

God, Our Father

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Introduction.

- A. Today, we commonly refer to God as our Father without much thought or fanfare about it, but this was not always the case. Look at the attitude of the Jews described in John 5:18. To them, daring to refer to God as their Father was a blasphemous thing, and indeed, when we think about it, it's not hard to see where they were coming from. Only our Father's grace allows us to call Him by such a familiar title.
- B. Today, by contrast, many people suffer from an opposite problem. Rather than having so much respect for God that they don't dare to refer to Him as Father, they have so little respect for Him that He hardly enters into their thinking at all. Like the Israelites of the days of the judges, they do what is right in their own eyes and ignore the responsibilities that God has placed upon them. One of the areas where this is most prominent is in the area of fatherhood. America is blessed with many things, but it is not blessed with an abundance of good fathers. Millions of men in this country want nothing to do with the children they help produce, or they believe that their obligations as fathers can be discharged with a monthly check in the mail.
- C. It's not hard to see, friends, that the failure of these men as fathers comes from their failure to connect with their Father in heaven. This is why, for the next three Saturdays, we have a series of men's studies scheduled on the topic of fatherhood. If we want to be good fathers, men, we have to turn to the word of God first. As an introduction to this series, though, let's look this morning at the good example of God Himself. Let's look at the things we can learn about fatherhood from what the word says about God, our Father.

I. Our Father Generally.

- A. The first and most important thing that the Bible calls us to notice about our Father is that He **LOVES** us. Among many other places, this is evident in 1 John 3:1. Indeed, this outpouring of devotion and affection is so great that John later says that God IS love. Every other way that our Father relates to us begins with love.
- B. If, as earthly fathers, we are to follow the example of our Father in heaven, we have to begin with love too. For many men, this is not a terribly comfortable thought. They feel that a constant expression of love shows weakness. That, friends, is a way of thinking that we need to get rid of. God expresses His love in Scripture over and over and over again, and that expression of love, rather than causing us to turn away from His presumed weakness, is what brings us closer to Him. Of course, love is about more than just words. It's something we need to express to our children in actions too, so they have no doubt where they stand with us.
- C. In similar fashion, the Bible spends a great deal of time discussing the way that our Father **PROVIDES** for us. We see the breadth of this provision outlined in James 1:17. As we've noted on several other occasions, every single good thing that we have comes to us from God, and there is nothing for which we are not indebted.
- D. Likewise, earthly fathers need to provide for their children. Sometimes, of course, our abilities to provide material things may not be as great as we want it to be. However, our care for our children needs to start with us giving them the best that we can. Just as God's providence, though, is not limited to material things, our own should not be either. Our children need so much more from us than three meals a day and a roof over their heads. Often, the most valuable things we provide are things that can never be bought or sold.
- E. In fact, this points to one of the truly great tragedies of our country's epidemic of divorce. When Mom and Dad have their "irreconcilable differences," and Dad moves to another part of town, another city, or another state, the biggest casualties are often the children. Fatherhood is not a part-time job. It's not an obligation that we can fulfill every other weekend and whenever we feel like calling. Fatherhood requires everything that we can provide, and every time I think about this, I grieve for all the children whose dads don't provide it.
- F. God's word also teaches us that our Father **PROTECTS** us. Let's look now at Jesus' prayer calling on the Father to do exactly that in John 17:11. Although our Father's protection is a general thing, here Jesus focuses specifically on His protection in spiritual matters. We don't think about it much, but when Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10 that God does not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able, what that's really saying is that God constantly works to restrain Satan. We will face trials, yes, but nothing that we can't handle.
- G. Likewise, earthly fathers should protect their children, and God's own behavior is a good rule of thumb for how we can do this. Sometimes, especially when we consider the evil of the world around us, we're tempted to wrap our children in cotton and stick them in a closet somewhere for the rest of their lives. Although that impulse is understandable, it is neither helpful nor wise. If our children are never challenged, they will never grow, either mentally or spiritually, and if they float to adulthood in a cocoon of parental protection, that will only leave them vulnerable to the challenges they will inevitably face then. Like God, then, we must protect our children in measured ways, ready to help them when they need it, but also willing to let them stand on their own feet when they are able, so that they can keep standing when we aren't around to help.

II. Our Father in Teaching.

- A. Although the Bible addresses these general areas, it also spends a great deal of time focusing in on one particular aspect of the Father: the way that He **TEACHES** us. Look, for instance, at Paul's comments on the subject in Ephesians 1:17. Of course, God teaches in different ways today than He did then. Back then, before the written word was completed, they received their information directly from the Holy Spirit. Today, that's no longer necessary. However, the Father's interest in teaching remains the same. He is still deeply concerned that His children grow and mature in spiritual wisdom so that they can be like Him.
- B. All of us who are fathers on earth should have a similar attitude. There's a sentiment in our culture that raising children is woman's work, but the Bible informs us that men have a vital role too. As the Scripture defines it, it is the mother's role to love, but it is the father's role to teach. That requires several things of us. First, it tells us that we need to know the word ourselves so that we can teach. Our kids don't tell us, "OK, two weeks from now, I'm going to come to you with a question about dancing, so study up on the subject." Second, though, it requires us to invest time and energy and thought in the teaching process. We have to constantly be on the lookout for ways to educate our children spiritually, so that they will do what is right too.
- C. As part of His teaching work, our heavenly Father also **PRUNES** us. Jesus discusses this work of the Father in John 15:1-2. The essence of pruning is of cutting back a plant, removing what is harmful and encouraging what is healthy and productive. God uses both His word and our circumstances to do this for us spiritually.
- D. Earthly fathers also need to give thought to the pruning process. Just like a fruit tree will, a child that is left to himself will develop in all sorts of unpredictable ways that are not necessarily good for the child. When we prune our children, it doesn't mean that we go around lopping off limbs. Instead, it means that we channel all of that explosive growth and development into good and useful things. That way, when our children pass into adulthood, they will be spiritually healthy and able to produce in abundance the fruit that God wants to see.
- E. Of course, God does not act at random in the way that He prunes us. Instead, first He **JUDGES** us to determine what is good and what is bad. Peter describes the judgment of the Father in 1 Peter 1:17. This refers, naturally to the final judgment, but it also refers to the way that God constantly weighs our conduct during our time on earth to determine what He needs to do with us. That's part of His Fatherhood.
- F. In our efforts at fatherhood, we also need to be willing to judge. There are lots of parents who aren't happy with this idea. They don't like authority figures themselves, so they don't want to set themselves up as an authority figure either. They want to play best friend rather than parent, so their poor child gets away with behavior that is basically unsupervised. Men, we can't do that. We have to set up standards for our children, and we have to use a judgment process to hold them accountable. That's the only way to teach them to be productive members of society here, but its importance goes far beyond that. If we don't teach them to submit themselves to our authority, they will have tremendous difficulty submitting to the authority of God.
- G. Of course, once God is finished weighing our conduct, there are going to be some things that are displeasing to Him, and that's why He sometimes **DISCIPLINES** us. The Hebrews writer discusses this topic in Hebrews 12:7-9. The word "discipline" can have a broader application to all kinds of instruction, but "chastening," as it is used here in the New King James, makes it clear that this sort of discipline is God employing corrective punishment. Sometimes He chastens us through the word, but other times, He chastens us in the physical world, using pain to teach us that a particular course of action is not a course we want to take.
- H. All fathers need to be willing to do the same. Certainly, not everything that a child does wrong should be punished every time with physical discipline, but a good father is willing to spank when necessary to train his child. There are just going to be times when the bottom listens better than the ears do. This is not a popular idea in our society. There are any number of child psychologists who will talk at great length about the horrible harm that any kind of physical discipline does, but that's a bunch of nonsense. In my experience, it's not the kids who were spanked who have the behavior and discipline problems. It's the kids who weren't. There is nothing in God's word that condones child abuse, but we need to be able to distinguish between abuse, which is forbidden, and discipline, which is required. It's the way to raise healthy, happy kids.
- I. Finally, though, once we see the wrong that we have done and are sorry, our heavenly Father **FORGIVES** us. Consider Jesus' own description of His forgiveness in Matthew 6:14. No matter the greatness of the sin that we commit, if we meet God's terms for forgiveness, the Scripture tells us that He doesn't even remember that sin anymore. Every time we repent, we get a clean slate with our Father in heaven.
- J. Likewise, earthly fathers need to be willing to forgive. There are all too many fathers out there who aren't. They have memories like a Roach Motel. They never forget anything, and every time they get in a screaming match with the kid, all the memories of past misdeeds become Exhibits A through Z in explaining why the kid is as worthless as a sack of dirt. Brethren, children learn nothing from that kind of verbal abuse, except maybe that they are worthless. Just like God, we need to be willing to let the past stay in the past. Now, this isn't to say that if our child is being stubborn and rebellious, that we should write off his past misdeeds anyway and ignore them. However, it is to say that once we see repentance, we need to welcome that repentance with forgiveness. Anything else is not living up to the example of our Father.

Conclusion. If you want to repent of your sin to God today, know that the Bible teaches He will surely forgive you.