



**1 Cor. 4:14-21**  
***Spiritual Parenting***

14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.

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.

16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

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.

18 Now some are puffed up, as though I were not coming to you.

19 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.

20 For the kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

21 What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?

There is an old saying that *the Apple does not fall from the tree*, which means that children tend to become like their parents. We might wish that they grew up to be the way that we would like them to be, but the truth is that they usually end up being more like we are. That is not always the case of course, sometimes godly and humble parents will produce wretched, arrogant, unbelieving children, and other times by God's grace, unbelieving parents will produce children who will go on to become wonderful believers.

But by and large, those are the exceptions not the rule. As you follow the history of the Kings of Israel and Judah in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, you read lines like the following all the time: ***“he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father”***

OR

***“And he walked in the way of his father Asa, and did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of the LORD.”***

It is generally the way of the Lord that as the father goes, so go his children, and that is one of the reasons why many evangelical churches are failing to hold on to the next generation of children. You see via youth groups and VBS and demographically tailored programs, they go directly after the children and essentially circumvent the parents. Now I am not saying that VBS or going bowling with Christian kids are bad things, but they do not of themselves produce godly Christian adults. In fact of those children who come from non-Christian or nominal households who make a profession of faith through a youth group, only about 16% end up back in the church.

No, the rule we see in the word is *godly parents, godly children* and therefore I believe the biblical approach is to go after families and in particular fathers and work on crafting them into the kind of households that (Prov. 22:6) “train up a child in the way he *should* go” – in other words teach fathers and mothers to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4)

But if the rule is Godly physical fathers produce godly children, then that rule is even more certain when it comes to spiritual fathers, that is why Pastors like Robert Murray McCheyne were led to say ***“What my people need most is my own holiness.”*** If we Pastors are not men of holiness, men who know the Lord and follow Him ourselves, then it is certain that all the programs in the world will not make our spiritual children Holy.

Paul was just such a godly spiritual father. Unfortunately, while he was away, his children had fallen under some fairly bad influences and were beginning to go astray, to become arrogant and puffed and as a result he had found it necessary to write some fairly harsh words to bring them into line.

Now some people have grown uneasy about Paul calling himself a father, they point out that Jesus said ***“Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.”*** (Matt.23:9) and wonder if Paul wasn't contradicting his Master.

The answer to that is first to remember the context of Christ's statement and Paul's. Christ was speaking to the people about the Pharisees, who wanted people to call them ***father*** as an honorary title. They usurped the honor of God, applying it to themselves, and in fact that were far from being spiritual fathers in any sense. They were as Christ put it “Blind Guides” who travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, they made him twice as much a son of hell as themselves.

Paul on the other hand is not using this as an honorary title, or in any way drawing the glory to himself. Rather he is making a comparison to physical fathering and speaking as the unique agent that Christ used in bringing them to Christ and it was the power of the Gospel, not of Paul that had produced their spiritual rebirth. Charles Hodge explains it well when he says: ***“In himself he could do nothing. It was only as an instrument in the hand of Christ that he was successful in bringing them to the obedience of faith by means of the gospel. There are three agencies in the conversion of men. The efficiency is in Christ by his Spirit; the administrative agency is in preachers; the instrumental in the word.”***

They could only be converted once and therefore while they might have many who would help them like tutors to grow in Christ they only had one father who had begotten them. That was Paul's great desire of course to see converts, Spiritual children and I wish I was more used in the begetting than the tutoring process my self, I feel the tug of Paul's words when he said in Romans 15:20 ***And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation,***

In any event let's see if we can't learn spiritual parenting from Paul, because I believe that in this section there are words of great wisdom that can be applied to pastors, parents, and individuals.

**First, spiritual parents actually have spiritual children! (verse 15)**

Tutoring, pedagoguing much easier

Pastors, Parents, individuals

**Second spiritual parents love their children. (verses 14 & 21)**

He does not rebuke to shame or beat them up, but to chasten, a fact that he is willing to confirm by his willingness even to use Church discipline.

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

***7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?***

It is not easy to pour yourself out, to rebuke, much easier to program and stay aloof... Discipline

**Third, *Spiritual parents are worthy of emulation***

*But what example are WE to be conformed to -*

*Follow me as I follow Christ*

***2 Thess. 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;***

***8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,***

***9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.***

Says he is sending a real spiritual son, Timothy to remind him of his ways *in Christ* and what he taught everywhere.

*You can assess pastors by this simple rule - If every church member of the church were like him...*

*Baptismal vow*

**Fourthly, *Spiritual Parents are not all talk (v. 19, 20)***

**Talkatives...**

***1 Thess 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.***

***Romans 15:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.***