

APPLE NAILING

by Paul David Tripp

This is the introduction to Paul David Tripp's series of messages "Your Christian School: A Culture of Grace?" to be given at the 2014 ACCS Annual Conference in Orlando, FL

If I were to watch a video of the last six weeks of your school—a nice comprehensive video of the last six weeks of your school—would I walk away saying, “This school is a culture of grace”? What would be the descriptive terms that I would use to capture what was on that video?

I’m very concerned about the state of Christian schools. I love Christian education. I love this moment. I love the thousands of people who have given time, money, and energy. I get a sense that many teachers are underpaid and undervalued. So I want you to know that I have great esteem and great respect for what you are doing. And here’s my concern: I’m concerned that in the way that we have structured Christian schools, we are asking the law to do what only grace can accomplish. We’ve fallen into thinking that if we have the right set of demerits, the right set of rewards, and a good system

of consequences, we can change the life and character of a child.

If the law had any possibility at all of changing a child, Jesus would have never had to come. That’s not in our model. We do not believe in systems of redemption, we believe in a Redeemer! Every other system is a system of redemption—it somehow buys into the hope that change can take place without the person and work of a redeemer. If we believe that, we wouldn’t be doing what we are doing. Now I’m not arguing, and I won’t argue, that we don’t need rules and regulations—we do. The law reveals sin. The law has some capacity to restrain sin, but hear this, it will never deliver your children from it . . . ever, ever, ever. And hear this, you are never, ever just dealing with the mind of a child. You cannot separate that mind from other parts of that child’s being. If education were just about the mind, your job would

Paul is president of Paul Tripp Ministries, a nonprofit ministry, whose mission statement is “connecting the transforming power of Jesus Christ to everyday life.” Paul is the founder of a Christian school, was the principal for 8 years, and taught kindergarten for 4 years. With a pastor’s heart for pastors, he is Professor of Pastoral Life and Care at Redeemer Seminary in Dallas, Texas, and the Executive Director of the Center for Pastoral Life and Care under the auspices of the Association of Biblical Counselors. Paul has taught at respected institutions worldwide and has written many books on Christian living that are distributed internationally.

be so much easier. You know that it's not just about the mind.

Well, let's look at the first principle. The Bible says something very radical. The Bible says that your students live, act, speak, and respond out of their hearts. Now I'm going to tell you what that means; I'm going to take you to a passage of Scripture. That means you have to embrace this—that the behavior of your children is caused more by what is inside of them than by what is outside of them. The behavior of your children is more formed, shaped, directed, and caused by what is inside of them than what's outside of them. Now there is not a child in your classroom who believes that. Because if Georgie and Lisa are fighting in the cloakroom, and you ask Georgie what's wrong, who do you think he is going to talk about? Yes, Lisa. And if you ask Lisa what's wrong, who do you think she is going to talk about? Yes, Georgie. Georgie is not going to say, "Well teacher, I'm a sinner. And I happen to live out of the heart. And what I've just done I've done by what is inside of me. If you could help me with heart change, that would be wonderful." That Georgie doesn't exist.

Luke 6:43 is one of the more fundamental illustrations that Christ uses. It's paradigmatic. It's formative. It's foundational.

For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks (ESV, Luke 6:43).

The Bible says that the way that we are hardwired as human beings is that we live out of the heart. Now it is very, very important that you understand the

language of the passage. I'm not going to assume that you do, so if this is review, please forgive it. The Bible essentially divides a human being into two parts, your outer man and your inner man. Your outer man is your physical self; it's your body. It's the house that God has designed for your heart while you are here on earth. You could literally call your body your "earth suit." Someday we are going to get a new suit; some of us are excited about that. And then there is the inner man. There are many words used in Scripture for the inner man: mind, emotion, soul, spirit, will. Those are all collected into one big basket term, the term "heart." That's the summary term for the inner man. That term is used in some 960 passages of Scripture; it's one of the most well-developed themes in the entire Bible. Now when you read in Scripture the word "heart," this is the definition that should be in your brain: **the causal core of your personhood**. Heart is the causal core of your personhood. Heart is the seat of your emotions, the seat of the thoughts, the seat of the desires, the seat of your values. The Bible attributes all of that to the heart. The heart is the causal core of your personhood. The heart is the steering wheel; the heart is the directional system.

Notice what it says here in the last sentence: . . . "out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." Have you ever said to someone, "Oh, I didn't mean to say that?" What would be more biblical to say is "please forgive me in saying what I meant," because if it hadn't been in your heart, it wouldn't have come out of your lips. Sorry, it's true.

Now teachers, hear what I'm about to say—if you are going to believe this for your children, you must first believe it for you. When you are shaken on a given day, by the sin, weakness, and failure of your students, what comes out of you is what was already inside of you. And if you are going to get at heart issues of your children, you have to start with your own heart.

This is a radical passage because I think sinners are very, very skilled and very, very dedicated

environmentalists. We, when we think wrong, when we speak wrong, when we do wrong, we are very, very skilled at pointing to what's outside of us and saying, "If this weren't going on in my life, I wouldn't be doing this."

Let me give you an example. Maybe you are sitting in traffic, mind-numbing traffic. You are on a road that is not designed to be a parking lot. And you are pounding on the dash: "This traffic makes me so angry!" And that sounds legitimate. It sounds right to say, "I would be an un-angry person if it weren't for this traffic; my problem is the traffic." Except you look out the window next to you and the woman next to you has a makeup kit out, and she's putting on her lips, and has a big smile on her face and she's thinking, "God must love me because He's given me a few minutes to reach a higher level of gorgeousness before I face my day."

You see? Why are there two different responses to the same moment? It is because the second brings a different heart to the moment. Maybe you have a very important meeting that you think is going to contribute to your career and you are just ripping that the traffic is in your way. Or, maybe you are just a little self-sovereign and you don't like anything in your way. She, on the other hand, wants to be beautiful and is enjoying the opportunity to enhance what God has created. You see—that's the heart.

Let me illustrate it for you this way. Imagine holding a bottle of water with the top off. What happens if you were to shake the opened bottle? Some water would spill out of the bottle. Now why did water come out of the bottle? Well, the spontaneous response you would have is because you shook it. That seems to make sense. Let me change the question a bit. Why did water come out of the bottle? (Because it was filled with water.) If this bottle were filled with milk, you could shake it for eternity and water would never come out of it. You see, again, when that child is shaken by the things around him, what comes out of him is what was already inside of him. That's what Jesus was teaching. "The good man produces good." That's a profound insight I don't think

we believe. And so we're given to all kinds of external, structural kinds of changes because we think those will ultimately win the battle. **They won't win the battle unless they address the place where the battle actually exists: the heart.**

Now Jesus gives us a wonderful physical example here. I love this example; it's the example of a fruit tree. Pretend with me that in my backyard in Philadelphia I have an apple tree. And every year my tree grows hard, pulpy, dry inedible apples. Organic hockey pucks.

Now think about this. Before you go any further, think. When you see an apple tree, you recognize it's an apple tree by what? Apples. But you instinctively know, don't you, that that tree is "appleistic" all the way down to its core, all the way down to its roots. If there weren't "appleism" in its roots, it wouldn't grow apples as fruit, right? You will never plant peach pits and get apples.

And so my tree, that's meant to be an apple tree, grows these organic hockey pucks. And that happens year after year; it's very discouraging—you can't eat them. They just sort of rot and fall to the ground. And finally my dear wife, Luella, comes to me and says, "Paul, it doesn't make any sense for us to have an apple tree when we can never eat the apples. Can't you do something about our apple tree?"

Well, I think and I ponder and I say to Luella, "Saturday morning I'm going to fix our tree." She's a little bit confused, but she's excited. Saturday morning she looks out the back window and she sees me carrying these items: a big tall ladder, some branch cutters, a pneumatic nail gun, and three bushels of red delicious apples. And I lovingly cut off all of those organic pucks and with dedication and zeal, symmetrically nail onto that tree three bushels of red delicious apples. From 75 yards away, you would look at that tree and think, "This man must be the horticulturalist of the century." If you're my wife, what are you thinking? You are thinking, this is the big one; the doctor said he'd be this way if he lives.

Now what's going to happen to those apples? They

are going to rot because they are not hooked to the life-giving resources of the tree. But even more profoundly brothers and sisters, hear what I'm about to ask. What kind of apples is that tree going to produce next season? Dry, pulpy, hard, brown, inedible apples. The tree produces those apples because there's something systemically wrong with that tree down to its roots. And if you don't get at that you won't get to a harvest of good fruit.

Now, I am deeply persuaded that most of what we do in Christian education to work change in children is nothing more or less than "apple nailing." And we are good at it.

Apple nailing. There is no capacity at all whatsoever to change the heart of that child.

I'll give you the young classroom example. Somebody has done something unkind to another student in your classroom. Teacher goes to Jimmy and says, "Say you're sorry." He's not! Why would you say that to him? He says, "Sorry." You say, "Say it like you mean it." He doesn't, because he's not. "Say it like you mean it." So he says, "Sooooorryy." You say, "At least say a sentence." He says, "I'mmmm sorrrrrrryyy." And you say, "That's better." There's nothing better about that at all. Welcome to Pharisee University.

What he has learned is nothing about the love of his neighbor. What he has learned is how to jump through your external hoops. And when you turn and go down the hallway, Jimmy sticks his tongue out at his classmate, demonstrating that there has been no change inside of that boy at all. But he thinks he's in a better place because you have a system that has made him OK. He's not OK. And he's learned this deadly skill: stay inside the boundaries when an authority is watching. You don't get in trouble when you do that.

That's neither godly nor moral. It's not. It's apple nailing.