

PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

I am certain that five minutes never eclipses after waking every morning without thoughts of one or more of my kids entering my mind. More often than not, those thoughts turn into prayers. Once you become a parent, you enter a different world and the more carefree former existence will never return. You will look at all babies and children in a different and, as a rule, kinder light. Let's take some time today to examine this relationship.

1. Children are gifts from the Lord.

The Bible says, *"Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward"* (Psalm 127:3). Erma Bombeck, the late comedian, in an attempt to be funny, said, "I've discovered what kids are...they are curses from the Lord." That may have aroused a laugh, but that's not what God teaches. God says children are His heritage, meaning that a child is someone valued by Him and endowed with characteristics indigenous to Him. *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"* (Genesis 1:27). The phrase "image of God" developed into the doctrine known as "Imago Dei" (Latin for the 'image of God'). Through the centuries the meaning has been interpreted similarly, yet with the emphasis placed differently among certain peoples. The Imago Dei concept had a very strong influence on the formation of American thought as expressed in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution and Bill of Rights. Even secular historians will admit that the Puritan theologians who were writing over a century before the birth of our nation bore a strong influence on the Founding Fathers. The monarchy in England were asserting themselves with what was called the "Divine Rights" which in turn was affecting their rule, especially in the role of churches, preferring some over others to the point of persecuting members of non-conforming churches. The persecution was imposed, first from the Catholic monarchs toward the reformers, then from the Church of England monarchs toward the non-conformist. It was during this time one of the most spiritually motivated intelligentsia groups rose up from the populace and their teachings began to be inculcated in the churches as well as the universities of Oxford and

Cambridge. I am referring to the Puritans who began to correct the view of only Divine Rights of Kings to the Divine bestowment upon all human beings, the Imago Dei, which was interpreted as human rights. This is the belief that God's Divine image, His personality and His Sovereignty can be still seen in man's nature. Although we are a fallen race, we can still overcome the effect of Adam by choosing Christ and becoming conformed to His holy ways. *"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son..."* (Romans 8:29). God declares children are His reward to parents, His personal gift, if you please. When a child is born it is a sign that God wants life to go on. As I visit our young parents in the hospital and they afford me the privilege to hold their baby or as I hold one of our newborns before the congregation when we dedicate the baby, I am ever aware, here is the image of God!

2. Parents are gifts to the children.

God said, *"Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee..."* (Deuteronomy 5:16). Here we find a principle that God grants both quantity and quality of life to children who acknowledge this truth. *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth"* (Ephesians 6:1-3). *"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother"* (Proverbs 1:8). *"Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old"* (Proverbs 23:22).

Not any parent would do; God chose the parents we have. In some cases the biological parent is not always the one to personally rear a child, but I believe in God's providence, even the stepparent is chosen and assigned by God. The perfect example is Joseph, the husband of Mary who had the privilege to rear up Jesus in the carpenter's home. I think of the parallels that went through our Lord's mind even when he said, *"...And upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18). *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you"* (John 14:2). Our Lord wore this title with honor, *"Is not this the carpenter's son?..."* (Matthew 13:55a).

"Is not this the carpenter...?" (Mark 6:3a).

3. Parents are commissioned to direct the child.

In I Timothy 5:14, the Bible tells the young wife to "...*guide the house.*" The word "guide" in Thayer's Greek lexicon means to impel, drive forward, propel, or strongly urge the forces and influences affecting the mind. Proverbs 22:6 says, "*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" The word "train" comes from a Hebrew root that comes from what the mid-wife or mother would do to a newborn. They would dip the tip of their finger in olive oil, then dip that finger in crushed sweet dates and touch the palate or roof of the mouth. The natural reaction is that the baby begins to suck and the mother has created the appetite for food.

I remember when Jonathan was about three years old he would go with me to take the girls to school. While enroute I would often play the classics. He got to the point as soon as I would slip in a cassette recording, he would holler from the backseat, Beethoven! or Mozart! or Bach!--sometimes after only two notes. All I did was say from time to time something like this, "That's Beethoven; isn't that beautiful?" Without even straining, I was setting his palette. On a more important point, we tried to the best of our ability to follow the admonition of Deuteronomy 6:5-7, "*And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.*" As parents we are to "set the palate," direct the taste of the child. "*O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him*" (Psalm 34:8). A truth unfolds in the teaching of Jesus and the prodigal son: our Lord tells us the thoughts of the wayward son, "*And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger? I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee*" (Luke 15:17,18). The prodigal knew his compassionate father's nature and forgiving attitude even toward the workers employed by his father. He knew the father would forgive him, he knew there was a path back for him. I submit those understandings in the boy's heart were placed into his memory banks from the time he was a babe in his mother's arms.

4. Parents never turn their back on their child.

This principle is illustrated throughout the Bible. Jesus said, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand"* (John 10:27-29). There are some sad exceptions as mentioned in Isaiah 49:15 which says, *"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."* God, our Father will never leave us or forsake us under any circumstance. We should follow the nature of God and determine to love our children unconditionally. A wayward child is far more likely to come back if they know they are welcome at home.

The story is told of a young man who spent 10 years in the state penitentiary. When he knew he would be released, he wrote his parents, *"The train slows down in the last curve before pulling into the station. I have embarrassed you and I am ashamed of what I did and how I have spent my last 10 years. I would not blame you if you would be uncomfortable with my presence in your home. If you still want me to come home, place a white handkerchief in that big oak tree at the last bend before the train stops. If I don't see it, I'll just stay on the train and go on my way."* Well, when the train slowed, the young man did not see a white handkerchief; he saw hundreds of white handkerchiefs on all the trees in the bend with a giant white sheet attached to the big oak tree. And there below the old tree was a weeping mother and an excited dad waving with all their might white handkerchiefs." A true parent never gives up. Never.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a large, decorative initial "J" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.