

Parenting (Part 2): Fathers

Fatherhood

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As you might remember, my last sermon given before Pentecost dwelt with "Parenting Principles." I wanted to show particularly what God's perspective on parenting is. The main point I stressed is that God has revealed Himself to us as a parent. He has requested of us that we call Him "our Father in heaven." He has revealed Himself through the Son that He is the Father—a father, a parent.

A good portion of our spiritual responsibility then is to become a parent like He is. We are to grow into the image of Him, as well as His Son. There are certain aspects of being a father that we need to take on in our character. In many respects, when we come right down to it in our own parenting practices, we are our child's gods until they are old enough to learn about the true God in heaven.

Our example then will be a great benefit to them in understanding the Father, if our example is good, if we are being parents in God's image. On the other hand it may be a very bad thing if our example is not good to try to point them to the Father, and start them off with very poor representation of what the Father is like.

Paul tells us in Galatians 4:26 that "Jerusalem above is the mother of us all," but far and away, in the Bible's focus, the Father is the central figure.

Let us start in Ephesians 3. I want to lay this as groundwork immediately. I want you to see the emphasis here on the Father. At the end of Ephesians 2 Paul had been talking about us being part of the body of Christ, and that we are members of the household of God. Then there is a long parenthetical statement from Ephesians 3:2 to verse 13, but he starts up again in verse 14.

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

That "from whom" is referring to the Father, not Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus Christ is the closest name to that "from whom," its referent is actually the Father. "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father. . . . from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." That includes everybody in heaven and earth that is part of the God Family.

Ephesians 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

That is pretty *all* encompassing, do you not think? If we wanted to change the way this reads and maybe make it a little bit more understandable, this would say, "One God and Father of all, who rules over all, and pervades all, and dwells in you all." This gives you a little bit better sense of what the prepositions there intimate about how the Father is *everything* to us. He rules over us, He dwells in us, and He should pervade everything that we do, everything that we are.

We are supposed to be filled with the fullness of God as much as we can in this life. In the next we will be just like Him. Everything begins and ends with the Father. His name identifies the entire God Family. "He does the works," Jesus said. He ultimately is the One who gets all the glory. The central figure in a Christian's life is the Father.

The human father in the human family should have a similar position, because that is the model that we are supposed to copy. He is the head of the family under Christ. Today though, this concept is almost nonexistent for various reasons. I would like to try to reinvigorate it in the church. In this group specifically (and I know there are lots of others in other groups that hear these messages), I would like them and all of us to think very seriously about fatherhood, and how absent it is from the American family. I want us

to think about how it has degenerated in the church even as it has in the world, and revive the institution of fatherhood in the church, because the family begins and ends with the father.

This is an especially appropriate time to speak on this subject since tomorrow in America is Father's Day. It is time to recommit ourselves as men to the model that goes through the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. It is the one way that God has given us of running a family that is going to produce the best results in the end. No matter what the feminists say, no matter what modern psychology says, no matter what modern sociology says, if God says that it is the best way, *it is the best way*. And even though we may go through some bumps in the road and into some ditches because we are not perfectly able to put it into practice, it is still the best way overall.

While researching for this sermon I came across an article in *U. S. Catholic Magazine*, dated February 1994. The title of this article tells you everything you need to know—"Does the Bible know best about fathers?" Catholic theologians are predominately liberal, as far as I have been able to see, because they do not believe the Bible basically. Even conservative Catholic theologians believe that tradition rates higher than the Bible, and what the "vicar of Christ" says from the Holy See is higher than what the Bible says. I found that most Catholic theologians are very liberal when it comes to applying the Word of God, and this author, whose name is Leland J. White, is no different. His basic argument is that since our culture is so much different from the one that is presented in the Bible, that the childrearing practices that are shown in the pages of Scripture are basically worthless. He just comes flat out and says that.

His approach is what I would call "evolutionary humanism." This is a basic belief that man, who is the center of all things—the whole universe—is improving, that he is only getting better. The "evolutionary concept" is that we started out less than apes, and now we are here, millions or billions of years later, and we are a whole lot better, and we are going to get better. That is "evolutionary humanism."

According to this philosophy, man has outgrown the culture and teaching of the Bible because we have learned so much in the intervening time. We have

come so far. Look at our technology. Look at what we know. Our knowledge is doubling every two or three years now. We are so much better and know so much more than they knew back then. Human nature has improved since then.

This philosophy says we know how to stop wars, and get rid of disease. We know how to do things and get people working together, according to this philosophy. Man has learned from the mistakes of the past, from former generations. We have better control of things, have better control of nature, better control of even ourselves in some respects. We are simply better in every way.

I saw a lot of skeptical looks on your faces out there, and I know that the vast majority of us would disagree vehemently with these conclusions. See, we do not believe in "evolutionary humanism." We believe in God as the center of all things. At the very best we think that man has gotten no worse, if you take my meaning. A thing left to itself however will degenerate, and man may have gone down a slippery slope. Human nature is at best the same as it was in Bible times. There are a lot more ways for human nature to get out of control because men have a lot more opportunities to sin. With greatly increased communications and greatly increased travel, man has a lot more exposure to a lot more things.

We know for sure that men *constantly* repeat the mistakes of the past. Look at what is happening in the Balkans today. That is a rerun in many ways of what happened only seventy years ago, or closing in on eighty years ago, before the First World War. It was in that region of Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, where the First World War got its start with the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand.

Are we learning from the mistakes of the past? I would say that a good lesson would be, let the people of the Balkans fight it out among themselves. The West should keep its nose where it will not get chewed off. Those people have been fighting for hundreds of years, and no person from Washington, D.C., who has a horrible moral record, is going to come in there and change the situation for the better. This is my opinion of course, but it just shows you human nature has gotten worse. We repeat the mistakes of the past.

We have so little control over things that this earth is fighting back in so many different ways. The weather is a sign that the earth is being disrupted. It is the principle of the Pentateuch—"the land will vomit you out." I believe it is in Leviticus where it says that if you cannot take care of things as God created them to be cared for, and your sins mount up, the earth will fight back. We do not have more control than we used to. We have less. We are men; we are not God, but we try to fashion ourselves into gods.

This is the same type of thing that they did at the Tower of Babel, and things are fighting back now because the order has been turned upside down. The one Being who can help us the most is the Great Creator God who has made us and knows us intimately. He has put that instruction in the Bible, and it is not worthless. It is *everything*! It is the mind of the Father given to us in writing, for us to lead very full and worthwhile lives, and to get us along the road that will gain us entrance into His Kingdom. He is producing children for Himself. He is reproducing Himself. How often did we hear Mr. Armstrong say that? That is why He introduces Himself to us as *Father*. That is the game—family.

Let us go now to Proverbs 1. I want you to look at this in terms of its spiritual sense, not its physical sense. The book of Proverbs is a book of instruction from a father to a son. Some have thought that it is Solomon writing down what David taught him. I do not know if that is actually the case. Maybe it is what Solomon taught his son. I am not sure, but it says it is the words of Solomon, but it mentions also David there in verse 1. David obviously had a great deal of influence over what was written here.

Proverbs 1:8-9 My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be graceful ornaments on your head, and chains about your neck.

Proverbs 2:6 For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Proverbs 6:20-23 My son, keep your father's command, and do not forsake the law of your mother. Bind them continually upon your heart; tie them around your neck. When you roam, they will lead

you; when you sleep, they will keep you; and when you awake, they will speak with you. For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light: Reproofs of instruction are the way of life.

Proverbs 7:1 My son, keep my words, and treasure my commands within you.

Can you hear God the Father talking? That is the sort of thing I want you to understand here; not a physical father talking to his physical son, but a spiritual godly Father talking to His spiritual son—you and me.

Proverbs 7:2-4 Keep my commands and live. [This sounds like Deuteronomy 30:19, does it not?], and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding your nearest kin.

Proverbs 23:22 Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old.

There are several references to mothers in there as well, but it is the mother that follows the lead of the father. In speaking of the church as the mother, the church should be teaching exactly what the father instructs so the law of the mother is the same as the law of the father. Proverbs beseeches us to listen to God's wisdom, because in it is the way of life that leads to peace and happiness and joy and hope and wellbeing, and ultimately to the Kingdom of God.

The Father has the answers to all of life's questions, all of life's situations, and He willingly gives the answers and the blessings to those who seek Him. Remember what Jesus said about the son who asks his father for a fish. Does God the Father give us a stone? No. Jesus ends that little teaching with, "No. The Father is willing to give you everything you ask." God the Father is willing to give us the answers, if we diligently seek Him.

What then is "the family culture of the Bible" (to put it in terms of that Catholic theologian)? To put it simply, it is a word that has become hated in

our society, because Satan the Devil hates it. The word of the family culture of the Bible is *patriarchy*. This is a loaded term in today's society. Feminism, where mostly this hatred comes from, has convinced most of the Western world that patriarchy is evil. They prefer equality, or democracy, or matriarchy, because women, according to feminists, are able to control themselves and rule the family.

The feminists say that fathers are abusive, despotic, totalitarian, authoritarian, domineering, and that fatherhood is unnatural because of the evolutionary concept. Mothers give birth. Mothers raise children. The father, in the evolutionary concept, is only necessary to produce the sperm. That is why they call patriarchy and a father-ruled family as unnatural.

You have to understand where they are coming from. The evolutionary concept puts dad way to the side. To them patriarchy, like I said, is abusive, domineering, authoritarian, and hierarchical. They do not like that either. They like democracy. "Authoritarian and UN-natural" is Satan's viewpoint in a nutshell. He likes none of those things, because God was the One over him. He wants to be number one, so he puts down everything that has authority, because he wants everybody to be out for himself.

I want to use *patriarchy* in its most simple form. Patriarchy is family organization with the father having ultimate authority. There are no loaded terms there. Very simply, *patriarchy* is family organization, with the father having ultimate authority. I know "authority" might be one of those loaded terms, but he has the final say in all matters of the family, if they get to that point where he needs to make a decision.

In a patriarchy all members of the family are subject to the father for as long as they live under his roof. He has authority to make final decisions on the major matters. There is not just authority there, because with authority comes responsibility. He not only has the authority to make the major decisions, he has the responsibility to provide for the needs of his entire family. He must make sure that the ultimate wellbeing, physical and spiritual, of the mother, the children, and any dependents that might be there, is high. If we look at it from that perspective, this is quite a heavy burden on the father.

Let us go to I Timothy 3 and look at this from the church perspective now. This is where we find the qualifications for elders.

I Timothy 3:1-5 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop [an overseer, an elder], he desires a good work [desires to be helpful, to serve]. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?).

Do you see where God places this idea of patriarchy—of the father being the head of the family? He says in His church the elders will show by their actions that they can rule or administer a family in a proper godly way before the whole congregation. If they cannot do that, they are going to ruin the church in one way or another.

An elder's family example is very important to the rest of the church. I do not want to get into all this what "rule" means. The basic thought is that it is an administration of authority and responsibility. That term has become loaded in the church as well. It simply means that God has given a person a task, and he has to work it out the best way, under God's law, under God's will, for the best of all concerned. That means that he has authority in the sphere of responsibility that God has given him.

I Timothy 3:12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

The qualifications for deacons are the same as for elders. Deacons have to be paragons of virtue as far as family goes, just like the elders. It is important to the well-being of the church that the leaders of the church rule their own families, and make sure the children are obedient and submissive to both the father and the mother, and that the mother/wife is also subject and respectful to the husband.

Ephesians 5:22-24 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Paul does not pull any punches here, does he?

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Does this not give you an idea of the role of father here, showing love to the wife, sacrificing himself for her, and sanctifying her—setting her apart—so that he could teach the Word, so that the wife and the family will grow and be cleansed in the Word? Is that not a huge responsibility? He is showing love and sacrifice in his role as father and husband.

Ephesians 5:28a So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies [This is no holding back.]; he who loves his wife loves himself

If you are showing love to your wife, you are fulfilling your role. In fulfilling your role, you will have salvation, because you are doing God's will. There is another scripture in Timothy that says the wife has salvation because she fulfills *her* role. This is where God has placed us, and this is where we have our laboratory, let us say, to perfect God's way in us. It is by carrying out the duties that we have in our roles that we show God that we are growing and that we deserve to be in His Kingdom. Not that we deserve it necessarily in that sense, but that we are coming to the point where He can feel good about having us there as members of His Family who will be able to contribute, because they have learned and grown in His character.

Ephesians 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.

This shows you that the husband's role is not to be abusive in any way, not to be domineering, not to be authoritarian. How could you show love if you are being like that? "Would you be that way to your own body?" Paul says. No. You cherish your own body, and it is the same type of love and concern that you would give to a wife.

Ephesians 5:30-31 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

This is the whole reason for all of this. A man is to grow up, leave his father and his mother, get married, and learn these lessons, if everything works out, if that is the route God has chosen for him. Obviously there are some men who have gone all their lives without being married, but the general rule is that men are to get married and to have children, if possible, because there is a great deal of learning in that. And by that, in many ways we come to understand the relationships within the God Family—between us and the Father, between us and the Son, between us and the church. That is the normal route that He wants men to go.

Ephesians 5:32 This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

That is the overall thing that He wants everybody to get, that this instruction is going to enhance our spiritual lives, that first overall, the pattern is Christ and the church. We come up to that understanding and learn and grow in it by our physical marriages and families. We learn so much.

Ephesians 5:33 Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. And you, fathers, do not provoke your

children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Notice the family organization. It is very clear. Father/husband, mother/wife, and children. I Corinthians 11:3 says the same thing. Christ is the head of the church, and under Him is the husband, and then under the husband is the wife.

I Corinthians 11:3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Paul, here in the New Testament, lays out patriarchy as the proper form of family for Christians. That should not come as a surprise at all, because as it says in Ephesians 6:32, it is the pattern of the divine order itself—Christ and the church, and the Father over all. We can never go wrong copying God's way of doing things, because it is the one that is going to work out the best.

I do want to go over this "submission" aspect here, because I think it is important. I am sure that there are still some people out there in the church who do not like this submission thing. There are still women out there who have been touched by the feminism of the world. My own personal opinion is that feminism is probably one of the worst philosophical ideas that has ever come down the pike. It ranks right up there with materialism and selfishness, because that is bound up within it.

I know that in Worldwide, as things got really bad, many brides and grooms were writing their own vows so that they could get around this submission clause in Ephesians 5:22. Just in case any of that lingers, let me show you what godly submission is. We will read verses 15 through 21 of Ephesians 5 to see the context of what led into this.

Ephesians 5:15-18 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

Look, times are bad. The end is near. Now is the time to get down to brass tacks here. Be filled with the Spirit. Redeem the time. Do not be foolish. This is time to fish, or cut bait. (I used a lot of metaphors there, but I hope you caught on to one.)

Ephesians 5:18c-19 but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord . . .

What he is getting at is these ideas—the things that are in the Psalms. The things that are in the Bible should be constantly running through our minds and coming out in some sort of visible way, whether in action, or whether in speech. They should just fill us.

Ephesians 5:20-21 . . . giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Not only are women supposed to be submitting to the men, but all of us are supposed to be submitting to every other one of us; young to old, old to young; men to women; Jew and Gentile, it does not matter. We are all to be submitting ourselves one to another. Minister to lay person, and lay person to minister.

Times are *bad*. The end is *near*. It is time to stop worrying about rank and position and who is where and doing what. It is time to **do** God's way. So submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Jesus Christ submitted to God the Father and the plan that They had. He made no reputation of Himself, but came in the form of a man to give His life for us. And look where that led Him.

Now every knee will bow to Him. He submitted. He did the will of God, and He will be exalted. He is already exalted above all, but many have not come to understand it yet. But in the end, every knee will bow to Him. Do you know what He does? In the end, He gives everything over to the Father. He submits once again. (I Corinthians 15). This is our example.

This is the run-up to this section to marriage and the family. Everybody submits to everybody else. The context is this Christian walk that we are doing—living in the will of God. If we are going to be doing the will of God, we will be submitting, one to another. We will be considering others better or higher than ourselves. That is also in Philippians 2.

Paul says this same attitude should reign in our most intimate relationships. Remember what I said. This is the laboratory. This is where we work it out. This is where we have the relationships that we should be working with the most. Paul uses this teaching on submitting to segue into the area where we are going to have the most practice—marriage and the family. So he tells wives to submit to their husbands. You know God inspired this, because wives have a hard time submitting to their husbands. So Paul gives them the instruction they need the most.

In the same way he gives the instruction to the husbands that they need the most—to love their wives. Maybe husbands have no problem submitting to their wives most of the times, and maybe wives do not have very much trouble loving their husbands most of the time, but it is the submission thing that trips them up. And for men, it is this loving thing that trips them up. So God says, "Wives, you work on submitting. Husbands, you work on loving."

Now what is this word "submission" in the Greek? The Greek word is *hupotasso*. It literally means to arrange, to set under, to position under. *Hupo* means under, *tasso* means to arrange, to put or to position, to set something. When someone is submitting, they are putting themselves *under*. They are arranging themselves *under*.

This is a military term. I think those of you who have been in the army and understand a little bit about the army, you can come to understand this. In the army, in military terms, it means to subordinate. It means to place under. It means to rank under, as in one officer being subordinate to another. In the organization of things, the lieutenant must come under, say, the captain or whatever the next higher rank is. Why? Because the army runs better when lieutenants are under captains and sergeants are under lieutenants.

Do you understand? One ranks under another, because that is where the commanding officer of the army has placed them. The whole army then

works better when all the officers and all the men subordinate themselves to those above them. There is order, and the army marches to where they need to go. If they need to fight, then everybody has his orders. He does his job, and they win the battle. That is the idea here.

In civilian life it meant to be subject to, or to obey. So in the vernacular we might say that this submission thing is to stay in one's place, to remain where you have been put under another, and to be happy about it, because there are things to learn in that position.

We moderns have a very perverted idea of submission, because we are taught from childhood to be number one, to be the most, the best, the tops, the premier, the one in charge, primary in everything that we do. It is the American way. Crawl over whomever to get to the top. That is not God's way. He will not teach us from childhood to be number one. Do you know what He teaches us? "Be you therefore perfect."

Do you know what that means? It means "be mature." It is actually a term that relates to something like a tool. A hammer is perfect for smashing nails into wood, but a pair of pliers, doing the same job, is imperfect. It does not work. When God tells you to "be perfect," He says, "Be the best you can be where you are." He does not want us to be number one. We cannot all be the head, can we? We cannot all be the hand. The hand is pretty important. We cannot all be the eye that sees. We cannot all be the mouth that talks. But if God has placed us in the chin, well we have got to be the best cell in that chin that we can be, because it will help the mouth talk.

If we are part of the fingernail in the hand, we had better be the best fingernail cell in the body, because it will help the hand work. That is what this term means. "Place yourself under whatever is above you, and be the most perfect of that kind that you can be."

I Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

So He made you a woman, and you got married, and now you are a wife. Maybe you had children and now you are a mother. Submit to where God has placed you, and be the best that you can be in that position.

Men, you were born male. You got married. You had children. Now you are a father; now you are a husband. Be the best father and husband that you can be, because that is where God has put you in His army. This is what God means by *submission*.

The same is true in the family. God has placed us in the family where we are, where He wants us. We are placed there not because we are superior. He does not make the men superior to the women. He has not made the woman inferior to the man, but because that is where we work best. That is where we will learn the most. That is where we can grow the most. That is where *He* wants us, because He is training us for a position in His Kingdom, and that is where we need the training for that job, whatever it is. We must submit to Him and His decision to place us where He has.

The "love your wives" clause in Ephesians 5 is very interesting, because that really is an act of submission. I went over this just a little bit while I was going through it. When he says, "Husbands, love your wives," that is not something we do from an ivory tower. Loving one's wife *is* sacrifice. The essence of love is sacrifice. You have heard my Dad say that many times. Sacrifice is an act of subordination, of giving to another who is over you.

Understand that I am not talking about animal sacrifice. In the Old Testament, using Abraham as an example, does Abraham offer a sacrifice to Eliezer his servant? Eliezer is under him. Why should he sacrifice an animal to Eliezer? That is not how it is done. To whom does he offer sacrifice? To the One who is *over* him—God. In Hebrews 7 it says that Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek. What does it say there about that? It says there that the person who gives tithes gives tithes to the one who is over him.

What does it say about showing love as a means of sacrifice? By showing this love, you are indeed submitting to the other. Ultimately, when we husbands and fathers show love, we are submitting ourselves to God's instruction. In every way you look at it, both the wives and the husbands are told to submit.

Why have I gone through all this in a sermon about fathers? Because after the relationship with God, the foundation, the basis, the core of proper

fatherhood is the marriage. That has got to be in place and working before proper fatherhood can happen. No sound marriage, no sound parenting. Remember the old children's rhyme—"First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage." First there is the love, and then there is a marriage. Then come the children.

I am thinking of love in terms not of romantic love, but of true godly love here which starts with our love for God. If we get these all in their proper perspective and in their right priorities, many of the problems of fatherhood and parenting disappear. The daily responsibilities become so much more manageable because everybody is pitching in. Everybody is submitting, everybody is loving. There is great respect, and everybody works together.

We have three links in a chain. The success of each is dependent on the one before it. The first link is our relationship with God. The second link is our relationship with our mate. The third link is our relationship with our children. It has to come in that order: God, mate, children. The last time I spoke I said that we have gotten that in reverse. We have put all our time and energy into our children. That is upside down. God first; then mate, and then children. If we get God first, it is going to be easier to deal with our mates, and then it is going to be easier to deal with our children. It just works that way.

I would like to give a few statistics on how marriage and fatherlessness impacts childrearing. These are really astounding.

Statistic in 1994: Twenty-four million American children lived without their biological fathers. [That is nearly forty percent of U.S. kids.] This number tripled between 1960 and 1990.

How about our prisoners?

Seventy percent of long-term prisoners, sixty percent of rapists, and seventy-two percent of adolescent murderers grew up without a father. [That is three quarters almost.]

A British study found that young women born in 1958 who grew up without a father at home were more likely to leave home early, to marry, or co-habit

in their teens, to have a child at an early age, and to bear children out of wedlock. The same holds true of women who had a surrogate father, such as a step-father or a mother's live-in boyfriend. [It is the biological father that counts is what that says.]

An American study in 1994 said children who grow up with only one of their biological parents (nearly always the mother), are twice as likely to drop out of high school, 2.5 times as likely to become teen-mothers, and 1.4 times as likely to be idle, be out of school and out of work, as children who grow up with both parents. [This is setting them back quite a bit, just because the father is not there.]

There is a very interesting article that I read called "A World Without Fathers," and was written by a sociologist named David Popenoe. It was in the *Wilson Quarterly*, March 22, 1996. I am going to read from pages 12 and 14. I think this summarizes the problem of fatherlessness.

The decline of fatherhood is one of the most basic unexpected and extraordinary social trends in our time. No one predicted this trend. Few researchers or government agencies have monitored it, and it is not widely discussed even today. But the decline of fatherhood is a major force behind many of the most disturbing problems that plague American society: crime and delinquency, premature sexuality, out-of-wedlock births to teenagers, deteriorating education achievement, depression, substance abuse, and alienation among adolescents, and a growing number of women and children in poverty.

The current generation of children and youth may be the first in our nation's history to be less well off psychologically, socially, economically, and morally than their parents were at the same age. 'The United States,' observes Senator Patrick Moynihan, 'may be the first society in history in which children are distinctly worse off than adults.'

The collapse of children's wellbeing in the United States has reached breathtaking proportions. Juvenile violent crime has increased six-fold, from 16,000 arrests in 1960 to 96,000 in 1992—

a period in which the total number of young people in the population remained relatively stable. Reports of child neglect and abuse have quintupled since 1976 when data was first collected. Eating disorders and rates of depression have soared among adolescent girls. Teen suicide has tripled. Alcohol and drug abuse among teenagers, although it has leveled off in recent years, continues at a very high rate.

Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have declined nearly eighty points, and most of the decline cannot be accounted for by the increased academic diversity of students taking the tests. Poverty has shifted from the elderly to the young. Of all the nation's poor, thirty-eight percent is children.

One can think of many explanations for these unhappy developments: the growth of commercialism and consumerism, the influence of television and the mass media, the decline of religion, the wide-spread availability of guns and addictive drugs, and the decay of social order and neighborhood relationships.

None of these causes should be dismissed, but the evidence is now strong that the absence of fathers from the lives of children is one of the most important causes.

God understood that. He is our Maker. He knew how important fatherhood was to society. Let us go to Genesis 17. Genesis is a book of beginnings. It is a book where God lays foundations, and there is one laid here.

Genesis 17:9-14 And God said to Abraham: As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any stranger who is not your descendant. He who is born in your house and he

who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.

Do you understand what He was getting at there? This is very, very interesting, I think. We tend to think of this covenant in religious terms, but it was much, much more than that. God does not necessarily think of His way of life as religion. It is "**the** way of life." It encompasses *more* than religion. Maybe we should say religion encompasses all of life. God's way should be with us (as He says in other places), from the time we get up till the time we go to bed. And even while we are in bed it says that His law keeps us. We read that. His covenant is very practical. His way is very livable.

Three things stand out here in this context. I do not know if you picked them up.

1. Every male was circumcised, whether he was born in the family, or whether he was bought. Every current and potential father.
2. God makes this covenant with all the males; not with the females. It is not that the females did not have a part in the covenant. He gave the sign to the males.
3. The body part that was affected in the circumcision is the male sexual member. Call it the instrument of his becoming a father—the means of procreation.

Think of it. Every time a man went to the bathroom, he should have been reminded of the covenant. "You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you." Every time the man looked down, while he was going to the bathroom, he should have been reminded that he had a covenant with God. And every time he had sexual intercourse it should have reminded him that he had a covenant with God, because that was where God put His sign. Very, very interesting.

Why there? Why not a tattoo on the arm, or something? No. He did it at a very important part of the body. For a man (most women would say) all his attention is focused there anyway. God wanted to move that attention from the sexual to the spiritual. It was to remind him that he had a covenant with God.

Why is this so significant? Go to Genesis 18:19. What did God do? God made this covenant with Abraham. God immediately tells him in Genesis 17:19, "About this time next year you're going to have a son—**the** son, the promised son Isaac." And then He says this:

Genesis 18:19 For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has spoken to him.

How do we put all of these things together? There is the sign of the covenant. There is the promise of the "promised seed." And then there is this statement by God saying, "I've done all this so that he could teach his children and get My plan of salvation going so that I can bring to him and to all the world all that I have promised that I would bless."

This is the conclusion that I have come to. Circumcision set apart all the fathers and all the potential fathers in Israel for a specific task—to teach God's way to the next generation. I do not know if you agree with that, but let us go to Deuteronomy 6. We read these verses every time there is a childrearing sermon, but do we read verse 2? I am going to start in verse 1. This was just after God gave the Israelites going into the Promised Land the Ten Commandments one more time. He reiterated them through Moses.

Deuteronomy 6:1 Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess.

He taught them so they could observe them.

Deuteronomy 6:2-5 That you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you [the promise made to Abraham]—a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

This is the foundation.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

He wants the Israelites to get started in this new land on the right foot, so He reiterates to them the Ten Commandments. And then He says, "You are going to teach your son and your grandson this way, and you're going to do it because it's in your heart, and you're going to do it all the time, in everything that you do."

The role of the father is to teach God's way to the children. There are all kinds of proof of this in the Bible.

Let us go now to Psalm 78 which reviews Israel's rebellion.

Psalm 78:1-8 Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His

strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God.

He says that we will have good times—peace and prosperity for generations to come if we will just do what He set down for us to do. Learn God's law and incorporate it into our lives, and teach our children. This is what our fathers failed to do in the wilderness, and they died.

Go now to Isaiah 38. This is Hezekiah's prayer to God, asking for longer life.

Isaiah 38:19 The living, the living man [He is saying, 'Look, God. I want to be one of these living men.'], he shall praise You, as I do this day; the father shall make known Your truth to the children.

Malachi 4:4-6 Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. [He goes right back to Sinai.] Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse [utter destruction].

Is that something that might need to be restored in the church of God—this process of the fathers learning God's Word, and then passing it down to the children as their part in the family?

I hope I have convinced you how important the father is to the Christian family. He is to lead, to teach, to guide the family as the head. He is a patriarch. That means the ultimate authority and responsibility of the family lies with him, in the physical sense. He is responsible for the entire clan's

wellbeing—both physically, and more importantly, spiritually. Remember God says that "those who do not provide for their own are worse than an infidel," so you provide spiritually *and* physically. We do these things because we are imitating God the Father, for He is the ultimate example of fatherhood, and we are imitating Jesus Christ, the perfect Christian.

John 5:19-20 Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does; and He will show Him greater works than these, that you may marvel."