

The Critical Role of Fatherhood in Redemptive History

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"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men" Frederick Douglass, 1817-1895, Abolitionist

"The fatherless family in the United States in the late twentieth century is a social invention of the most daring and untested design, It represents a radical departure from virtually all human history and experience. In the past 200 years fathers have gradually moved from the center to the periphery of family life" - David Blankenhorn, Fatherless America, p12

"When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel".
Judges 2;10

The Rejection of Fatherhood in Our Culture

The trend line has been running un resisted for at least 150 years as increasingly, the responsibility to train the next generation has shifted away from the father and over to government, church and private institutions. David Blankenhorn, in his book, "Fatherless America" makes the observation of the twentieth century that:

"For the first time in history, children were being shaped primarily outside the tutelage of their fathers. 200 years ago it was unthinkable, except among the very wealthy, that a child would be educated upon another knee than the father".

This stands in sharp contrast to God's radical stance on the trans generational responsibility of fathers.

The Biblical Record

Even a cursory review of the 66 books of the Bible reveals the central role entrusted to fathers to play the premier function in training the next generation.

This is how it should be. But this is not how it is in the church today.

Faithfulness Through Genealogical Lines

The Old Testament carefully traces the story of faithfulness to God through genealogical lines. Matthew tells us that there are 14 generations from Adam to Abraham, 14 generations from Abraham to David and 14 generations from David to Christ.

Throughout these generations, God designated fathers to deliver the covenants from one generation to the next. Some fathers failed, others succeeded. But, God kept his righteous seed alive and recorded for us how this seed ultimately resulted in salvation through Jesus Christ. Isaiah 6:13

The Prominent Role of Fathers in the Old Testament

With the opening pages of the Bible we are shown a trans generational view of life. The first eleven chapters of Genesis, revolve around two fathers and their sons: Adam and Noah. From chapter 12 forward the focus is on four patriarchs and their sons: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. These families in Genesis teach us much about how families fall into traps that continue for generations. These families had the same problems we have in the twenty first century. At the same time, the testimony of these families challenge us to cultivate faithfulness across the generations.

The bypassing of fathers in modern church structure, is nothing less than a rejection of the method God used to communicate His truth from one generation to the next. We learn from the Old Testament that failure in fatherhood is not an isolated failure that centers around the individual, but is the failure of the fundamental theological delivery method for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

This is a reversal of the Biblical order. It represents a nearly complete abandonment. Men in our churches have almost completely lost a memory of the importance, the duties, the structure and the function of fatherhood. Who will instruct these millions of fathers who have no roadmap for their God given role in life? Blankenhorn's words are chilling in this regard:

"Never before in this country have so many children been voluntarily abandoned by their fathers. Never before have so many children grown up without knowing what it means to have a father... Fatherless ness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation. It is the leading cause of declining child well being in our society. It is also the engine driving our most urgent social problems, from crime to adolescent pregnancy to child sexual abuse to domestic violence against women." (Blankenhorn, in the Introduction to Fatherless America)

The Father/Son Pattern of delivery

The connection between the covenant and fatherhood is obvious in the Old Testament. Every Old Testament covenant was given to a father for his sons, and their sons after them.

O. Palmer Robertson, in his book *The Christ of the Covenants*, states that the Old Testament covenants with Noah, Abraham Moses and David are held together in "a unity in genealogical administration". P34.

The genealogical administration of the covenant underscores the connection of each successive covenant with previous administrations... When God determined to relate to a people covenantally, he made his arrangement a genealogical one. This genealogical aspect of the covenant is present in the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and the Davidic covenants. It is manifested specifically in the reference to the "seed" concept (cf Gen 15:18; Exod 20:5,6; Deut 7:9; I Sam 7:12). P34-35

RC Sproul Jr, says it this way, "I realized that every time God made a covenant, it was always 'with you and your seed.' God makes covenants with families, not individuals". P6 Family Practice

Several covenants are mentioned in the Bible. Notice the trans generational implications of these covenants. They are administered by fathers. They are as follows:

The Adamic Covenant – Genesis 3:14-19, Genesis 4:7, Romans 16:20, Ephesians 6:12, Gen 22:17

The first act of redemption comes through the Adamic covenant in which God speaks:

To satan regarding the coming opposition of the woman's seed, and his defeat by the seed of the woman.

To Eve regarding her new marital relationship and her pain in childbirth

To Adam regarding his creation order responsibility to tend the garden by the sweat of his brow. This is commonly known as the "cultural mandate."

By "the woman's seed", depravity enters the human race and it is transmitted by birth to all of Eve's descendents. But God's grace prevails, as certain descendents will reject the "father of lies" and embrace their father in heaven (and, as we learn later, the faith of the fathers of Israel). As the woman bears children, the world (and the woman) will receive both blessings and sorrows. The multigenerational drama of the conflict over "the seed" has begun. The battle lines have been drawn, with fathers and children hanging in the balance. What we will see from this point forward in the history of man will be satan's war against the seed of the woman.

The implications of satan's strategy against "the seed of the woman" strikes deeply into the strategy of God regarding fatherhood.

The Noahic Covenant – Genesis , 6:17-22; 8:20-22 , 9:1-7. There are several elements of the Noahic covenant including God's judgment of sin, his gracious mercy for those who love Him and wrath for those who reject Him. Prominent, is the trans generational element.

As the sons of unrighteous Cain proliferate over the earth, they intermarry with the sons of Seth, who carries on faith in God. As they intermarry, the human race becomes so decadent that God decides to wipe out all but eight people. P 231...237 D Fuller

The Noahic covenant is evidenced in the flood that will not return to the earth upon the promise of God, and the symbol (the rainbow) that He will never again to destroy all mankind in a flood.

One of the elements of the Noahic covenant relates to the family. Robertson states:

"...the covenant with Noah relates to God's intention to deal with families in his covenant relationships"... The righteousness of the single head of the family serves as the basis for including the whole of his descendants in the ark. Because Noah is righteous, his entire family experiences deliverance from the flood". Robertson p113-114.

God says to this family head:

"I will establish my covenant with you and you shall enter the ark, - you and your sons and your wife, and yours son's wives with you." Gen 6:18

"And God said to Noah, 'Go, you and all your house, into the ark for you I have seen as righteous before me in this generation.'" Gen 7:1

Clearly this covenant is carried on by faithful fathers of sons and daughters.

The Abrahamic Covenant was initiated by a very personal act between father and son – circumcision. Genesis 17:6-8. This act would be a symbol of the need for cleansing as well as an illustration of the process for cleansing. Genesis 15:5-18

The rite of circumcision sealed the covenant. It was an act performed by fathers on boys eight days of age. This rite, performed on the reproductive organ of the male, has particular significance. The rite bears two meanings;

"First, it may be concluded that the rite of circumcision implies the race is sinful and in need of cleansing. Sin is not merely a matter of the individual, but of the race. From the point of its original institution, circumcision implies the guilt of the race.

Secondly, the close relation of this covenantal seal to the propagation of the race indicates that God intends to deal with families. God in his work of redemption intends to restore the solidarity of the creation order of the family... The promise of the covenant, sealed by the initiating rite of circumcision, addresses itself to the solidarity of the family unit". P152 Robertson

But, why were males the only ones circumcised? Pastor John Tebay of Calvary Church Placentia California in a tape series on circumcision, answers, "Circumcision is about men battling evil and marking offspring for God. God wants males to lead in the battle against evil. He wants them to lead by giving their sons a physical sign of their inward devotion to God".

The entire content of the Abrahamic covenant, is bound up in the critical role of fathers. Genesis 18:19 Makes it clear that the purpose of Abraham's life is caught up in what he would do as a father.

"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".

In this regard, Abraham is our role model. His calling is our calling.

The Mosaic covenant. The "ten words" (commandments) are the summary of the Mosaic covenant. (Ex 34:28, Deut 4:13, Deut 9:9,11) . The center of the Mosaic covenant is the law. As with the other covenants which continued alongside the previous ones, the Mosaic covenant did not pass away, but was fulfilled through the protection of godly seed in Christ. Matt 5:17-19, Romans 7:7,12.

The Davidic Covenant, Ps 89:3, 2 Sam 23:5, I Sam 7, I Chronicles 16:15-18, Ch 17, Romans 1:3,4, Heb 1:5, Isaiah 9:6, Psalm 45:7

The Davidic covenant emphasizes God's work to redeem through the kingly rule of David, culminating in the coming of the Messiah. There is a connection between David, his sons and God's Son who will accomplish redemption as "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". God's sovereign plan to complete the messianic, genealogical line of David will not be cut off.

The New Covenant Luke 22:20, II Cor 3:6, Heb 8:8ff, 10:15-18; 12:24

In the New Covenant, Christ is positioned as the fulfillment of the promise that is demonstrated and proved by the genealogical line going back to Abraham. Jesus, is the fulfillment of the messianic promise and the genealogical line of the "son of David". This is proved in the opening words in Matthew. Note the density of family imagery here:

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."

Matthew 1:1-2

In the New Covenant, God has spoken through His Son, and not only is Israel a candidate for salvation, but we (the gentiles) are grafted into the genealogical line of Abraham by faith. Romans 11:17-19, Acts 3:25, Gal 3:29

Other Key Events and passages that emphasize the role of the Father

Exodus 12 – The Passover – God’s home based teaching tool

God chose a celebration conducted in the home to be a constant reminder to His people of His power and faithfulness. With His mighty power He caused the death angel to pass over the houses of God’s people and He then defeated Pharaoh and his army. The memory of these acts of God were to be kept alive through a yearly Passover celebration in the home. God provided minute details for the method and sequence of events of the commemoration. Ex 12:13, 17-28

12:13 Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are"

12:17 Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance"

12:24 And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever.

12:26-27 And it shall be, when your children say to you, "what do you mean by this service? That you will say, "it is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel... and delivered our households".

Who was responsible for the continuation of this celebration? The father. I have a friend, who is working to strengthen families in South America, who likes to say: "in Exodus, the lamb died for the family". The Passover was indeed a family affair.

Judges 2 – When fathers dropped the ball in Israel

Judges 2 records the situation where an entire generation had no memory of the mighty acts of God or the law of God.

"When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel".

Judges 2:10

This first generation in the promised land bears a striking resemblance to the children in our generation – they grew up as pagans. They did not know what God had done for Israel. They did not know about God’s sovereign humiliation of Pharaoh, the many miracles, the manna or God’s salvation on the bank of the red sea.

This was truly one of the dark periods in the Bible. This time of departure from God, was not the failure of the priests but the fathers.

Passages which underline the importance of fathers

Many Old Testament passages reiterate this same theme of the importance for fathers to take responsibility for their children. Psalm 105:8-10, Isaiah 59:21, Psalm 78, Exodus 20:5,6, Deut 7:9, Deut 6:1-4, Deut 30:19.

The Judgment Upon Fathers who failed in their fatherhood mission.

Some of the most devastating judgments and prophecies were given around the issue of fathers and sons and their trans generational mission.

Notice the extreme judgment upon Eli because he was not the Father God called him to be. In I Samuel 2 and 3 we learn that Eli honored his sons more than he did the Lord. He is an example of someone who practiced family idolatry. He falls into the category that Jesus spoke of when He said that if you love your family more than me, you are not worthy of me."

God speaks to Eli in the following way:

"Why do you kick at my sacrifice and my offering which I have commanded in My dwelling place and honor your sons more than me, to make yourselves fat with the best of all the offerings of Israel My people?" I Samuel 2:29

What were the consequences of this lapse in fatherly leadership? Brace yourself for the following judgment:

In that day I will perform against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them or rebuke them. Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever." I Samuel 3:13-14

If there ever was any doubt in your mind, that the role of fatherhood was of extreme importance to God, let this judgment against Eli clear the record. When you tamper with the core creation order relationships of fatherhood, sonship and marriage, you are tampering with the fundamental elements of man made in the image of God and the divine plan for blessing the world with the glory of God.

This judgment was not an isolated incident. The same kind of thought was reflected by a prayer of Solomon as he recounted the requirements of the Davidic Covenant.

The "Fatherhood" condition imposed on Solomon.

The prayer of Solomon, the second recollection of the Davidic Covenant, reflects God's concern with the father/son transfer of faithfulness.

Therefore Lord God of Israel, now keep what you promised your servant David my father, saying, "you shall not fail to have a man sit before me on the throne of Israel, only if your sons take heed to their way, that they walk before Me as you have walked before Me." I Samuel 8:25

We see the same concern in David's charge to Solomon:

"Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying; "I go the way of all the earth' be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the Lord your God' to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning Me, saying, if your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, He said, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel." I Kings 2:1-4

The same type of warning is given to Solomon regarding his sons in I Kings 9:6-9

"But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I gave given them and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all the peoples. And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, why has the lord done thus to this land and to this house? Then they will answer, "Because they forsook the Lord their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them' therefore the Lord has brought all this calamity on them"

The rest of the story teaches us that God is faithful to his promise. Solomon's sons did depart from God. The calamity did come in 586 BC. Jerusalem was invaded. The temple was destroyed. The people were led away as captives. Fortunately though, God remains faithful to His promise to accomplish salvation for His people through "the seed of the woman."

The Importance of Family Heads for the Nation of Israel

The worship around the tabernacle was organized by family heads, placed in an orderly manner around the tabernacle. Some were positioned to the north, some to the south,

some to the east and some to the west. God wanted to collect families together to worship. They were very orderly in their arrangement of the family groupings.

"Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father's house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting." Numbers 2:2

The administrative operation of tabernacle worship was organized around family heads. In Numbers 3-4 we see the sons of Aaron, Levi, Kohath, Merari and others handling various aspects of these duties. The father and his sons were the organizational structure that God commanded.

The trans generational presence of blessing and cursing

In Deuteronomy, Moses makes it clear that the commandments are important "that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you". Deut 6:3. Blessing and cursing will follow in family lines. "Therefore know that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments; and He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them" Deut 7:9

The first ten chapters of I Chronicles traces and documents the heads of families.

The children of Adam, Ishmael, Keturah, Isaac, Seir, Israel, Hezron, Jerahmeel, Caleb, David, Solomon, Jeconiah, Judah, Simeon, Reuben, Gad, Manasseh, Levi, Aaron, Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, Asher, Benjamin and Saul are named by name in these first chapters of I Chronicles. As our family has read through the Bible, we come to this section and marvel at the detail given. For ten chapters there is little more than the names of fathers and sons. This is a stunning testimony when you realize that this section is longer than most of Paul's New Testament letters.

The Prominence of Family Imagery Throughout the Bible

Throughout the Bible, family imagery pervades. The Bible opens with three persons in the Trinity working together in creation. "Let us make man in our image." Creation was superintended by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit working in partnership.

The doctrine of the "Eternal Sonship of Christ" asserts that Christ was God's Son, not at his birth, but in his eternal relationship with His Father. The Father and the Son have always been Father and Son. This relationship forms the example for our relationship with the Father. We are commanded to become like Christ in all things. His love for His Father, His submission/obedience to His Father and His suffering for His Father's sake are all prime examples of the areas we are to become like Christ.

This Father and Son relationship forms the foundation of all other relationships going forward.

The transgenerational nature of the fathers role to keep the commands of God in play is found in nearly every Old Testament book.

The Closing Chapter of the Old Testament is a prophecy that the hearts of fathers would turn to their children in the manner of Elijah. Malachi 4:6.

The beginning of the New Testament is the fulfillment of that prophecy in John the Baptist.

Both Mary and Zacharias understood the way of God to put the responsibility for translating faith in Him on the fathers.

Mary the mother of Jesus understood the trans generational plan

Mary saw the trans generational connection as its acknowledgment is woven throughout the "magnificat" in Luke 1:46-55

Luke 1:50 and his mercy is on those who fear Him, from generation to generation....v55 as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever"....

Zacharias picks up the theme in his prophecy and he also acknowledges the patriarchal line and the prophets in Luke 1:72,79

"to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham"... v79: "To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace".

Peter made this same connection when he preached on the Day of Pentecost and a mighty harvest was reaped. He said to the crowd:

Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name

Of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall

receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call"

Acts 2:39

The Apostle Paul was vitally aware of the importance of "the seed" of Abraham and its role in salvation:

"And as Isaiah said before: Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, We would have become like Sodom, and we would have been made like Gomorrah." Romans 9:29

For Paul, the importance of the genealogical program of God is that it has kept righteousness alive in society. The covenants, the circumcisions, the rites, the celebrations, the rhythmic routines of righteous fathers throughout the generations were God's ways of battling against evil.

A father who faithfully passes the baton of righteousness to the next generation has joined with God Himself in His cosmic battle against evil.

At the end of Revelation the families of the earth who have been purified by the Blood of the Lamb, and made brothers and sisters in the household of God, will celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb.

All of this teaches us, not to deify our families as some will do. On the contrary, we are to acknowledge God's methods and to nurture the family to be what it was created to be: the place where the commands of God are upheld, the salvation of God is accomplished and the glory of God is the focus for the salvation of the nations.