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Teaching Letter

A Father's Leadership



Part 3/3
Fatherhood
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In the office of fatherhood God has united the greatest privileges of leadership with the greatest responsibilities of leadership. This theme runs through Scripture from beginning to end. In the days of fearful evil, immediately before the flood, there was one man who found grace in God's sight—Noah.

To Noah, God said: "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation" (Genesis 7:1). It was the righteousness of Noah that provided a covering for his whole household. Because Noah took his rightful place before God as head of his house, he had the privilege of bringing his entire family with him into the ark.

Taking Leadership in the Home

Later—after the flood—God began to look for a man who would become the head of a special nation, destined to bring unique blessings to all mankind. Eventually God found the man He was looking for in the person of Abraham.

Genesis 18:19 reveals the special element in Abraham's character that caused God to choose him over all the men of his day:

> 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.

God chose Abraham for one primary reason: He knew He could count on him to train and discipline his children and his household in the way of the Lord. What tremendous importance God must attach to this aspect of a man's character!

God expected Abraham to "command" his children and his household. The word command sounds undemocratic to some Western ears. But it is the key word in this passage. There are times when a man has both the right and the duty to command. When he stands as God's representative and governor in his home, he must not be weak and compromising. He must say firmly to his wife and children, "I require you to do so-and-so."

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Some men may ask, “What will my wife and children say? They aren’t used to hearing me speak like that!”

May I suggest how they will react? It may take them several minutes to recover from the shock, but eventually they will say, “At last—we’ve got a man in the house!” Both the wife and the children know in their hearts who ought to lead, and they will respond to a father who takes his rightful place. Many women have taken the lead in the home by default because their husband failed to do it; and they would be happy to give it up if the man would take over.

The Failure of Lot

We have seen that it was the character and conduct of Abraham in his home that commended him to God. However, Abraham’s nephew, Lot, stands in sad contrast. Lot started out with Abraham. He had seen God’s blessings and had heard God’s promises. Nevertheless he made a wicked and foolish decision. He chose to lead his family into the degraded city of Sodom (Genesis 13:10–13). The lesson of Lot moves me deeply each time I ponder it. He led his family into Sodom, but he never led them out again! When God’s judgment fell upon the city, Lot lost his entire family, except two daughters (Genesis 19:15–26).

Fathers, let me say this plainly: If you know the way of the Lord, do not take the same foolish course as Lot. You may lead your family into Sodom—into the world with its sinful pleasures and enticements. You may make the world the center of life in your home. Then the day may come when you tire of the world and turn back to the way of God. But remember this: Your family may not be willing to follow you any longer. You who led them into Sodom may never be able to lead them out again!

Joshua’s Choice

Let us look at another leader of God’s people—Joshua. At the end of his life, having brought Israel into the Promised Land, Joshua challenges them with a decision:

> Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." Then Joshua adds, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15)

For years I marveled at these words of Joshua. Obviously, he could make his own personal decision to serve the Lord. But how could he be so sure his family would serve the Lord? Then one day I understood the basis of Joshua’s assurance. He had taken his God-given position as priest, prophet and king in his home. Therefore he knew he could count on the faithfulness of God to honor him in that position—by answering his priestly intercession for his family, by confirming his prophetic declaration made on their behalf, and by upholding his kingly authority over them. Joshua’s assurance was based not on what he was in himself, but on God’s faithfulness to the office of fatherhood which he held.

The Faith of a Father

Let us turn on to one of the most frequently quoted passages of the New Testament—Acts 16:30–31. The Philippian jailer, under deep conviction, asks of Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their answer is, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

One day as I was quoting this promise to a lady who was concerned for the salvation of her family, the Holy Spirit spoke gently but firmly to my spirit: “You are misapplying that promise. It was not spoken to a woman, but to a man. As a husband and father, the Philippian jailer had a God-given right to claim the salvation of his whole family.” God has given to every father, by virtue of his position, both the right and the responsibility to exercise faith for the salvation of his family.

Does this mean that other members of the family can be saved solely on the basis of the father’s faith, without exercising individual faith for themselves? No, it does not mean that. What it means is that, through the faith and ministry of the father in his God-given office, each member of his family will come to personal faith in Christ and will thus be saved.

This is not to say that a family cannot be saved through the faith of a believing mother or some other member. Rahab, the harlot in Jericho, provides a beautiful picture of a woman whose faith and courage brought salvation to her whole family. Out of the midst of the total destruction of the city where she lived:

> And the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had. (Joshua 6:23)

All these were the fruit of Rahab’s faith.

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However, the father has a different relationship to his family from that of any other member. If he takes his God-given position as head of his house, there goes with it the God-given right to claim the salvation of his household. This right is based not merely on the father's individual faith, but on the office of fatherhood he holds. God's obligation is to the office, not merely to the man.

Results of Delinquent Fathers

The Word of God offers many warnings concerning the evil results that will follow when parents—and especially fathers—fail to fulfill their God-given responsibilities in the home. In Deuteronomy 28:15–68 we find a long list of curses that God warned Israel would come upon them if they were disobedient to His law. While reading through this list one day, I was struck by verse 41:

> Thou shalt beget sons and daughters, but thou shalt not enjoy them: for they shall go into captivity. (kjv)

This is addressed primarily to fathers, since the word "beget" describes the father's part in procreation.

The simple thought occurred to me that children are given to us by God that we may "enjoy" them. They are intended to be an ever-present source of delight to us as their parents. Yet how many parents today are really enjoying their children? I remember once hearing a Baptist preacher with a large family pray, "Lord, help us to remember that our children are blessings, not burdens!" Somehow I formed the impression that he did not expect a positive answer to his prayer.

As parents, we may be sure of one thing: Our children will recognize our true attitude toward them—whether we feel they are burdens or blessings. And they will react accordingly.

If we fail to discipline and relate to our children in such a way that demonstrates we enjoy them, what will be the alternative? Deuteronomy 28:41 tells us plainly—"they shall go into captivity." Has this not happened to millions of children in our Western civilization? They have "gone into captivity"—to drugs, illicit sex, the occult and countless other snares of Satan. Such children are in captivity just as surely as if they had been carried off into slavery by some foreign power. The responsibility lies at the door of the fathers who have failed to relate well to their children and teach them the law of God.

Communicating God's Law

Malachi 2:7 pictures the priest as the guardian and interpreter of God's law:

> For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth.

(The "knowledge" referred to here is the knowledge of God's law.) As priest in his home, each father has this responsibility—to guard and to interpret the law of God for his family.

What if the fathers/priests in a nation fail in the responsibility? In Hosea 4:6 God sums up the tragic situation that results:

> My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.

What a fearful thing it is when God Himself tells us that He will "forget" our children! When a father rejects the knowledge of God's law, he is no longer fit to exercise his priestly ministry on behalf of his family. As a result, the children lose the protection of a father's authority and covering and become prey to all the snares and deceptions of Satan. Why is our land today filled with God-forgotten children—children who are strangers to the covenant promises and provisions of God? Because their fathers have forgotten the law of God!

A Word of Promise

In Malachi 4:5–6 the final word left to us in the Old Testament is a curse—but it is also a promise:

> 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.

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By prophetic revelation, the Bible here depicts the most urgent social problem of the period immediately preceding the close of the age: divided, strife-torn homes, with parents and children alienated from each other. How accurate God's Word is! It is precisely this situation that confronts us today. Unless it can be reversed, there is only one possible outcome—a curse upon the whole earth. However, God promises to send a ministry that will "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers." Thank God, the situation is not hopeless! Reconciliation and restoration in our homes are yet possible. This is the message of God's Spirit to us today.

But we must observe the order that God's Word establishes. First, the fathers must turn to their children. Reconciliation in each home must begin from the father's side. If the fathers will repent and humble themselves before their children, then the children's hearts will also turn to their fathers. But the first move is with the fathers.

Fathers, I challenge you to be men! Rise up and take your position, under God, as the head of your house! If you have been a renegade, repent and ask your wife and children to forgive you. Be reconciled with them. Then lead your family into God's full provision for them.

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