

Fatherhood

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I am sure that most of us are aware that today is Father's Day, a day devoted to remembering and honoring fathers. What many do not know, however, is that Father's Day, despite it being a secular holiday, was conceived while sitting in the pew of a church in 1909. In May of that year, a woman by the name of Sonora Dodd was listening to a Mother's Day sermon and thought how nice it would be if there were a similar way to honor her father who had raised her and her five siblings after her mother had died in childbirth. She interested the political leaders of Spokane Washington in the idea, and the first Father's Day celebration was held in the city of Spokane on June 19, 1910. The idea caught on but not quickly, and it took until 1972 for it to be recognized as a national holiday.

That is the way that Father's Day began, but we would not be discussing it here if we did not see a biblical connection in it. The biblical connection is, of course, fatherhood, and the father of all fathers, God Himself. There is nothing in the secular celebration of Father's Day that celebrates or even recognizes our Father in Heaven, but we see the connection, which is that the way in which our Father God fathers us (his earthly children) is the example of how we, who are earthly fathers, are to father our own children. We call it "fatherhood," and turning it on its head we could also call it "children hood," because the way in which we who are born of earthly parents are commanded to honor and relate to our fathers on earth is, with only a few exceptions, how our Father in Heaven expects us to honor Him and relate to Him as his children.

Let us begin, therefore, by looking back to the first biblical example of fatherhood, which is the fatherhood of giving life that we read about in Genesis 1:27:

"So God created humankind in his own image; in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them."

That is our birth at creation, and those of us who are fathers are very familiar with what came next which was that we who were God's children disobeyed. Our Father said to us:

"You may freely eat from every tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You are not to eat from it, .." (Genesis 2:16a-17a).

And what did we do? As soon as we thought that our father wasn't looking we tasted the fruit and had to be punished, for as our Heavenly Father instructed us in Proverbs 13:24:

"He who fails to use a stick hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."

And discipline us He did, with a very big stick that has come to be called the "fall of man," whereby he put a wall of separation between Him and us until such time as, through the sacrifice

and teaching of Messiah Yeshua, we would be in a spiritual condition to return to Him in obedience.

The early part of the Bible discloses generational genealogies – father-to-son, father-to-son, until we come to a very special father, whom some are fond of calling “Father Abraham..” They call him that because he was selected by God to father many nations; in Genesis 17:1-7 we read:

“When Avram was 99 years old ADONAI appeared to Avram and said to him, “I am El Shaddai [God Almighty]. Walk in my presence and be pure-hearted. I will make my covenant between me and you, and I will increase your numbers greatly.” Avram fell on his face, and God continued speaking with him: “As for me, this is my covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations. Your name will no longer be Avram [exalted father], but your name will be Avraham [father of many], because I have made you the father of many nations. I will cause you to be very fruitful. I will make nations of you, kings will descend from you. I am establishing my covenant between me and you, along with your descendants after you, generation after generation, as an everlasting covenant, to be God for you and for your descendants after you.””

So, Abraham became the spiritual father of us all, but God’s covenant was not only with Him, it was also with his descendants through Isaac and Jacob, the children of Israel, more recently known as the Jewish people. What I am suggesting, is that those of us who are of Israel, i.e. Jews, are charged by God to be spiritual fathers to all others; as God proclaimed to Moses in Exodus 19:5-6:

“..and you will be a kingdom of cohanim [priests] for me, a nation set apart.’ These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra’el.”

And also Isaiah 49:5-6:

“So now ADONAI says- he formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Ya’akov back to him, to have Isra’el gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the sight of ADONAI, my God having become my strength- he has said, “It is not enough that you are merely my servant to raise up the tribes of Ya’akov and restore the offspring of Isra’el. I will also make you a light to the nations, so my salvation can spread to the ends of the earth.””

Also regarding Israel, we read in Genesis 12:2-3:

“I will make of you a great nation, I will bless you, and I will make your name great; and you are to be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse anyone who curses you; and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

Some mistakenly believe that the blessing to Jews is because Israel is a favored nation. That is not correct. Israel is a servant and priestly nation, which is another way of saying a father nation to the other nations of the world and, as such, deserves the respect commanded in Ephesians 6:2a:

“Honor your father and mother.”

Of such significance did God consider his own fatherhood, that

“He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

And God’s son Yeshua honored his Father by his obedience of love. He said it and showed it in so many ways and at so many times, but here are just two of those times:

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38).

“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” (John 15:10)

So, we have spoken of God as being a father, Abraham as being a father, and Abraham’s descendants through Isaac and Jacob (the Jewish people) as being a father nation to the Gentiles. Let’s now take a close look at the fathers with whom we are most familiar – our own fathers or, if we have children, ourselves. It is not accidental that so much in the Bible is about fathers and their children, for God the Father made us in his image. We have no indication that the Apostle Paul had children, but he considered himself as a father to the Thessalonians to whom he ministered. We read in 1 Thessalonians 2:10-11:

“You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children,..”

But fatherhood is a two-way street because we cannot adequately be a father to our children if our children do not let us. That is why we read in Ephesians 6:1:

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”

And again in Colossians 3:20:

“Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.”

So, today is Father’s Day in America but, according to the Bible, Father’s Day should be every day. What I mean by that is that our Father in Heaven wants us to honor Him, love Him, and obey Him every day. He wants us to be sons and daughters to Him as Yeshua is a son to Him, and He wants us to learn how to be sons and daughters to Him by using Yeshua as our example and aspiring to be like Him. Now endeavoring to become like Yeshua is not new in Christianity; in fact, a name has been given to it which is “discipleship.” The problem for many Christians though, is that their focus on Yeshua has become so intensively narrow that Yeshua eclipses God the Father in their lives, and they give little attention to Him so long as they can have Yeshua. In not all but many Christian churches, all prayers are directed to Yeshua, all singing is to Yeshua,

and the sole focus of every Sunday's sermon is on salvation, which is interpreted as having life after death with Yeshua. And God the Father? What has become of Him? Oh yes, once in a while they are reminded of Him, as the "Ancient of Days," the God of the Old Testament – a God to honor but not to relate to or emulate except through Yeshua. How sad for our Father in Heaven who wants so much to be our Father, to be close to us, for us to love Him, and for us to want to be his children.

According to Scripture, Yeshua commanded his disciples to follow Him, but he did not want them to look solely to Him; rather He wanted them to look beyond Him to his Father in Heaven as did He:

"Then Yeshua answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner." (John 5:19)

"Then Yeshua said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things". (John 8:28)

"For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak." (John 12:49)

"You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I." (John 14:28)

Did you notice what Yeshua said in John 14:28? "My Father is greater than I." And did Yeshua tell his disciples to pray to Him? No, He did not! He gave them words to pray to the Father and said: "In this manner, therefore, pray:"

So let us now pray his words together as they are projected on the screen:

"Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our [sins,] As we forgive [those who sin against us]. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." (Matthew 6:9-13)

Okay, we have covered a lot of ground regarding fatherhood, but there is one area left to discuss, which is our own fatherhood. Father's Day in America emphasizes children honoring their fathers which the Bible does as well. However, the Bible equally emphasizes the responsibility of fathers to their children, which is not a theme of the secular Father's Day.

According to the Bible, being a father to our children is serious business as we have seen from the attention that our Father in Heaven gives to us. I had my two sons before I was a believer, and I remember distinctly what my attitude was about it. I saw other new fathers (also

unbelievers) agonizing over the responsibility of their fatherhood (thinking it was so complicated). I scorned their concern because I considered fatherhood to be the most natural thing in the world, requiring only five things – (1) providing for my children; (2) protecting my children; (3) spending time with my children; (4) teaching my children; and (5) respecting my children as people. When I think back on it, although I was an unbeliever and knew virtually nothing about the Bible, I was spot on! I didn't know it then (but I do now), that my wisdom about bringing up children did not come from my own intelligence, but from God imparting it to me. What I also did not know at the time (but do now) was that the five things I intuitively knew were required for bringing up children amounted to biblical love. Yes, God knew me before I knew Him, and He was a father to me before I even knew He existed.

So, although there are many Scriptures about fatherhood, let me unpack the ones that speak to the five essential attributes of fatherhood of which I spoke. The first of them is being a provider for our children; in 1 Timothy 5:8 we read:

“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.”

God provides for us and he expects us to do the same for our children. We read in Philippians 4:19:

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Messiah Yeshua.”

And similarly, Matthew 6:31-33:

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

The second essential attribute of fatherhood is being a protector of our children. Children from birth are helpless and even when they grow to teen age they are vulnerable. Yeshua prayed protection for his disciples (his children) and said to his Father in John 17:15:

“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one.”

And we also read of God's protection in Psalms 32:7:

“You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.”

We too must protect our children from the dangers of the world, for “*the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Peter 5:8).

The third essential attribute of fatherhood is being a spender of time with our children. There is no substitute for it because it is by spending time with them that our children get to know us and absorb our values. We must therefore spend quality time with our children in the same way as God spends time with us.

Proverbs 18:24 says of God:

“..there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother,”

and the ultimate of God spending time with us is expressed in 2 Corinthians 6:16:

“For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

In that He has made us his Temple and lives within us, He spends time with us all of the time.

The fourth essential attribute of fatherhood is being teachers of our children. Proverbs 22:6 exhorts us to:

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

And in Deuteronomy 6:6-7 we read:

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

Little more needs to be said about that.

We come now to the last essential attribute of fatherhood which is being respecters of our children and treating them as persons. 1 Peter 2:17a in the NIV commands us to *“Show proper respect to everyone:”* We normally think of children respecting parents and not vice versa, but *“Yeshua said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven’”* (Matthew 19:14). When I had my first son David, something in me (I know now it was God) told me that it was important to respect my son as having as much human value as if he were an adult. I followed that principle with David and then with my other children, and the way that I did it was to not talk down to them with baby talk, to respect their prerogatives and desires, and to not take undue advantage of them with my greater strength and size. I reasoned with them as though they were adults even when I was certain that they did not fully understand and, when I bought them a gift that had an adult counterpart (such as a hand tool), I bought them the adult version that was of better quality instead of the child’s toy version. Later, as they grew to adulthood, I let my children know what my expectations of them were at every stage of their development, and I held them accountable. Above all, I always listened carefully to what they were saying and responded to them in an adult way even when what they were saying was childish. And they always had an adult seat and were free to contribute to conversations at the dinner table even among guests.

That concludes my message on “Fatherhood,” and at this time the leaders of ICC would like to pray for the fathers that are here in this room.