the gospel to the Gentile churches; if they turn away from Paul, they are really turning away from Christ
3. Imagine rejecting the Book of Romans! The Book of Ephesians... Philippians!
4. They would be eternally paupers because of it
5. So he has to challenge his enemies to a spiritual duel
6. When he comes, he wants to find them SUBMISSIVE to his fatherly authority and no longer rebellious

G. YOU MAKE THE CHOICE: What Do Prefer?

1. Paul's saying "It's up to you!"
2. I don't want to execute discipline on you... if you will just repent, I will come with fatherly gentleness, and not the ROD!!

VIII. Applications

A. The Central Issue Here is the Gospel of Jesus Christ

1. If Paul were here, his deepest concern would be to make certain all of you are born again, have found salvation in Christ
2. Have you?? Do you know for certain that if you died tonight, you would go to heaven and not hell?
3. If Christ probed you and asked you on what basis you would enter heaven, what would you say? If you say something like, "Because I'm basically a good person," you are LOST
4. Christ did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance!
5. He died on the cross so that sinners could be forgiven... only by trust in Jesus Christ can sinners like you and me be forgiven

B. For the Christians... Do You Long to be a Spiritual Father??

1. The issue here is discipleship... taking responsibility for the progress of the gospel in another person's life
2. The lessons of being a spiritual father will help BIOLOGICAL FATHERS AND MOTHERS raise their biological children

- a. Do you love them? Do you cherish them? Do they know that love and see it in you?
 - b. Do you use the strong language and godly rod of discipline where needed, not allowing your children to develop evil habits of sin? Or are you too indulgent of your children, too permissive?
 - c. On the other hand, are you wisely restrained in your discipline, knowing when enough is enough?
 - d. Do you set a clear example of godly living in your household, so that they can see you live out a strong faith in Christ?
 - e. Are you pouring the word of God into your children day after day?
3. However, the home base of this text is not biological fathers and mothers, but the discipleship relationship
- a. DO YOU HAVE ANY SPIRITUAL CHILDREN?
 - b. Have you led anyone to faith in Christ?
 - c. Do you have someone to disciple?
 - d. If so, are you following this pattern of being a spiritual father to your spiritual children?
 - e. Spiritual multiplication! That pattern can happen much faster than biological!

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

May God enable us to see this pattern replicated again and again to win the Triangle Region to faith in Christ!