

God's Order for Fathers
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I Corinthians 7:32-35; Ephesians 5:23-25

Responsibilities of a father: A married man has three basic responsibilities: lead, provide and protect. This message examines all three, with a few words in the beginning for our single brothers and sisters, along with the importance of marrying the right person.

The single man is free from the encumbrance of these duties to serve the Lord. Unlike his married counterpart, a single man's life is relatively uncomplicated. It might not seem that way to one who is single, but that is only a matter of busyness and perspective. Just ask any man who is married if his responsibilities were less or more after marriage.

But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. 1 Corinthians 7:32-35



Rabbi Paul is not writing this to prohibit or even restrict marriage. It is a warning not a prohibition. Being the consummate scholar and rabbi that he was, he would have known and totally agreed with Proverbs 18:22: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD." But Paul's message by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is a sobering reminder that if a man or woman marries, his interests are redirected. He has other, added obligations now which do not diminish his responsibility to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. He maintains his loyalty and fealty toward the Lord, serving Him with his whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and in addition he has other responsibilities.

And those responsibilities are in no way light or trivial. [Painting: Rembrandt's Paul at Writing Desk.]

Be careful about your choice of a wife. Subsequent in importance to one's decision to become a true follower and disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, there are three critical decisions which people make, usually early in life. Unfortunately, those callow, early years are the very same time when experience is the most limited. Just when they need the most experience, the least is to be had. Those who have waited until later in life to marry have an advantage in this area. Therefore it is of great importance to be properly

submitted to the authority of parents—they can save a young man or woman many a heartache.

These three decisions are as follows: 1. Where will I go to school? 2. What will be my life's work? 3. Who will I marry?

Prudence is more important than beauty. Proverbs 19:14 tells us, “Houses and land are the inheritance of fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.” Outward beauty fades but inner beauty, when found in the way of righteousness, only grows stronger.



Therefore, after sincerely seeking the Lord, the single man who wishes to marry should search diligently for and find an excellent woman. He should talk to her father first, praying that she will have mercy on him and be amenable when her father takes word to her about the interest expressed by the prospective suitor. Look for prudence and look for character. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). Do not marry a woman (women do not marry a man) who does

not know the Lord as you do, who does not share your values or embrace those things most important to you. Do not count on time to soften your partner so that they will “see the light and become believers.” The chances are against it. The more equally yoked one can be the better. One young girl asked her grandmother about the young man she was dating, “Isn’t it good that we are so different? You know, Grandma, opposites attract.” The grandmother replied, “Honey, being man and woman is opposite enough.”

Do not marry without receiving wise counsel. If one’s parents are dead-set against the proposed marriage, find out why. Do not contravene their counsel unless the circumstances are indeed most unusual and egregious. Violating parent’s counsel in the matter of marriage is almost always a grievous error. Do not be hasty to go against wise counsel. Just in case there is anyone who is thinking “but certainly my case is the exception . . .” take even more caution. Such a person has most likely been subject to deceptions in other areas as well. If one’s parents are no longer living, he should seek the counsel of wise men and women of the Lord who are in some measure of spiritual authority over beside him. The man who makes haste to marry will live to regret it. But then, he will have the rest of his life to ponder his decisions and may, at his leisure, repent of his haste.

The married man’s three responsibilities: lead, protect and provide.

A husband leads. First of all, a man who has a wife must take the lead. A man is commissioned for this duty and born for this responsibility. He will receive God’s grace to do the work. Scripture appoints husband is the head of the wife.

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything Ephesians 5:23-24.

Wives are placed in the vulnerable position of submitting to imperfect husbands. God will give them grace, but woe to the husband that abuses his authority. Husbands, take extreme care in this area or you may encounter the discipline of the Lord. God will also turn a deaf ear to the prayers of an abusive husband. The Lord is the wife's defender and He will not delay to "bring about justice for His elect" who "cry to Him day and night" (Luke 8: 16-18). Wives are directed to submit even to unbelieving husbands:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior 1 Peter 3:1-2.

You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7

Lead with love. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her Ephesians 5:25.

Leading with love means that a husband cannot seize authority. All authority, in order to be truly successful, must be granted by the person under authority and not seized by the person in authority. One commands respect by living two words: integrity and love.



Any person under authority has a natural and strongly developed ability to know when she is being treated shabbily by a person over them. She can detect any lack of integrity. She also knows when she is not loved. It is required of all leaders that they not be abusive. Abusive situations will at some time be overthrown, and the overthrow will be both warranted and welcome.

Do not neglect your duty to advise, encourage, and warn (to say no when necessary). It is always more difficult to do the right thing. Neglect is another form of abuse.

The Bible gives us two remarkable examples of neglectful and inadequate authority on the part of husbands: Eli and his sons, and Samuel and his sons.

Eli and his sons:

Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. He said to them, "Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people? No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD'S people circulating. If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against

the LORD, who can intercede for him?” But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death 1 Samuel 2:22-25.

Eli was generally unaware of the circumstances of his sons’ immorality. Indeed, he heard it from “all these people.” Obviously, there was little or no sharing of heart-felt issues between father and son, and his neglect had gotten so egregious that the sons were grossly abusing their authority without his notice. He does tell them the truth about their actions, but it is too little, too late. By the time he had decided that action was necessary, the Lord had already judged his sons and decided to put them to death, rather than to allow them to abuse His people any longer.

Samuel and his sons:

And it came about when Samuel was old that he appointed his sons judges over Israel. 2 Now the name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judging in Beersheba. 3 His sons, however, did not walk in his ways, but turned aside after dishonest gain and took bribes and perverted justice 1 Samuel 8:1-3.



Apparently Samuel did not learn from his master’s mistakes, or if he did, it fell to him, most unhappily, to see the very same situation which Eli encountered repeated in his own life. His sons were worthless men who accepted bribes and perverted justice. And as in Eli’s case, Samuel, we shall charitably assume, did not know of his own sons’ shameful deeds. I say “charitably,” because if he did know and yet did not restrain them, then the problem has greater dimensions with even greater neglect on Samuel’s part. But as it was, he was so neglectful that the problem had to come find him through the voice of others rather than finding it himself through watchful diligence.

[Illustration: Samuel anointing Saul. But what happened to Samuel’s sons?]

Leading without provoking. Another form of abuse of leadership on the part of fathers is the provoking of their children. Both the letters to Ephesians and Colossians address this rather common malady.

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” Ephesians 6:4.

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart” Colossians 3:21.

Both injunctions follow immediately the command that children obey their parents. God recognizes that children are vulnerable to the whims and poor attitudes of their parents and provides a repeated warning to the fathers. Fathers must take extra care in this area, or once again, God, who is the defender of even the widow and orphan, will hear their cries and resist the proud spirit of the abusive man.

Leading with a kind heart. It should go without saying that a kind hearted leader will listen more than he talks, admit when he makes mistakes, and in general, follow closely Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” A kind heart does not shun the duty to make an unpopular decision and stick with it, but he does not have an attitude of insolent pride, but of the entreating pastor and shepherd.

Be the spiritual leader in your home. Neglecting the role of spiritual leader is neglect in its highest form. Being a spiritual leader means that one sets the example in prayer, Bible reading and attending church. If any man would say, “I’m just not into it,” he should repent and get his heart right with God and start leading. Call a family meeting,



admit the neglect this area and then start fulfilling the position you to which you are ordained. Call the family to pray and read the Word together. Husbands should take the initiative on church meeting days to round up the family in order to arrive at church on time. Some duties can be delegated. This is not one of them.

Lead by example. Children learn a little by what we say, more by what we do and the most by who we are. Who we are is the collected experience of one’s character as revealed through one’s actions over years of

living. From our fathers we learn how to handle adversity, fear, fatigue, disappointment, and success. From parents we learn deference, kindness of speech and deportment, manners and patience. Remember, fathers are constantly teaching, not just when they think they are teaching. When one is critical, sarcastic, vindictive, sarcastic, critical, unforgiving or hateful he is teaching. When one exhibits the fruit of the Holy Spirit he is teaching. Fathers set the tone in the house; so make it loving, peaceful, and Godly. Our attitudes tell our sons how to treat women and our daughters what men are like.

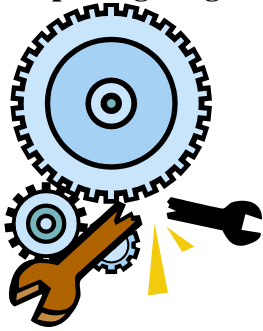
Our children watch our speedometers when we drive and our eyes when we are around other women. Example is our most powerful teacher. What are we teaching?

A husband provides. Provide for the material needs of your family.

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8).

Go to work. If a person is inclined to be a lazy man, he must repent of this sin and start practicing diligence. Provide the needs; let the children work for their wants. If a man must work two jobs to make ends meet then he must work two jobs. Do not provide by the use of credit the needs of food, clothing and shelter. In other words, “live within your means.” All debt presumes on the future. The thought is, “Tomorrow will be just like today, only better.” (See Isaiah 56:12).

Keep things in good repair. Husbands can set a good example for sons by keeping their



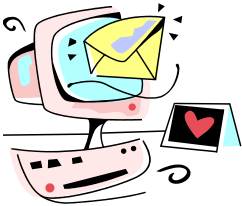
homes, autos, and personal possessions in good order. To allow one's home to become a disorganized junkyard is to neglect good stewardship. Take a good look at this area. Fix what is broken. If a man is not "handy," he can learn or submit himself to his friends that are. Most men are glad to help others, as long as the one requesting help genuinely wants to learn and is not simply a freeloader. Do not let the back-breaking work of your home fall to your wife. Take care of the heavy outside and inside work. Supply your wife with the tools she needs to do the job. If the vacuum is broken do not expect clean carpets.

A husband protects. That it is the husband's duty and role to provide protection, both physical and spiritual, is written in the mores of all civilizations. It is a very sad and telling commentary on our times that our women are going into combat zones, sometimes being captured, tortured and killed by our enemies, while their husbands are staying at home and caring for the children. This is clear evidence of degenerate and morally compromised leadership at the highest levels of our elected officials. It is also evidence that our men are becoming emasculated both spiritually and intellectually.

I will not elaborate on the necessity and morality of a man providing physical protection for his family. Any man who loves his wife and children would gladly die for them. But here are some areas of protection that may not be so clear:

Protection from excesses. Husbands must protect their wives and children in areas of our society's excesses. He should look for areas of weakness and provide protection. Rest, overeating, speech, entertainment, dress and friendships immediately come to mind.

Protect your home from outside intruders such as unhealthy internet use, chat rooms, unregulated sites which pool the collective foolishness of peers and pornography. Computers that are used by family members should be in an open and very visible location, not in a spot where no one can see what is going on. Just as a roof over your house protects you from rain and locks on your doors protect you from intrusion, filters and passwords protect young people from unscrupulous wolves that lurk on the internet.



Take the initiative when anyone proposes to have unfettered or unfiltered access to your wife or children. That includes all salesmen, teachers and other levels of authority, including youth leaders and pastors. A husband must not blindly or unthinkingly turn his children or family over to be instructed by people that he does not know, does not have confidence in or has no idea what they will teach. Leaving one's family unprotected in these areas is the equivalent of leaving one's life savings on the front lawn.

Now is the time to lead. No man should imagine that he can wait to be the kind of husband and father that he knows he should be. When the children are in diapers it seems they will always be in diapers. When they are in grade school it seems they are stuck at 4 feet 2 inches. When they are in high school it seems the perpetual motion will never cease. But one day it is over. They are on their own and gone.

Finally, here are three illustrations that I encountered while researching this message.

Illustration #1 “At the Library”

I was sitting in my favorite chair, studying for the final stages of my doctoral degree, when Sarah announced herself in my presence with a question: “Daddy, do you want to see my family picture?”

“Sarah, Daddy’s busy. Come back in a little while, Honey.”

Good move, right? I *was* busy. A week’s worth of work to squeeze into a weekend. You’ve been there.

Ten minutes later she swept back into the living room, “Daddy, let me show you my picture.”

The heat went up around my collar. “Sarah, I said come back *later*. This is important.”

Three minutes later she stormed into the living room, got three inches from my nose, and barked with all the power a five-year-old could muster: “Do you want to see it or don’t you?” The assertive Christian woman in training.

“NO,” I told her, I DON’T.”

With that she zoomed out of the room and left me alone. And somehow, being alone at that moment wasn’t as satisfying as I thought it would be. I felt like a jerk. (Don’t agree so loudly.) I went to the front door.

“Sarah,” I called, “could you come back inside a minute, please? Daddy would like to see your picture.”

She obliged with no recriminations, and popped up on my lap.

It was a great picture. She’d even given it a title. Across the top, in her best printing, she had inscribed: “OUR FAMILY BEST.”

“Tell me about it,” I said.

“Here is Mommy [a stick figure with long yellow curly hair], here is me standing by Mommy [with a smiley face], here is our dog Katie, and here is Missy [her little sister was a stick figure lying in the street in front of the house, about three times bigger than anyone else]. It was a pretty good insight into how she saw our family.

“I love your picture, Honey,” I told her. “I’ll hang it on the dining room wall, and each night when I come home from work and from class [which was usually around 10 P.M.], I’m going to look at it.”

She took me at my word, beamed ear to ear, and went outside to play. I went back to my books. But for some reason I kept reading the same paragraph over and over.

Something was making me uneasy.

Something about Sarah’s picture.

Something was missing.

I went to the front door. “Sarah,” I called, “could you come back inside a minute, please? I want to look at your picture again, Honey.”

Sarah crawled back into my lap. I can close my eyes right now and see the way she looked. Cheeks rosy from playing outside. Pigtails. Strawberry Shortcake tennis shoes. A Cabbage Patch doll named Nellie tucked limply under her arm.

I asked my little girl a question, but I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear the answer.

“Honey . . . there’s Mommy, and Sarah, and Missy. Katie the dog is in the picture, and the sun, and the house, and squirrels, and birdies. But Sarah . . . *where is your Daddy?*”

“You’re at the library,” she said.

From *Guard Your Heart*, pp. 21-22.

Illustration # 2 “Understanding our priorities”

My father used to play with my brother and me in the yard. Mother would come out and say, “You’re tearing up the grass” Dad would reply, “We’re not raising grass”. We’re raising boys!” Harmon Killebrew

Illustration #3 “What’s important to our children may not be the same as what is important to the parents”

Charles Francis Adams, a nineteenth century political figure and diplomat, kept a diary. One day he made the following entry. “Went fishing with my son today—a day wasted”

His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary, which is still in existence today. On that same day Brook Adams made this entry: Went fishing with my father—the most wonderful day of my life!”

Discouraged? Do not despair if you are failing in any or most of the areas mentioned. Ask God to help you know where to begin. Get some wise and godly counsel and get started.

If you grew up without a good father. If you had an abusive or absentee father, or your father died before you could learn from him, do not despair. God will give you an extra measure of His grace to compensate for the lack. Look to the Lord our God. He invites you to call Him “daddy.” Abba, Father, is the term Jesus used in His prayers. “Abba” means “daddy.” The Lord’s Prayer begins in this way, “Our Father . . .” God is your Father; there is none better.