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A Father's Responsibility

Introduction

Many years ago, I could bring a person to the very place, when speaking to a young father who was rather strict on his little children I said, "One of the most serious responsibilities in life is to be a father", something he readily agreed with. Then I said, "You and I have children who call us "father", then we teach them that God is also our Heavenly Father. The question is, "As Christian fathers, to what degree is God, as our Heavenly Father, seen and known and glorified through us?", or put another way, "What sort of an impression am I giving of God as Father?". Throughout the years I have pondered on this in my own personal life. We need to be an example of God's love to our children.

To begin to answer this question there must be the comprehension of what God as "Father" is like, and only then can I determine if my impression of God is clear or distorted. It will come with exceeding quickness that it is not how like God as Father I may be, but how distorted is the impression I convey to my children.

What are God's characteristics as "Father?"

- 1) When the Lord told the parable of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:20), the father is seen as a shadow of God. It had been a heart wrenching departure for the father when the son left the father's house. How things had changed. He went out full with a vision of dreams, free from parental restrictions, but now destitute and having a conscience weighed with guilt and remorse, he is coming home. What was the father's reaction? There was no belittling or scolding but when the son was a great way off we read, "his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Lk. 15:20). How hard fathers can be on a strong willed child especially when they go astray. Cruel words and rehashing the errors the child made does not help the situation, but neither does enfolding the child back as if nothing was ever done wrong. David accepted Absalom back but there was no repentance in the heart of Absalom and it came with a heavy price. The lesson is:
 - a) As parents, there must be a balance between compassion from the father and truth with repentance on the wayward one.
- 2) A second characteristic of God as Father is His love. *"BEHOLD, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us"* (1 Jn. 3:1).
 - a) He does not say, "What manner of love God hath bestowed upon us". In John 3:16 we are told God loves the world, but here it refers to the children of God by new birth and as such He is "Father".
 - b) Neither does it read, "The Father loves us" but, "What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us." There is an intensity and fulness manifestly seen in the bestowment placed upon us.
 - c) Everybody needs not only to love but be loved, and on this point not only does God tell us He loves us, but His actions prove it. I had a wonderful father but back in those distant days parents often did not tell their children they loved them, they demonstrated it. Only once do I ever recall my dad telling me he loved me and I treasure it still, even though that is almost thirty-four years ago! Tell the child daily they are loved, and being loved is not because of something they are or do, it's just because you love them.
- 3) A third feature is progressive discipline (Heb. 12:5-10).
 - a) There is first a rebuking (Heb. 12:5), then chastening. I recall a father who I never heard rebuking his children. The instant they did wrong, whether it was the first time or not, he took a literal piece of wood about four inches across and would spank the child with it. What a distorted manifestation of God he gave. How could the child understand God loves when that which he saw was a cold non considerate tyrant?
- 4) The ancient Psalmist wrote many wise counsels about God as father and its relationship to us. One of the most memorable is, *"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."* (Psa. 103:13, 14). It is easy to forget that a little child

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is just a little child with a very limited knowledge and understanding. One of the characteristics of a child is the speed at which they forget. For instance, children cannot walk, they run, skip or jump, neither can they be quiet. They do not seem to know what the words mean. Life for them is filled with laughter and excitement and to expect them to instantly remember and obey is an impossibility. I recall being in a home where a cold harsh father was visiting with his wife and children. As the little ones laughed and shouted and played there was noise and the father did not remember that one child was dust, frail, caught up in his own world. He called the child who literally came trembling, and in front of all the other children and adults yelled and humiliated the child. How will that child or the others think of God as father?

- 5) Security (Psa. 89:26)
 - a) After being loved a child needs the awareness of security. How often a little one will climb into the parent's bed because they are frightened or when any awareness of danger approaches them? When available they will rush to be caught up in father's arms. Like God, the father is to be to them their rock and security. Never would a father who loves his child reject their call for help and leave them to the danger they are terrified of.
- 6) Gives wise instruction (Prov. 13:1; 15:5)
 - a) When we consider the scriptures we read that, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" (2 Tim. 3:16) thereby assuring humanity that there is no foolishness or error which could lead to bad behavior in any of the communications of God. This is important because, "*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child*" (Prov. 22:15), and the wise father will seek the wisdom that comes from above (Jam. 3:17) to guide the child.
- 7) Respect due to position, our Father.
 - a) To the detriment of society, we live in a world where children have little respect for adults, and this applies to children and their parents. I have seen a child hit the mother on the face, children ignoring the parent when they are called, and older people are called "old man" or "old woman". The Lord taught us to say to God, "Our Father", and He who was God's equal never called God "the old man". This respect must not be just positional, but a respect based on the honour the child holds for the father.

Concluding Thoughts

As fathers we all fail, especially in reflecting the likeness of God. Knowing that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, a wise father will seek the wisdom and help of God's Spirit to portray a worthy remembrance of our Heavenly Father.

... Rowan Jennings