

Fathers

(Ephesians 6:1-4)

by Charles B. Hodge, Jr.

The year 2000 will be determined not by organizations, or budgets, or church houses, but by the equipping and developing of men. Ephesians 4 says that every officer in the church is here to equip, to disciple. I believe the building of men is the greatest work of the 80s. This truth parallels with the role of fathers. What daddies are today will determine the future. It is frightening. I always read Ephesians 6 with trembling hands. The responsibility for the future of the world is placed upon fathers.

When I was a boy my daddy told me, "Always go to the head man." I believe that in the judgment God will go to the head man. The awesome responsibility of the home, the church, and the world is given to the head of the house.

Seventeen times in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ called God "the Father." It was Jesus who gave us the fatherhood of God. Through Jesus we have become sons of God. There is no greater privilege than to acknowledge God as Father. Nothing is as poignant, as meaningful. David said God was a shepherd and that is beautiful. But God is more than a shepherd. He is a daddy. He doesn't love us like lost sheep; He loves us as born-again sons.

Martin Luther never could call God a father because he had a tyrannical daddy. The greatest physical honor I have is to wear the name of my daddy. There can be nothing more meaningful than to be an heir of your father. In Matthew 7 and Luke 11 Jesus says, "If ye then, being earthen daddies know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts unto you?" What a great privilege to have God as our Father! And we need to remember that the greatest gifts of God are our children.

In Psalm 127:3-5 David said, "Children are our heritage of God; the fruit of the womb is his reward." Then David said, "Happy is the man that has a quiver full of children." Beloved, children are not mine. They are not ours. They are

God's. We are His stewards. God gives us these precious children, not only to enrich our lives, but that we may train them to be servants of God. When a child is born, like Hannah of old, we ought to give that child back to God. It is the awesome responsibility of fathers to take those children and rear them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

In this lesson I will point to two obligations or responsibilities of fathers.

I. FATHERS MUST GIVE CHILDREN ROOTS.

Children need roots or a foundation. We call it the Patriarchal Age. That is a fancy word for "father-ruled." The father was the head. The Bible still says that the husband is the head of the house and the father has the responsibility of the child. The measure of a family is the measure of a man. Our problems today—welfare, delinquency, etc.—stem from the absentee father. What America needs today is God-fearing daddies. We don't need more laws and guns. We need daddies. Until we get daddies troubles will increase. Our daddies are so busy making a living that they have forgotten about life.

I think I can qualify as a sociologist. It is difficult to be an orphan. The hardest task on earth is to be a daughter without a daddy. It is even worse than being a son without a daddy. It is one of those quirks in the way God made male and female. We need to identify with a daddy. So every husband is his own patriarch, and God intends for kids to learn about God through their parents. That is why it will be very difficult for a child to respect his God, if he does not respect his parents.

What is a daddy to do in the home? First, *he is to conduct worship*. We fail here, don't we? The religion of most American men is in their wife's name. I thank God for these women who teach God's word. Keep at it. I am glad we have some

good mamas. But a mama is not a substitute for a daddy. God didn't tell women to be responsible for the religion of their kids. We think Sunday School is for women and kids, but that is tragic. That is why when kids get big enough to be like daddy, they quit going to church. The Bible says in chapter 1 of Job that Job went out and prayed for his children. We need daddies who pray for their kids. The Bible says of Abraham, "I know him. He will command his children to worship God." We need men like Abraham. A great man one time was asked what he wanted written on his tombstone. He put it in two words: "He prayed." I don't know of a greater epitaph that could be placed on a man's tombstone. Religion is more caught than it is taught. In Isaiah 38:19 Isaiah said to daddies, "Tell your children about the faithfulness of God." God not only exists, but God is good. From the moment a child is born, his daddy ought to tell him that God is good. He ought to be surrounded with that truth. I don't like May. Our kids graduate and say good-bye to God. But I notice that those kids who do say good-bye to God were never really here. They sat at the back and never participated. I have watched. That is the value of tenure. You get to watch. Kids who bring their parents quit when they graduate, and their folks do too. They were just here in body, not in soul.

Second, *a daddy is to teach the Bible*. All of us know Deuteronomy 6:4-8. Put the words on the bedpost and over the door. Teach them when they get up and when they lay down. But have you noticed what Moses said? Jesus quoted it in Matthew 22: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. . . ." Jesus said that is the number one command. Moses was not telling us to give a bunch of facts to our children. He said the main role of the daddy is to give his children God. He is to remind him every day of God. He is to remind him of God every night when he goes to bed. Did you know a Jewish boy had to pass an exam of six hundred questions when he was eleven? How many of us could answer six, let alone six hundred? The Jews have what they call the Bar Mitzvah. It says that a boy is accountable. Why? Because he has been taught. We ought to learn something from

the Jews. You can't turn over to the church, to the school, to the jail the religious teaching of your child. He ought to be able to pass his religious exam. It makes him accountable.

A lot of people in town were upset when we lost another beer election. I was talking to some of the big shots in town; they were quite upset about it. They said, "Hodge, are you not upset?" I said, "No." They said, "Well, you are a preacher. Why aren't you out on your soapbox?" The way to clean up this city is to clean up the homes. You can clean up the street with a fence, but that isn't going to help your house. If our city will clean up its homes, the streets will be clean. The problem in our streets is the failure of our homes. I am not worried about people drinking beer in a cafe. I am worried about beer in the refrigerator. I don't want it in our cafes, by the way, but I am just telling you that a lot of us think that keeping it out of a cafe is going to solve our problems. The determining factor of the 80s will be daddies.

Third, a daddy must teach his children how to work. One of the biggest mistakes we are making today is that of failing to teach our children right attitudes toward work. We tell them, "You are rich enough, smart enough, or educated enough; you won't have to work." Nonsense! The Jews said if a father didn't teach his boy to work, he taught him to steal. If I read my Bible right, Jesus Christ learned how to be a carpenter. I figure that He was a pretty good one. If I read my Bible right, Paul was a tentmaker. Peter was a fisherman. Jesus did not call a bunch of lazy, no-good bums. They were all workers. Man's integrity is based in his work relationship. I think it is wonderful what parents are willing to do for their children, but I think it is terrible what they are not willing to do for their kids. We do things for children which the children should do for themselves. Like Detroit mass producing cars, we have been turning out emotional cripples.

The Decalogue uses frightening language to show that the iniquities of the fathers last for three and four generations. Our kids can't afford to pay that kind of price for our mistakes. The poorest kids are those who just have money. Psychologists and sociologists say that what our kids need is inner control. What is inner control? Mental tactness. Fathers, rear your children in

the nurture and admonition of the Lord. What is that? Mental tactness. It is an ability to stand on your own two feet, have your own convictions, and have your own conscience and integrity.

II. FATHERS MUST GIVE THEIR CHILDREN WINGS.

Fathers are obligated to give their children wings. A lot of us are pretty good at giving them roots but fail at giving them wings. Parents are persons too. We have lived in a child's age. I came up in the wrong one. I grew up where the old folks ate first and we got the chicken wings or necks or gizzards. I don't like chickens. I guess that is why I like chocolate pie. They don't have bones in them. At least most of them don't. Now I am old and we feed the kids first, and I still get the wings, the necks, and the gizzards. Parents are people too. There never have been perfect parents. Jesus wasn't a parent. And Adam and Eve weren't perfect. So God never asked you to be.

Remember that mates come before children. This is where we goof. You don't marry kids. The best way to save your kids is to save yourselves. Children are accountable too. I have always heard, "Give me a child till he is fifteen and I will determine the destiny of his soul." That is true to just a certain degree. The Bible says in Proverbs 20:11, "Even a child is known by his doings." I don't believe it was the daddy's fault in Luke 15 when the prodigal went to the

far country. I would hate to indict God as being a bad daddy. Some of the best people on earth have the sorriest kids, and some of the worst people on earth have the best. When you figure that one out, I will tackle the problem of how to get along with women. Until then, I won't touch it with a 10-foot pole.

Children are people too. They are not robots. They are not clones. They are not cattle to be driven. They are not our slaves. They are reared to be released. Cut the apron strings and let them fly. It is easier to rear a child than it is to turn him loose. When they are little, they step on your feet. When they are old, they step on your heart. But you have to let them fly! There comes a time when you have to step back! They are of age. They are accountable. It is their life. They are private property. Hands off. Let them fly. When you let them go, you will know divine humility, the risk of God. He made man but He said let him fly. God does not coerce. He does not bully. He does not meddle. But the door is open and the handle is on the outside. God gives you children and you bungle and blunder, then there comes that time when you step back and open the door and let them fly.

CONCLUSION

Give them roots. Give them wings. God says, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord." This congregation will be in the 90s what the daddies are in the 80s.