Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How to Be a Spiritual Father
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:14-21
Code: 1822

Turn in your Bible, if you will, to 1 Corinthians chapter 4 as we look to our study for this morning. We are having a great time in 1 Corinthians and the Lord has really been teaching us some very, very basic things. I think, however, though this morning's message is going to be unusual in that it will probably stand out in the Corinthian series as an extremely practical message. It deals with the concept of being a spiritual father. The Apostle Paul, of course, in writing to the Corinthians is dealing with their problems. He's struggling against their weaknesses and their sins and trying to bring them into conformity to the truth of God. They're Christian people for the most part but behaving as if they weren't. And he's very, very zealous and he's very, very earnest as he writes this epistle to solve their problems.

And while in the epistle he is dealing with their problems, such as the problem of division in the first section, the first four chapters, while he's dealing with their problems, he is constantly explaining his relationship to them. He'll say I'm saying this because of this and this...I'm saying this because I am your servant...or I'm saying this because I am the slave of God...and I want to carry out His orders...or I'm saying this because I'm a steward of God's mysteries and I must tell you the truth. And he uses many different metaphors in describing his own ministry so that 1 Corinthians not only becomes a letter dealing with problems in the church, but it becomes a letter that maps out the patterns of the ministry, for we see a church being attacked and we also see a minister attacking the problems in the church. So we get both sides of it.

And as we study the book we're going to see a lot about the church and we're going to see a lot about the ministry in the church, the pastor, the teacher, the leader of the church as well as things applicable to every Christian's life. Now already in 1 Corinthians we've been introduced to different metaphors to speak of the minister or the pastor or the Apostle or the prophet, the one who leads the church. For example, in chapter 3 verse 5 he is called a servant. In chapter 4 verse 1 the minister is called a slave, a slave of Christ. In chapter 4 verse 1 again he is called a steward of the mysteries of God. And so already we've seen the pastor as a slave and a servant and a steward.

We found too that in chapter 3 verse 6 the metaphor of a farmer is used. He says I have planted and Apollos has watered. So you not only have domestic metaphors like servant, slave, steward, but you have actually a farming metaphor in farmer and you have a building metaphor in verse 10 of chapter 3, he calls himself a wise master builder. So many metaphors in 1 Corinthians are used to describe the ministry, and all of them taken in a composite would give a tremendous study of what the pastor

is, what the leader is, what the elder in the church is.

Elsewhere in Scripture you could even add to that study. For example, in 1 Timothy 2:7, pastors and teachers or ministers are called heralds. In those days when a king wanted to make an announcement, when any news needed to be given to the people, since there weren't any newspapers, they had professional heralds...guys who went out and stood on a corner and hollered out the news. And that's precisely, Paul said to Timothy, what Christian preachers are...they are heralds, they are the King's heralds. They are proclaiming the truths the King wants announced.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20 the preacher is also called an ambassador. In those days the emperor would represent himself in a foreign land with an ambassador. And we are God's ambassadors representing Him in this world in a foreign land.

So you have domestic metaphors to speak of the ministry. You have agricultural metaphors, you have building metaphors, you have what you'd call political metaphors in the herald and the ambassador. There's also a legal metaphor to describe the preacher, he is called a witness...somebody who gives testimony, somebody who witnesses to the truth as it were in a court. Now all of these metaphors describe the preacher.

But there is one other metaphor that perhaps sums up in a very unique way the intimacy between the pastor and his people and that is in verse 15 of chapter 4, "Though you have 10,000 instructors in Christ you have not many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." And this is the metaphor of a father. One way that God describes the relationship between a preacher and his converts, a pastor and his people is the relationship between a father and his child and therein lies the personal metaphor, the intimate metaphor. And that is the theme of our study for today.

Now remember, for the four chapters we've been studying, Paul has really been firing all barrels. He's really unloaded on them against their carnality, against their pride, against their love of human wisdom, against their sectarian spirit, their splits and quarrels over whichever preacher they like the best. They were factioned into division and he's really been wailing on them. And even at the end of the last passage we studied, he became very sarcastic. And when you get to the place of sarcasm, you're really dealing in strong language. And he's been very strong with them and he will for the next chapters in the book, 5 through 16, be equally as adamant and equally as zealous and equally as stern and equally as strong in dealing with their sins. But he stops right here in verses 14 to 21 and really tells them why he is so stern and why he is so strong and why he feels that he must speak with such conviction. And the reason is because he seems himself as their father spiritually.

Now, you know, if I deal sternly with my children and if I deal strongly with their mistakes and if I deal lovingly with their lives and if I struggle diligently to conform them to the things I believe in, it is

because I am their father and it is because I do love them. And that's exactly what Paul is saying here. In the very middle of this thing I need to tell you the reason I'm doing this and it is because I have this tremendous sense of responsibility as a loving father to his own children. And in every sense of the word the Corinthians were his children. John said in 3 John 4, we're going to study this concept tonight and I think with great benefit, he said, "I have no greater joy than to see my children walk in the truth." Paul in 1 Corinthians is expressing the very opposite, as it were he is saying, "I have no greater anguish than to see my children are not walking in the truth." And he sees it from the standpoint of a loving spiritual father.

Now look at verse 15, "Though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you don't have many fathers. In fact, in Christ Jesus I...and it's emphatic, the egois emphatic...I alone have begotten you." You may have a lot of instructors, you've got only one spiritual father.

Now think about your spiritual father, who was it that led you to Jesus Christ, that's your spiritual father, that's what Paul is talking about. You may have ten thousand instructors and the word there, paidagogos, including the word for a child in the training of a child is the idea, was not a teacher. Paidagogoswas a slave who was given the responsibility of the moral guardianship of a child. He would take the child to school, he would walk the child back from school. He would try to guide the child in moral matters. He would try to help the child in decision making. He would try to make him into a solid man. This particular word refers to a moral guardian. And a child could have...and he speaks with hyperbole here, exaggeration...you could have ten thousand moral guardians. You could have ten thousand people giving you information. You can come to the church here and you can have a lot of different people teaching you but you have only one spiritual father. And Paul says it's me who is your spiritual father and that's the reason I feel about you with such intensity. I'm not just one of the non-family members, I'm not just a slave assigned to do something for you. I'm more than a steward of God. I'm more than a slave of God, I'm more than a servant of God, I am your father spiritually and I feel that toward you. And therein really lies the depth and the compassion of his heart. He was not indifferent to them. He was not just merely carrying out orders as a servant. He was sensitive to them as a father.

Now this passage, 14 to 21, then expands on that concept and develops for us a very beautiful picture of the ministry of a spiritual father. Now preachers are to be spiritual fathers. But let me add this, so is every other Christian. So what I say is not only pertent...pertinent to me but it is equally pertinent to you. Let's look at it together.

What are the characteristics of a spiritual father? Now Paul doesn't give these, he doesn't list them as such, but by what he says we can understand what they are. They're here by implication. He's saying to them, "Now I am your spiritual father and this is what I do." And by seeing what he does we can draw out what marks a spiritual father.

This is so important. People ask me all the time, everywhere I go in conferences they say, "How do you disciple somebody? What is your discipleship program?" A week or so ago I spoke to a group of Free Methodist pastors, the question they asked: how do you disciple somebody? What is the process you use to take somebody who has been born into the family of God and raise them up as a spiritual son? How do you build them up in maturity? What are the principles of being a spiritual father? That's what we want to talk about right here.

Number one, the mark of a spiritual father is that he begets...he begets. Verse 15, "Though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, you have a lot of teachers, not many fathers. No, for in Christ Jesus I alone have begotten you through the gospel." Paul says I am your spiritual father first of all because I led you to Christ, that is begetting. And really that's where being a spiritual father has to start. A father is somebody who has a child, would you agree to that? You don't have a child, you're not a father. You may be a husband, you may be a man, but you're not a father. But you become a father when you produce an offspring. There are some Christians who are not spiritual fathers. They have never produced a child. They have never begotten anybody in Christ. They have never led anybody to Jesus Christ. They are not a spiritual father. And in a sense, they are a living contradiction to what a Christian is. A Christian is a living thing. And one of the characteristics of a living thing is the ability to do what? To reproduce. And so a Christian should be reproductive. Every believer should be a spiritual father in the metaphorical sense, bringing somebody to Christ.

Now Paul was the spiritual father of the Corinthians. In Acts chapter 18 he arrived in Corinth and he became very close friends with Aquila and Priscilla. In fact, he probably stayed in their house. And little by little he began to have an impact on the city of Corinth. He taught and preached. And finally it says Crispus believed and many of the Corinthians baptized believing and the church was born. And Paul was the agency of the birth of the church. He begot them.

Paul also went to Galatia and to the four towns in Galatia, Antioch of Pisidia, Derbe, Lystra and Iconium and started churches. And so when he wrote the Galatians in Galatians 4:19 he calls them my children, or my sons, my little children. There was a slave by the name of Onesimus who happened to get in contact with Paul when Paul was a prisoner. And Paul led him to Christ. And then Paul wrote his master, Philemon, the letter of Philemon. And in the letter he calls Onesimus "my son whom I have begotten in my bonds." So the idea of begetting is the idea of bringing someone to Christ. Paul called Timothy and Titus his children.

Now that's the basic thing. Now I want to add what he says into the text here so you'll get the picture. He says in Christ I have begotten you. Now even though the word "I" in the Greek is emphatic, he is not saying "I am the one who saved you." He is saying, "I alone as opposed to all your other teachers was the instrument through which you were saved. Consequently I feel a unique relationship to you. There is a sense of concern about you that I don't feel about those that I didn't lead to Christ." And I

think that's realistic. I'm not...I'm not excusing indifference to those that we didn't lead to Christ but I am saying that when you yourself leads someone to Jesus Christ, you tend to feel a greater degree of intimacy and responsibility than for one you did not. I just think that's the way it is. And so Paul says I have begotten you. I am the one who feels the concern, not all these other instructors. And the reason I write with such strength is because of that.

Now, he, however, does a good job of making sure we don't think that he is the whole story in salvation because he says this, "In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." And he recognizes two things, the power of God in Christ and the agency of God, the gospel. Really two things bring about salvation from a divine standpoint...the power of Christ and the truth of the Word of God. Is that right? But the third thing that is in there is the human agent. That's the way God has designed it. Because he is in Christ he has the power of Christ moving through him. Because he knows the Word of God he can give out the gospel. And that's very basic to bringing someone to Christ.

James 1:18 gives us an insight. It says simply there, "Of His own will begot He us with the word of truth." God does the begetting through the Word, James 1:18. In 1 Peter 1:23, "Being born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible by the Word." It is the Word of God that is the instrument. It is the Spirit of God, according to John 3, that is the power...the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, divine power. But there is the human agency. So Paul is saying yes, Christ is the power, yes the gospel or the Word of the truth is the instrument but I have been the agent that God has used. I therefore sense toward you a tremendous degree of spiritual responsibility.

Now I think it's important, people, to remember this that you can get so sovereign in your thinking that you don't think you need to do anything, God will just save whoever He wants. God does do the saving and God does have the Word of God as the instrument but God does use the human agent. Let me give you an illustration. Our Lord Jesus said this, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will save the people." Is that what He said? "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will...what?...send forth laborers." God has chosen not only redeeming men through His power and His Word but human agencies. So you and I are part of the process. An analogy in the human realm would be to put it this way, the father of a human child is used to plant the seed, but yet in every sense of the word that new born baby is a creation of God. And so we may be used by God to plant the seed. We may be used by God as the human instrument. But that doesn't violate the fact that what is born there is the creation of God. Hodge said, "For though multitudes are converted by the Spirit through the Word without any ministerial intervention, just as grain springs up here and there without a husbandman, yet it is the ordinance of God that the harvest of souls should be gathered by workman appointed for that purpose," end quote.

So a spiritual father begets. My dad used to say, I can hear him saying it, he said it so often, "The church ought to be a maternity ward where there is constantly heard the cry of newborn babes in

Christ." And that's true. Wouldn't it be exciting, we had about 55 babies we dedicated this morning, wouldn't it be equally as exciting to have 55 new babies in Jesus Christ this morning? But that's the way it ought to be. We ought to be begetting.

Secondly, a spiritual father not only begets but he loves. Now back up to verse 14, "I write not these things to shame you." You know, a loving father doesn't want to browbeat his children and have them cringing and cowering in a corner in fear. I don't write to do that to you. "But as my beloved sons, I admonish you." Now just pull the word "beloved" out of there. Paul loved these Corinthians. He loved them deeply. And the word is agapetosfrom agapao, the strongest kind of love, the deepest kind of love, not just brotherly love, not just phileolove but the deepest kind of love, the love that can only be measured by God. I have that toward you, I love you. And he truly did.

In 2 Corinthians in the second letter that he wrote to them under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit it says in verse 11, "O Corinthians, our speech to you is candid, our heart is wide open." Paul says I write you and I am an open book, I let it all out. You're hearing exactly what I'm saying. My heart is open to you. Man, that's a great characteristic, you know. That kind of openness and it's born out of love. He says there is constraint in your affections. He says I speak as unto my children, open wide your heart to us. Paul is saying...Hey, my heart's wide open to you, I care for you, I love you with all my heart, will you receive me in that way?" He cared about them.

In 2 Corinthians 11:11 he says, "Am I doing what I'm doing essentially because I love you not? God knows. God knows." It's not because I don't love you it's because I do love you. And then that great statement of 2 Corinthians 12:15, "And I will very gladly...oh what a statement...I will very gladly spend, I will very gladly spend, I will give everything I have, I will spend everything I have and be spent, even myself for you even though the more abundantly I love you the less I be loved." Isn't that a great statement? I will spend everything I have, I will even spend myself for you even though the more I love you the less you love me. That's love, love that is so strong and so deep and so far reaching that it doesn't even ask anything in return. He loved those people. It wasn't just sentimentalism, it was a strong unselfish love that cared and disciplined. And it was a self-sacrificing love where he would give his life for them. And that's as it ought to be for a father. There ought to be that love for our children.

You know, as a father I can qualify my love by certain characteristics...and maybe this will help to define how we are to love our spiritual children. When you love your children you have to love them with understanding. A father who loves his children really struggles to understand his children. He wants to meet their needs. He wants to know where they hurt. He wants to fulfill their hopes. He wants to bind up their wounds. He wants to dispel their fears. He wants to strengthen their weaknesses because he loves his children and he has to be understanding.

And I think it's true in raising spiritual children. Paul was so understanding with the Corinthians. Even in his sternness there was a sense of gentleness. He even referred to the meekness and gentleness of Christ. And that leads me to the second thought, in loving your children there is not only that understanding but that gentleness, like Jesus who said I am gentle and lowly of heart. Paul said to the Thessalonians, "We were gentle among you like a nursing mother." There's a sense of strength and a sense of gentleness. We have to recognize that spiritual children grow slowly, spiritual children frustrate us, spiritual children foul up, spiritual children have a hard time learning the principles. And so we have to be patient. And so we have to be understanding and gentle with them.

But in addition to that I think our love, like Paul's, makes us intense. It makes us have tremendous desire to see them follow the patterns we believe in. I remember when our children were little that I used to really worry about them running in the street. And Matt when he was little used to run in the street. You know, he did it a few times and then I, you know, really laid it on him. I mean, man, it was bad. We have this board that we use and we really use that baby on him. He was..he was feeling it. And, you know, I would lay in bed at night and I'd wake up with a jolt, you know, fearing that this dread that I had in my mind that one of my children would be run over. And I'd be somewhere else and I'd be thinking about home because I was afraid my kid would run in the street. And I was practically paranoid about children running in the street, so much so that my kids were practically paranoid about going in the street, you know. It was a big a problem to them as it was to me. But I used to worry about it. And the reason was, I didn't want my kid dead. It's obvious. And so I would really get earnest about that. And I think that when you love somebody you have such a tremendous concern for their welfare that you cannot be without passion. You cannot be without concern.

People may come even to Grace Church and they may listen to me and they say, "Man, he gets all excited about this." Well of course I do, I care about you, see? I mean, it matters to me how you behave. It matters to me how you respond. I want you to walk in the truth. I want you to be obedient. And that's why I pour my heart out to you in order that you might know that I care about you. I want to transmit through me the care that God has for you.

And so I love you and so I love my spiritual children, those I lead to Christ and did Paul love his spiritual children. It is characteristic of someone that you lead to Christ that you are to love that person. That means you are to make sacrifices for their sakes, spend anything you have, time, money, anything and be spent, wear yourself out for them. And even though they love you less for it, you still love them more.

Third thing, if we're going to raise a spiritual child, we not only must beget them and love them but we must admonish them, verse 14. "I write not these things to shame you." He didn't want them cowering in a corner, he didn't write the 1 Corinthians to make them all into fearful beaten dogs, whipped puppies sitting in a corner cringing. He wanted to bring some shame on them, yes. And he does speak to their shame as we shall see in 1 Corinthians 5:5. But he wanted them to go from

shame to a change of behavior. In other words, he's saying my purpose is not to destroy you, it's to reclaim you. It's like in Ephesians 6 where you have a father who provokes his child to wrath. You can discipline your child to the place where it ceases to be correction and becomes so wounding that he may never recover from it. And sometimes we pick up the pieces of adult lives who once were so beaten and oppressed by their parents without any reclamation or any redeeming that they were destroyed as human beings. Now Paul says I want to bring some shame but I want to go from shame to change. "So I write not these things to shame you but as my beloved sons I admonish you."

Now you've got to understand the word "admonish." The word means to criticize in love with a view toward a change. The word admonish assumes a problem, it assumes a weakness and it assumes a sin. And it is saying I see a sin, I see a weakness and I correct it in love so that you might be changed. It is not punishment, it is not just slamming home the rod. It is not just beating them with a big club. It is seeking a change in their behavior. You don't want people are shamed into almost the loss of their own sense of self-worth but those who are shamed into a change for what is right. So I admonish you. It presupposes a problem, the word noutheteodoes, and it means a change with a view toward being obedient to God.

An illustration of this is Eli. Eli was one of the most rotten parents that ever is recorded in the Bible. He absolutely was horrible. In 1 Samuel chapter 3 it tells us the sad story, chapter 2 and chapter 3, but 3:13 comments on Eli and it says, "The problem with Eli was his sons went bad because he restrained them not." And the word "restrained" is translated in the Septuagint "admonish." Same word. He never bothered to criticize them lovingly with a view toward a change. He never bothered to take them from this wrong behavior in love into right behavior. In fact, Eli didn't even know what they were doing. In chapter 2 he sees his sons and he says, "Hey, fellows, it's been told to me that you are sleeping with the ladies at the door of the temple." Wow, that's unbelievable. They're having love affairs with the ladies at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. That's pretty gross stuff. And Eli is the high priest. And he's saying, "You know, I've heard what you fellows have been doing." You've heard it, Eli? Where have you been? You start getting that kind of information second hand, you reveal a fact that you're not even involved in the life of your children.

Finally he hears about it and then he says to them, "Why did you do that?" You know what I thought when I read that? Eli, that is irrelevant. You're speculating about causes and you're supposed to be seeking solutions. He never did understand what he was supposed to be doing. Tragic. And he did not admonish his children.

Listen, if you have a spiritual child, it's no different. You better admonish him. If he's doing something wrong, criticize him in love with a view toward a change in his behavior. Don't damn him for it. "Boy, are you going to get it...oh baby, you just forfeited your reward, you are done." No not that, no that isn't the idea. The idea is a loving criticism with a view toward a change, not a dunning of somebody into feeling such shame they can't recover. We need to do this. A loving father doesn't

publicly shame his children. He doesn't make mockery out of his children. He doesn't make them a public display. But he does do things to see a change in their behavior. He aims to reclaim them, not to destroy them.

Oh, this is an important part of a father's work. Paul admonished, Colossians 1 he talks about admonishing every man, all the people he worked with he admonished to see a change in their behavior. Let's say you're discipling somebody and you see that person doing something wrong. You have the obligation if you really care about them, if you really love them, and if you really want to see them come to maturity, you have the obligation to say that's wrong and let me show you why it's wrong and let me show you how to make it right. That's part of discipling.

You know, a fellow was talking to me about discipling, he said, "You know, we've got a great discipleship program. We meet once a week and we teach these people discipleship principles." He said, "Is that how you do it?"

I said no. And I said, "I really question that because you can't just disciple somebody by teaching them. You have to confront their lives with the things that need to be happening in their lives as individuals. You have to get alongside of them and see what's going on."

All right, fourth, a spiritual father not only begets and loves and admonishes, but he sets the example. And maybe this is the most important thing at all. Certainly nothing works without this. Verse 16, "Wherefore I beseech you, be followers of me." Now one other characteristic of a spiritual father is that he sets a pattern for his children. If you're discipling somebody, just set the pattern that you want them to be. Whatever you want them to be is what you are. If you're not that then they're not going to be that either. If you say, "Now, my friend, I led you to Christ and I love you and I want to get you going here, so here are the principles and here are all the facts, now do these." And he looks at you and says, "Well yeah, you don't even do those." Well you've just lost it, haven't you? It's out the window.

You think about this, mom and dad, when you look at your kids. You want to disciple the kids in your home? You better be sure that you are what you want them to be because they'll never become what you want them to be unless they can see it in you. You'll just reproduce yourself all over again...and that's a fearful thing. The toughest place to disciple is in the home because you can't put on your disciple suit, you know, I'm going out to disciple and get your Bible and go out. See, you're there, man, in the morning when you're grubby and at night when you're tired and all that stuff. It's all hanging out. And if you can disciple somebody in the home, then there's a genuineness to your faith. That's why the Bible says that an elder or a leader in the church should have godly children. Why? Because it gives evidence of the truth of his ability to live the life.

So what are we saying then? We're saying that you must be able to set the pattern. He says I beseech you, be followers of me. The word "followers," mimetes, mimics, imitators. You imitate me. I'll set the pattern, you follow. Philippians 4:9, "The things that you have heard and seen in me, do." Do what I do. First Corinthians 11:1, "Be you followers of me as I am of Christ." He's saying, "Look, I'm the one to follow. I'm following Christ, you watch my life and make yours like mine."

Boy, that's exciting. Discipling isn't just teaching principles. It isn't just applying principles. It's living principles in front of those people. And your consistent life will become a rebuke in itself.

Verse 17, look at this, this is really super. "For this cause, for this reason, because of this idea of example, because I want you to be followers of me I have sent unto you Timothy." Now, you know, I read that and I thought, "Now that doesn't make any sense." If I had said to somebody, "Now I want you to be followers of me and because I do I'm coming to be with you." He doesn't say that. He's saying, "I want you to be followers of me so I'm sending him, Timothy."

You say, "Well what is the deal?" The deal is simply this, people, here is an illustration of the absolute ultimate in spiritual fatherhood. Paul had done such a job on rearing Timothy that sending Timothy was just like being there. Do you see the point? He had so raised Timothy to be a spiritual son that Timothy could stand in his place. I'm telling you, folks, that is the epitome of rearing spiritual children when you don't even have to go, you can send one of your sons in the faith in your place and know that if they follow him, they'll be following you who are following Christ. Now that's the way to minister on the broadest base.

The best way to be an effective minister is not to get a high-powered car, a handful of airplane tickets and keep going and go all over the place and minister to everybody. The best place to minister is probably to stay in one place, build spiritual children who then can go everywhere with the ministry. And they can, in a sense, be you, be Jesus Christ cause the principles are the same for everybody wherever they go. So the ultimate in raising a spiritual son is to be able to say, "Because I want you to be followers of me, I'm sending somebody else that I have raised."

Do you have anybody like that? When you can't go somewhere to present Christ, when you can't go somewhere to show people what a Christian is, when you can't go somewhere to minister, do you have somebody you can just grab and say, "Hey, would you be me over there? Would you take my place?" Because you know their spiritual life, you know the content of their living and their knowledge because you know they're so committed to Jesus Christ that it's just as if you were there? That's as it ought to be.

So he says I want you to follow me so I'm sending Timothy, listen, who is my beloved son. Again he goes on this father idea. My beloved son faithful in the Lord and he gets there he'll bring you into remembrance of my doctrine. Is that what it says? What does it say? My ways. When Timothy

comes you'll see how I do it. You'll see my ways which are in Christ. Paul, what a fantastic guy. Christ was living through Paul and Paul had been used of God to reproduce that same kind of life in Timothy. When Timothy gets there you'll know how I live, you'll know how I walk in Christ, be ye followers of me. Paul's conduct was Christlike and he had been the instrument by which God had made Timothy's equally Christlike.

So, the spiritual father begets and loves and admonishes and sets the example. Fifthly, he teaches. And here we come to the fact that there has to be the giving of principles, the end of verse 17, "When Timothy comes he's not coming with a lot of doctrine, he's coming just to be an example, that's all. And he will bring you into remembrance of my ways which are in Christ as I teach everywhere and every church." Now what he says by that is, "Look, Corinthians, Timothy is going to come and he's going to show you the principles."

Now listen. The principles aren't any different anywhere else, I'm not asking anything special out of you. This is the same thing that I teach everywhere. Paul taught the principles and he lived them...and watch, thirdly, he reproduced them in somebody else. There is the Christian life. There is how to make a disciple...teach it, live it and reproduce it.

So Paul taught. It's obvious that we believe in teaching, right? You can't live principles you don't know. God never put a premium on ignorance. There's no value in being stupid. There's honor in not knowing something. And biblically we are to know the Word of God. And so Paul says I'm teaching principles. Always the same principles, there's no...there's no relativity in the Christian life, there's no, "Well, if this applies to you, it's good...if it applies to you, it's good," no there's none of that dynamic inspiration here. I teach everywhere the same thing in every church. There's absolute truth. It's the same for everybody. It isn't cultural. It's absolute. And it isn't any different for you than anybody else. Timothy will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, the same principles that I teach everywhere.

So discipling somebody is teaching and applying and setting the pattern. Very important. And what can we say about teaching? Well, obviously we've said all there is to say about it again and again here at Grace Church, but one thought just might help. When you are in a situation of being a spiritual father, remember one thing, you're teaching should be practical and it should be simple. Some time we have to crucify our intellectualism and our erudition and get rid of our Doctors degrees and all the stuff that surrounds our lives that sort of gives us credibility academically and we've got to get down to a humble place and teach on a basic level.

I am so graphically faced with this in my own home when my kids ask me questions because I am a teacher of the Bible and I know the Bible and I'm well read in a lot of areas of the Bible, and then I go home and my kids ask me these questions, these little questions that kids ask. And I realize that it's very easy for me to talk to professor but it's a struggle for me to get down and be simple with those

children. I mean, those little questions like how can God be in my heart and in heaven at the same time...and things like that, that are very...how do you explain that to a little kid? Well He's everywhere. Well He must be really fat, see. No, He's not fat because He doesn't have a body. Well, then you're really long gone, see. So you struggle with that. That's why in our house we have a little children's book that teaches basic theology because I need some help to get that down to the very simplest possible way.

And so, it's important when I deal with spiritual children, that I be humbled to the place where I don't care about the intellectual thing, but I am willing to forget my education and get down there and struggle to be able to communicate something that is practical and simple. John Stott says, "If we love them, our objective will not be to impress them with our learning but to help them with theirs." Bishop Ryle says, "One of the keys to the eighteenth century British revival was the simplicity of the preaching." He says to attain this, quote: "They were not ashamed to crucify their style, sacrifice their reputation for learning. They carried out he maximum of Augustine who said, `A wooden key is not as beautiful as a gold one but if it can open the door when the gold one can't, it's far more useful.'" Good point.

I was reading a story in a British medical journal in 1957 of a patient in a mental ward who attended chapel. And all the patients in the mental ward were there because that's where they belonged, apparently. And the chaplain got up and spoke and he was so confusing that one of the people going out was heard to say, "There but for the grace of God go I." So...so, it's very easy to be impossible to understand. Jesus was so simple, wasn't He? You know, you think about the knowledge of Jesus and then you read the parables and they're so simple...simplicity.

All right, if we're to be a spiritual father we beget, we love, we admonish, we set the example, we teach...and one more and we'll be done...we discipline. We have to discipline. I mean, when it's time to use a rod, we use a rod. We have to come to those that we've led to Christ and we have to deal with them. I can think of many times in my own life with people that I've done this, when I've discipled somebody and I've just sat them down and I've just said, "You know, it grieves my heart to tell you this because I love you but you are out of line and there's going to have to be some changes in your life. Your testimony is not what it ought to be. Your not living by the principles." And you really come down to grips with this and sometimes there's some tears shed and sometimes there's some pain but when it's all done you've done what's right because you've confronted them with what has to be done.

Look at verse 18, now he says, "Some of you are puffed up as though I wouldn't come to you." The Corinthians had a puffed-up problem. They had pride. We saw that last time. And some of them were really proud. You know, they were saying, "O boy, you know, Paul won't dare come around here. He won't show up around here. You know why? Man, we've got control of this baby, he's afraid...he's afraid to show up. See, we've established new groups, Cephas group, Apollos group, Christ group and Paul has pretty well faded, he won't show up around here." They were really proud

and boastful.

And so, he says some of you are puffed up, you don't think I'm coming but I will come shortly. Then he throws this in, "If the Lord will." He knew to throw that in because a lot of times when he planned to go somewhere he never got there. "And I'll find out then not the speech of them that are puffed up but the power. I'll find out who is talk and who is real when I get there. You people talk a great game but I'm going to find out who's real, not who is just talking."

Discipline is important. Paul says when I come there I'm going to check some things out. Love is not easy blind sentiment, love really disciplines when it's necessary. You know something? A simple principle, an undisciplined child belongs to a parent is too selfish to love the child. And it's true spiritually. If Christians, everybody who is a Christian has been led to Christ by somebody. Why aren't we all mature? Because somebody who led us to Christ, or somebody else along the way hasn't cared enough to bring us to that place and maybe it's because they haven't been willing to discipline us. I thank God for that, people who are willing to discipline me spiritually. Even my own wife who is careful to do that when it is needed, and I thank God for that.

So, he says I'm going to come and find out which of you are all talk and which of you really manifest the power of God because the Kingdom of God is not word but power. This isn't an issue of words. I'm going to come and find out who is genuine. The man's true character is determined not by his words but the divine power exhibited in his life because if he's a member of the Kingdom of God, if God rules in his life then there's going to be power in his life, not just verbiage. Now he says I'm going to come and check you people out, that's what verses 18 to 20 mean, I'm going to check you out.

Now watch, verse 21, what are you going to do about it? What are you going to do? "Shall I come unto you with a rod." If you don't change, that's what's going to be. "Or in love and the spirit of gentleness." How do you want me to come? I'm coming and I'm coming shortly and how do you want me to come?

Did you notice there's no answer there in verse 21? Why isn't there any answer? Who had to make the answer? The Corinthians. The choice is yours. I'll come and if it needs to be a rod, it's going to be a rod and some heads are going to roll. That's right. But, I could come in love and gentleness, it's up to you. This is a great illustration of a loving father who is going to use the rod when he needs to use it, who's going to discipline when he needs to discipline and who's going to love in gentleness when that's called for. But the decision is theirs.

Have you ever told that to your children? Have you ever said, "Look, the choice is yours"? "You can obey me and everything will be great, but you don't obey me and the consequences you pay." That's what he's saying. God laid the laws down, you obey...great, fine. You don't...the rod.

And so, the spiritual father bares his heart. I care about you, he says. I begot you. I love you. I seek to see a change in your evil behavior. I want the pattern of my life to be the example for you. Paul cared about them...so much so that he was willing not only to teach them but to discipline them, to bring them into conformity to that pattern. That is as it should be.

My prayer for us, for me, for you, for all of us is that we would become in the fullest sense spiritual fathers. Wouldn't that be exciting? Why aren't we busy reproducing? There may be ten thousand instructors, all kinds of people that are teaching and giving input. Not many fathers. A Christian who isn't spiritually fathering somebody is a contradiction. My prayer for us is that we would all become spiritual fathers. Let's pray.

Lord, we know that some of us have failed miserably in this area...of really being all that we should be in terms of spiritual fathers. And, Lord, we would ask that somehow you would help us to see that and someway make some fresh commitments in our hearts to be what we ought to be, to find some folks and to bring them to Jesus, to beget them and to love them, admonish them, set an example for them, teach them, discipline them in order that they might grow up and that some day we might be able to say, "I want you to know how I live so I'm sending so-and-so." May it be, Father, that we have such disciples who can go for us and even in the place of Jesus Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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