

The Good Man And His Grandchildren

Providing a Lasting Inheritance

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What if the earth were, say, 900,000 miles further from the sun than it is, about one percent further than it is now? We have all run across that sort of what-if question. Creationists and the advocates of Intelligent Design pose questions like this all the time as challenges to evolutionists' arguments. The point is to show that even a relatively small change from the present configuration of God's creation would not be inconsequential. If the planet were just a little bit further from the sun, it would, of course, be cooler, and its orbit would be quite a bit larger and elongated, so the year would be longer, the seasons different. The earth's relationship with its moon would also be different, because of the gravitational situation that would change. The tides would be different. The length of the lunar month would be longer. The calendar would be different; and so on and so on. You can take a look at something like this and see that just a very small change, if God were to make it in His creation, would just have a plethora of cascading consequences.

Playing what-if games of this sort might make a good Friday-night activity with your children, to show them how well knit God's creation is, and how He has orchestrated everything so very well. This is something you may want to discuss with your children when driving home from the Feast. Please turn to Psalm 90, and we will play a what-if game of a somewhat different sort.

Psalm 90:10 The days of our lives are [40] years; And if by reason of strength they are [60] years.

What if Moses had written that? What if God had chosen the numerically significant figure of 40 rather than 70? What if the days of our lives were but 40 years? What if a 40-year old was a senior, and a 70-year old was an ancient, and a statistical oddity? Lots would change, I suggest, and I will leave it to your drive home to talk about some of those changes. I do want to focus, though, on one big change. There would be no grandchildren. And, that is my topic this morning: Grandchildren. I suggest to you that, by far and away, the most significant consequence of a 40-year life span would be the lack of grandchildren. Children would continue to exist, of course, and continue to be born. But, few of them would have living grandparents. Few children would have the opportunity of enjoying and knowing their grandparents. That is what I mean when I say there would be a lack of grandchildren.

You can easily figure this out. If you started to reproduce at about the age of 20, and your children likewise began to reproduce at about 20, you would be 40 when your grandchildren began to come along. And, if the average life span were 40 to 45, you would not have much time to enjoy the company of your grandchildren.

And, this is significant. Please turn to Deuteronomy 4. What does a civilization need if it is to survive? What does a civilization need if it is to thrive over the years? Well, in either case, near the top of the list, short or long, is something called "trans-generational stability." This is a long term, a big word, but it simply means that adults need to think and act much like their parents; the more similarity exists between the values and ideals of parents and offspring, the more stable will be a civilization.

More than that, though, adults need to act and think much like their grandparents, and their great-grandparents, and their great great grandparents, which is to say, their forefathers. That is why in the past, teachers held up as examples George Washington, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, as exemplars of virtue and of right thinking. If children could come to share the reputed values of the forefathers, values such as honesty, hard work, a love of freedom, and such, there would exist a continuity of values over the generations. That continuity of values would necessarily translate into a continuity of action. And, that would impart stability to civilization.

Deuteronomy 4:1 is the keynote passage of my comments today. Moses is speaking:

Deuteronomy 4:1 Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.

Moses connects the current events of his day, that is, the passage of Israel across the Jordan River, their entry into the land—he connects that event to the God of their forefathers. Clearly, these are not their biological fathers, who died in the wilderness. He connects them to the Patriarchs. For God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God is not holding up the faithlessness of these peoples' biological fathers as an example, but the faithfulness of the Patriarchs—the fathers.

This is the history, and this is the past, to which God wants Israel as a people to connect. He wants them to remember the promises that He made to the faithful fathers.

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These are Israel's forefathers with whom God wants the children of Israel to connect.

Notice this also: Over time, Israel was not to add to, nor subtract from the revelation God had provided them through Moses. The Law was to be an absolutely solid bedrock, the legal and cultural foundation of the civilization, and it was not to change one bit from one generation to another. Talk about stability. Would we have the kind of stability today? Returning in verse 6, where Moses continues:

Deuteronomy 4:6 Therefore be careful to observe them [these statutes and commandments]; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For [Moses continues] what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?

Israel's stability and power would become apparent to the nations over a period of time. God's comments here are not sickly protestant promises of heaven, but practical advice about national greatness. Such greatness would be the result of obeying the law, not just for a day. Israel did that occasionally. Israel's greatness would come from the people remaining faithful to God and His Law for generation upon generation upon generation. Remaining faithful. In the New Testament context, we call it enduring—remaining faithful..

God was not about to build Israel over night. It would take generations, just as it will take generations for righteousness to overspread the earth during the Millennium. But it will happen. The result of trans-generational faithfulness—faithful obedience to God's Law generation after generation—will be growing prosperity, an avalanche of power and cascading stability. Israel would grow to become the head. It would take some time.

But, how is all this going to come about? What does that require? It requires two things.

Deuteronomy 4:9 Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.

That is the first requisite: enduring obedience, remembering the law. Obey all your life;

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not just momentarily. Not just when you are young, not just when you are old—all your life. And the second requisite is also in verse 9:

Deuteronomy 4:9 And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb.

Teach. And, teach not just your children, but your grandchildren. This passage gives the recipe for trans-generational stability. A law that was never to be augmented, never diminished, never changed. The same law that was given in Horeb, taught from one generation to another generation and obeyed from one generation to the other. In the execution of that recipe for national greatness and success, grandparents had a key role to play.

Now, some people in the world—and we are going to see not everyone, but some—have a common sense of all this. They know that stability has its roots in passing what they call "tradition" to the young. They do not speak in terms of passing God's Law to the young, because most of them do not really understand God's Law or do not believe it, but they do speak in terms of passing tradition and values on to the young. One commentator makes this comment about the importance of the grandchild-grandparent relationship:

The grandchild, far from being incidental, is decisive. Civilization persists when there is a widespread sense of an ethical obligation on the part of the present generation for the well being of the third generation—their own grandchildren. A society where this feeling is not widespread may last as a civilization for some time—indeed, for one or two generations it might thrive spectacularly. But inevitably, a society acknowledging no trans-generational commitments to the future will decay and decline from within.

So it is that some people have come to recognize the importance of the study of history in today's schools because it entails the transferring of a view of the past to the young. And, they passionately want that tradition passed along. That is why people fight over changing the wording of the Pledge of Allegiance, the teaching of evolution as a fact in the schools, the content of sex education for young children. You can think of other examples. Many people do not appreciate the statist mis-educational system and its failure to inculcate these values. This fact is one of the drivers of the home-school movement that is going on today.

At the same time I said that there were a lot of people who did not think this way. There are groups of people who attack tradition, whether it is traditional hiring practices in the

workplace, traditional family and marriage configurations, traditional religious beliefs, and traditional moral stances. Again, you can think of other examples. I chose the word attack advisedly. For these people attack. They have gone on the offensive, attacking traditional values and beliefs through the media, the judicial (i.e., the court) system, the educational system, and the political process. For lack of a better descriptor, I will simply call these people liberals. Liberals' attack of the belief systems of Middle America has grown to such an intensity that some commentators have come to use the word "war" as a metaphor to describe their activity. Indeed, since about 1970, a culture war has raged in this nation. It continues to rage.

What is a culture war? In a few words, a culture war takes place when one segment, usually a minority segment, of a civilization seeks to overturn the long-standing belief systems, the traditions, the mores, and the values of society at large. They want to overturn the culture, and of course there is resistance to that—war. Perhaps the best ancient example of a culture war is that of the ancient sophists in Greece. The sophists were philosophers who went from city to city in Greece, sowing seeds of doubt in peoples' minds, asking questions that had never been asked before. They asked "trick" questions about the nature of the universe, the nature of man, the nature of his culture and government. Now, these people were smart. They knew how to use the rhetoric and language well, how to argue well. John Doe Greek knew his traditional moral values, to some degree, but was not committed to them. He did not know why they were so important. As a result, slowly, over a number of years, Greek culture changed through a great deal of conflict from one of traditional values to the totalitarian ideas of Plato (if you have ever read *The Republic*), to the evolutionary thought of Aristotle. Greek civilization underwent a gradual revolution that ended in the empire of a megalomaniac, Alexander the Great. It all started as a culture war.

This is a classic example of a culture war and its result. Today's conflict is no less real. The liberals, like the Greek philosophers, are smart. They seldom attack outright, but subtly, by innuendo. They often ask questions which sow seeds of doubt in peoples' minds.

One of their most obvious ploys, one they have used for years now, is to tear down traditional icons, exemplars, such as George Washington or Thomas Jefferson. This has become the stock and trade of a cult of historians who proudly call themselves revisionists. They want to revise history. They want to rewrite it. Whom do these iconoclasts, these destroyers of traditional examples, put in place of the Founding Fathers? Well, of course, people like Dorothy Dix and Mother Jones—people whom most of you have never heard. They were women activists during the so-called Progressive Era. And, while they and their ilk admittedly did play a role in American

history, it was relatively minor, certainly not so seminal, so lasting, as the parts played by the likes of Jefferson, Washington, Madison, Hamilton, and so forth.

If they denigrate Jefferson and emphasize Jones, whom do the liberals lionize, whom do they exult? Darwin, Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, Kinsey, Jean-Paul Sartre. And, what kind of role models do these people make? What kind of icons do these people make for our young people? They make role models so poor as to make this an improper venue to discuss their lives in detail, because their lives are disgusting. Suffice it to say that, whether hetero- or homosexual, these peoples' lives were given to sadomasochism, pedophilia and bestiality. Not every one in every case, but virtually all of them practiced some of that kind of stuff. These people were not the people next door who just happened to be a little more liberal than we are. These people were possessed by demons, or at least influenced by demons, and they led lives that are absolutely disgusting. These are the lions of our civilization. Every one of them were atheists.

Atheistic and secularized liberals, who wage war on traditional American, and more generally, on Western values, have nothing but contempt for Middle America. They hate America. They absolutely loathe Middle America's vision of American history. These warriors absolutely gloat that they are what they call "change agents." Change agents—that is what they pompously call themselves, because they want to cause change.

To them change is good, and the old, traditional, protestant-centric vision of America is something that they feel is bad, wrong-headed, and should be consigned to the dustbin of history. These are the people who want to wipe God out of public worship and life and, in rare candid comments, assert their desire to outlaw God in private belief systems as well. These are the "culture-of-death" crowd, who preach the unrestricted license of abortion, actually as a right, who advocate infanticide under the name of partial-birth abortion, actually again as a right, and who more and more are coming out in favor of euthanasia, assisted suicide and eugenics. These are the tolerance-infected minds which argue that homosexuality is a preference, and a right. These are the champions of gay-marriage.

These are decidedly not the rank and file American, but a relatively small corps of the elite and cosmopolitan intelligentsia, dedicated to turning American culture inside out, upside down, uprooting it, forming a new America. That is what the culture war is all about. And, like it or not, or know it or not, we are right in the middle of it, as it were, on ground zero. And if your children attend public schools, then hour-by-hour in that school they are hearing that. They are in the middle of the culture war. Are they prepared for the battle?

You are probably ahead of me, but I will ask the question anyway: What do grandparents have to do with all this? In the context of America's current culture war, grandparents could be the foot soldiers of the defense, those capable of turning the situation around. They are not doing that at all. By and large they are not serving this purpose, because they are more interested in spending their time on cruises than with their grandchildren. Seniors in Florida (which is, by the way, our oldest state) use bumper stickers to boast that they are spending their grandchildren's money. They are more interested in fun.

But, let us focus on the matter from the perspective of God's church. Grandparents play a key role in anchoring our young in traditional morality and values. By traditional values, I mean the values of honesty, hard work, sacrifice, as opposed to such wrong values as instant gratification, entitlement to benefits, hedonism—you know, the "eat, drink and be merry" mentality that we in God's church know should be shunned. Grandparents can help immunize the young from becoming infected by these pernicious values in our society. And, this is a valuable service indeed.

Turn please to Proverbs 13. This verse encapsulates the role of grandparents, as God sees it. By the way, this verse is the one that illustrates the title of my comments today, "The good man and his grandchildren."

Proverbs 13:22: "The good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children,"

To his grandchildren. Quite a bit different than what they are doing in Florida. Now, in a prolific family, a couple living into their 80s or 90s can have many grandchildren, even great grandchildren. Most such seniors today are not able to bequeath large sums of money or large pieces of land or anything like that. But, what can they leave them? They can leave them other gifts of lasting value—important gifts..

I remember my grandparents very well. My father's parents lived near us when I was a boy. They died in the mid 60's, and I remember them visiting us. Every two or three weeks or so I would see my father's parents. My mother's mother lived with us. Her husband, a trainman, had left her a widow before my parents were married, and indeed, some 15 years before I was born. I never met him at all.

Grandma was born in 1876, in Kentucky, crossing the Mississippi in 1880, when she was four years old. Her parents finally settled near Wichita, Kansas, just to the south of us today. Grandma told me many stories of her girlhood in the late 1800s, and of the

harsh life in the Mid-west during the early 1900s. She had lots of old photographs of long-deceased relatives in their strange clothes. And, we would spend hours looking through her stereoscope. You young people do not remember those, but that is what people once used instead of television. Looking through this lensed device at painted cards made the image appear 3-D. They were quite for to look at. She had packets of these old cards. Grandma gave me a love of history, an appreciation of art, an appreciation of beauty, and a lot more than that.

One day she was out hanging clothes on the line. This would have been in the very early 50s: we had no dryer then. "Grandma, what is that?" I queried, pointing to an article of clothing she was hanging on the line. It was a strange piece of clothing. "That's my corset," she answered, rather gruffly, I think. "What's it for?" I do not remember what my grandmother answered, and I do not think I could tell you today what a corset is for, by the way. But, this I understood: I did not wear such a thing, and neither did my father. I came to understand that women dressed differently than men. That was the way it was, and it seemed good to me. After all, I certainly did not want to have to wear one of those bulky things.

That was not the half of it. Grandma always wore these long dresses, practically down to her ankles. Every Saturday morning she would don a broach on her frock and then proceed off to church. She put a hat on, by the way. It was a black hat with netting on it. I used to fantasize about that black hat, how much I would just love to borrow it, attach a stick to it, and catch butterflies with it. I never did it. If I had, I think I would have spent the rest of my boyhood standing up.

Anyway, every Saturday morning she would dress like this and go off to church. My parents and siblings and I attended church on Sunday, but she on Saturday. On a few rare occasions (I barely remember them) she would take me along with her.

I do remember our discussions about the Sabbath a bit; we would talk about it off and on. It always seemed, to my boyhood mind, that she was always interminably reading the Bible. Every Saturday she carried home from her church some children's literature published by the Seventh Day Adventist Church, of which she was a member. And I, as a young child, would read it avidly.

I much missed grandma when she died at 86. I was a junior in high school. I appreciate your indulging me in these comments. It is kind of my way of bringing her to the Feast this year. It is her first Feast. There will be more. What grandma gave me, her inheritance to me, was far greater than money or land. She imparted to me an understanding, albeit an imperfect one, of the Sabbath, as well as values and

perspectives that I have kept to this very day.

She bequeathed to me a love of history and a respect for tradition. Her involvement in my life was surely no more of a fluke than was Abraham's involvement in the lives of his grandchildren, Jacob and Esau. If you would take a look at the genealogies you would find an overlap, probably of about 15 years. It was no more of a fluke than, for instance, Isaac's overlap of his life with Joseph. Again, he probably knew Joseph for the first few years of Joseph's life, at least. It was not an accident, but something God willed. How blessed Jacob felt to see his grandsons,

Ephraim and Manasseh. We will not have time to turn to Genesis 48:11, but I will just quote it very quickly and review Jacob's words to Joseph. He said, "I had not thought to see your face, but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" I wonder if Ephraim and Manasseh ever really appreciated their relationship with Jacob. Probably so.

Certainly, grandparents' influence can be a strong one in a child's life. Remember how Paul intimates that faith can, to some extent at least, be passed down from one generation to another. That is an interesting topic in itself. In II Timothy 1:5, the apostle remarks about "the genuine faith" of Timothy, which, as he continues, "dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also." Timothy's grandmother was obviously an important figure in his youth, important enough to warrant Paul's mention.

So, what is a person to do in the face of this well-equipped, well-funded army of self-styled change agents and self-serving culture warriors who have gained control of the media and education, and who now have garnered the respect of corporate executives, almost everywhere, and of public policy makers in government at all levels? What do we do?

It is time to bring out the big guns. It is time to bring out the grandparents. Of course we understand that parents have the prime goal in raising children. I am certainly not denying that in any way. And certainly, I understand that we in the Church must consider the degree to which the kids' grandparents are converted. Even if once converted, a person may become apostate, backsliding in his old age. Notice the warning against idolatry and how it focuses on old people in Deuteronomy 4. Moses here specifically addresses the older people.

Deuteronomy 4:25-26 When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, ... [Verse 26] I call heaven and earth to witness against you

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this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land . . .

Unconverted, backsliding, even hostile, grandparents, with values quite different from ours, can do significant damage to our own efforts to raise our children in the nurture of the Lord. These are real issues that need to be considered. In some extreme cases, it may be absolutely unwise to bring grandparents into close contact with our children.

But, those cases aside, grandparents more often than not can make a valuable contribution to the lives of our young children. When a child sees his grandparents, he sees his past. He sees the values and lifestyle of a nation that has all but passed away. The erstwhile first nation in which we live today will pass away in their lifetime.

As I conclude, let us go back to where we started and look at the earth. We move from kin to cosmos. After man's creation, the earth experienced significant ecological change at least twice. First was the cataclysm of the flood. After that, God's Word is clear that peoples' life spans began to shrink. Still later, probably in the late 600s BC, another noteworthy cataclysm occurred. Amos refers to it as "the earthquake" in Amos 1:1, in the days of Judah's king Uzziah. It was probably in the days of Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel. I suspect that this event, perhaps caused by a passing meteor or comet, changed the orbit of the planet, thereby lengthening the year from 360 days to 365? days, its present length. This was a small, but significant change. The early, and very accurate, Babylonian calendars were based on a 360-day year. The Chinese and Greeks had to adjust their calendars after this event, this "earthquake." That is why the Greek Thales is credited with creating the calendar. Well, he did no such thing. All he did, in reality, was come to understand the adjustments that had to be made to the much older Babylonian calendar.

Whatever caused it, it must have terrified people. In Jeremiah 10:2 we read that the nations were "dismayed at the signs of heaven." And if you take a look at some of the other translations, it says that the nations were affrighted, they were terrified, and they were alarmed by the heavens. This was not a small event, and indeed, proved to be a catalyst for a global historical change called the axial period of history, a centuries-long period when so many of the ancient kingdoms of the world became extinct.

Yet, as horrendous as these two events may have been, neither it, nor the Flood before it, changed the orbit and axial tilt of the earth so much as to shorten life spans beyond the 70-year period. The changes decreased peoples' life spans, yes, but not below 70-years. God, understanding the value of the grandparent-grandchild relationship, made no changes that would render it impossible for us to obey His command that we teach

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our grandchildren. Grand parenting remains possible. It remains viable. And, it remains oh, so valuable!

God has graciously given us 70 years, in many cases more, plenty of time for grandparents to interact with their grandchildren for many years.

Children, enjoy your grandparents while you have them. And remember, they break easily.

Parents, exploit the children's grandparents, use them as is consistent with your particular situation in your particular family.

Grandparents, cherish the moments you have with your grandchildren. Understand how vital it is that you teach your grandchildren God's Law, for that is part of His commandment for you. It is good for them, and it is good for the society at large.

Take action to ensure that you leave them a gift of lasting value before you depart. The nature of things is that childhood is fleeting and the old soon run out of time. Redeem that time.

I am going to conclude in Ecclesiastes 4, reading from the *New English Bible*. This passage aptly states the principle behind my comments today. Apply this passage to the task of child rearing. Ecclesiastes 4:9, where Solomon says,

Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two are better than one; they receive a good reward for their toil, because, if one falls, the other can help his companion up again; but alas for the man who falls alone with no partner to help him up.

In childrearing, two generations, parents collaborating with grandparents, go a long way to ensure success. Verse 12 adds that three are even better: parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 If a man is alone, an assailant [like, a culture warrior] may overpower him, but two can resist; and a cord of three strands is not quickly snapped.