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A Model for Christian Fathers

By Joseph Tkach

The fact that human beings can produce children does not mean that parents are automatically capable of raising those children properly! Humanity today, to its chagrin, is experiencing the truth of that statement.

Today the lack of right childrearing is contributing to the erosion of the family unit, and the decline of the family is a major cause of the societal collapse we see taking place around us. Juvenile crime, drug abuse, psychological problems and even suicide are on the rise. And family problems are present even in God's Church!

So where do we turn for answers? Notice what God intends to do: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart

of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5-6).

God is guiding parents in the Church, through the leadership of Herbert W. Armstrong, to better fulfill their responsibilities to their offspring.

Malachi's message, quoted above, specifically singles out fathers. Of course, fathers and mothers must work together to provide godly upbringing for their youngsters. The duties of mothers will be described further in other articles to come, but in this article we will concern ourselves with the special part God says the father, as head of the home, must fulfill for his children.

Actually, the most important example human fathers can look to is that of God the Father Himself! The human family, as Mr. Armstrong has

explained, is a model of what God's Family — His Kingdom — will be like. And God is the Model of the perfect Father. Human fathers need to develop the qualities God the Father exercises in caring for His Family. Let's look at a few.

Right leadership

A vital quality Christian fathers need is *right leadership*. Notice God's command: "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

This task requires that your children maintain proper respect for you as their father. In this day of "children's rights" and "letting kids decide for themselves," real *respect* for parents may sound old-fashioned. But this is the relationship that must exist if you are to lead your children

properly. Some men in the Church have misused this concept of "respect," and have succeeded only in terrorizing their children *and* their wives. To be truly respected you need to display compassion, courage, godly understanding *and* firmness. Yes, your decisions as head of the family will stand, but you will use wisdom in making them, and you will carefully consider the input your wife and children offer.

On the other hand, some parents think they need to be their children's "friends." The last thing a normal child needs is a middle-aged man or woman "buddy." Your children don't have your years of life experience. By bringing yourself down to their level, you compromise your position and destroy their respect for you. Your children desperately need mature, loving leadership from you.

A firm resolve to obey God, along with an outgoing, compassionate personality — that is what makes for true leadership.

A good provider

God the Father is a *good Provider* — He supplies all His Family's needs. He is the Giver of every good thing (Jas. 1:17). In this, too, He is the Model for human fathers.

During the Church's wedding ceremony the man vows, before God, to provide for his wife. This responsibility extends to any children they produce. God shows His scorn for any able-bodied man who refuses to work when He says, "If any would not work, neither should he eat" (II Thess. 3:10).

But this responsibility for human fathers to provide for their families extends beyond physical needs.

A father must give of himself personally as well. This means spending time with your family, especially at meals. When was the last time you took your family on a special outing? Do you *plan ahead* to spend meaningful time with your wife and children, fellowshiping with them, teaching them and enjoying each other? God has given you charge of them — you are to care for them as He would. God is always available for us to call upon, and we fathers should always be available to our families. A father must provide emotional and spiritual support for his family.

What do all these provisions add up to? Love. Fathers, *love* your families. This is pleasing in the sight of God, the Father of us all.

Ability to teach

Your children look to you fathers for guidance. God the Father teaches His children the right way to live, and He commands you likewise to train up your children in the way they should go (Prov. 22:6). That means instructing them about God's laws (Deut. 6:7).

Train your children to respect their elders. Teach them to take care of their belongings and the possessions of others. Expose them to the finer things of life. Don't let your kids decide for themselves in moral matters — that would be like a gardener refusing to pull the weeds out of his flower patch, reasoning that it is up to the flowers to choose their own companions. Your children do not naturally know right from wrong. You, with the Holy Spirit, do, and you must teach them.

Learn to exercise discipline properly. Remember that your children are not converted and don't have your level of character and understanding. Temper discipline with understanding, mercy and compassion.

Remember, too, that the example you set as head of the home teaches your children more than any number of lectures does. Do your children see you practicing God's way of life? Do they hear you belittle your wife — their mother — or criticize the Church or its activities? These things register in young minds. You as a Christian are to be a light to the world, and a major part of your particular world is your family. Are you a godly light to them? You will be blessed if you are:

"Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord" (Ps. 128:1-4).

Consistency

God the Father is consistent. He has existed from eternity, and has

never deviated from His purposes. His Son Jesus is just like Him, "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). This quality of *consistency* must be present as well in the makeup of a Christian father.

Do your kids know where you stand on the issues that affect them? Do you need to say "No" only once for them to get the message? Are your views even predictable? If so, your children will learn that they can *rely* on you for the support and solid foundation they need.

Don't, however, make yourself a god to your children. They must learn to be independent. They need to be strong emotionally and morally regardless of the actions of others — even you. Some parents in the Church have been rudely surprised when, after years of training, their children grew up and bolted from the Church! The kids had never, of their own independent will, seen the value of living this way of life.

But being consistent as a father will help avoid this problem. Your children will see that you really believe, live and reap the rewards of what you teach them.

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace (I Cor. 14:33). In a consistently peaceful and reliable environment, your children can develop a right confidence in themselves and God's way of life.

Meet the challenge

Raising children properly in this chaotic world is a real challenge. God lays much of the responsibility on fathers. But you as a father can meet this challenge!

God Himself is your Model. If you stay close to Him and practice what He teaches you in His Word, you can produce some fine young people who may be leaders in the world tomorrow. Try to become more like God, the perfect Father, and you will see positive results in your family.

The apostle Paul encourages, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like *men*, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity" (I Cor. 16:13-14). You can be a truly Christian father, and God will be well pleased with your effort. □