



Growing Through The Gospel

Today's Scripture Text

1 Corinthians 4:14-21

Sermon Points

#1. God gifts the church family with spiritual parents

- Read 1 Corinthians 4:14, Ephesians 1:5b & Psalm 27:6

Paul strongly cautions the Corinthian church, in the same way a father would warn his children, when behaving poorly. There is a strong family-type bond between them, because the gospel had unified them in Christ, making them all part of God's family. When we place our faith in Christ, we are immediately adopted as God's sons and daughters, and are equals with one another, despite our backgrounds or abilities.

To grow and mature the church, God has always appointed spiritual parents to help steer us in the right direction, as we seek to develop in spiritual maturity. One of the ways in which we grow is in becoming truly convinced of our new identity as members of God's family. This progressively results in us becoming interdependent, and sharing who we truly are, including the areas of sin that need dealing with.

Our big issue with transparency and vulnerability is with our own inner fear of being exposed and ridiculed by those we trust. Shame is something that we avoid at all costs, and so instead of sharing our weaknesses with others, we hide from them, and keep up the appearance of maturity, when in fact we are suffering and broken inside. Part of the reason for our fear of exposure, is because many of us in the church are in fact untrustworthy with other people's personal information. In moments of weakness, or just pure foolishness, we justify our desire to tell another person, and we betray confidence. In the very place where this self-disclosure should be met with care and protection, it is not. In so doing, we tend to fuel the fear of shame by our own sin of gossip.

Spiritual parents, on the other hand, are there to correct us when we fall into this kind of sin, and steer us away from other ways of immaturity or worldliness. As believers, we should be able, as family, to trust one another fully with confessing our sins and struggles, so that we can be guided in repentance, healed, restored and encouraged. Sin always destroys, and therefore it is the most loving thing for family to confront and correct us. We all need this this loving leadership, guidance and advice from those walking with us on this journey.

- ♣ Why are spiritual parents necessary in the church?
- ♣ Why is the confession of our sin and struggles to one another so important for our spiritual growth?



- ♣ What is your biggest concern with being transparent with others within our community?
- ♣ If someone in our gospel community confronted you about a sin issue, how do you think you would respond?

#2. The church family ought to imitate its spiritual parents

- Read 1 Corinthians 4:15-16

There was no doubt that the Corinthians needed guidance in their Christian development, and Paul wanted them to grasp their need for spiritual parents, rather than just mere instructors in the faith. Parents are different from tutors/moral instructors, primarily because of their love and investment in the children that they are entrusted with. Teachers do what they are required to do, while parents guide, steer and care for children at great cost to themselves. If done perfectly, fathers would lead with selflessness, sacrifice, strong leadership, protection, mercy and tenderness. This was the way in which Paul taught and led the churches that he “birthed”, and he wanted them to imitate this kind of gospel-centered Christian maturity.

In his letter to Titus, Paul gave clear instructions for how to lead a church and for who should be placed in spiritual authority over them. In all churches, elders are to be fathers in the faith, but being spiritual parents is certainly not limited only to them. Spiritual parenting is something that we are all called to, because just as children are on a trajectory from infancy to adulthood, so are believers on the path from immaturity to maturity in the faith. Those who are more mature than us are to train and mentor us into maturity, and we are to do the same with those who are less mature in the faith than we are. As we grow in Christian maturity, we progressively live lives that are worthy of being imitated.

- ♣ What point was Paul trying to make by contrasting the difference between a spiritual father and a tutor?
- ♣ In what manner, should spiritual fathers parent their spiritual children? (i.e. what makes a good spiritual parent?)
- ♣ Why is the role of spiritual parenting not restricted to the elders or other male leaders in the church, and why is this important to note?
- ♣ Spiritual parenting is intentional, focused love and guidance and training, including correction and at times even rebuke. Who, in our church community, is currently playing this specific role in your life? Name the person and share a little bit about how this intentional relationship came about and what it has been like for you.
- ♣ If you have never had a spiritual mother or father in our church community, what are you going to do about that?

#3. Spiritual parents lead us to maturity

- Read 1 Corinthians 4:17-21 & Hebrews 12:6

The church in Corinth thought they were mature and independent, and yet they were still infants in the faith. This was evidenced by their attitudes and behaviours; still arguing with one another about petty things that had



no real relevance. They were still filled with pride and were unaware of it but this only highlighted their immaturity even more.

Many of us mistake our intellectual ability or theological knowledge for Christian maturity. Spiritual maturity is evidenced by the laying down of our old nature, and the pride of self, and instead handing our lives over to Christ, and bearing the fruit of righteousness and brotherly love. Christian maturity is displayed primarily through the fruit that our lives produce when we are submitted to the Spirit of God. It changes us, and focuses us on the gospel rather than on petty and insignificant matters. One of the ways this is evidenced is through our willing submission to church leadership, and the surrender of our personal preferences.

Knowing that this was not our natural disposition, God gave the church spiritual parents to model submission and surrender to Christ, and to instruct and lead the church in that same direction. As we continue to imitate those who imitate Christ, we will continue to grow in spiritual maturity. The minute we think we are all sorted and do not need to submit to or imitate leadership, it means that pride has set in and that we are no longer growing.

Because of their immaturity, Paul sent Timothy to the church in Corinth, so that he could help lead and guide them towards spiritual maturity. Paul entrusted Timothy, as a spiritual son who had faithfully imitated him, to become a spiritual father to the Corinthians. Paul hoped that they would choose to follow Timothy's example, rather than incur fatherly discipline, if they chose not to.

We are presented with the same choice: will we submit to our leaders and imitate them as they imitate Christ, or will we choose to do our own thing and cause division and dissension in the church? Will we choose to live lives of love and righteousness, or will we need to be disciplined, like disobedient children? Will we remain religious and try and live moral lives to keep God happy, or will we love our identity as God's children, dearly loved and free to live lives that honour him and bring blessing to ourselves and others?

- ♣ Why is our preoccupation with our own preferences and our discomfort a sign of our spiritual immaturity?
- ♣ Why is submission and surrender to our spiritual parents a sign of growing maturity in the faith?
- ♣ Why did Paul send Timothy to the church in Corinth and what does this teach us about who our spiritual parents should be?
- ♣ As children in the faith, why is spiritual discipline a choice we make and why is it necessary and appropriate for disobedience?
- ♣ In what area of your life is God prompting you to grow in spiritual maturity?