

When Fathers Weren't So Honorable

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

To us, today is The Father's Day because it is the first day of the week. To our culture, it is simply Father's Day because it is the third Sunday in June. It's a day to honor fathers for their love, compassion, care, providence, work. But what about when fathers aren't so honorable? I think all of us could tell stories of times our fathers weren't so honorable. Even those of us who look back and, in general, claim we had the best of fathers can find defects of character that have impacted us. I think I had one of the greatest fathers who ever lived, but even I can pinpoint things he did that have affected me negatively. In these situations, we very readily point out no one is perfect and very quickly encourage folks to honor our fathers for all the good they did do. But I'm not talking about these situations. I'm talking about much worse situations. When I was in college, one of my best friends told me stories about his childhood. His father was a womanizing, alcoholic who beat his children repeatedly. He told me about times he crawled across the floor trying to get away from his father while being beaten with a bicycle chain. Did I mention that at the time his father was a gospel preacher? When I was in Texas, I attended a conference and was able to hear former Miss America Marilyn Van Derbur talk about her childhood. Her father sexually abused her from the time she was 5 until she left home at 18. I can hardly fathom what Father's Day must be like for those among us who had fathers that weren't so honorable. Throughout today, I hope you can spend a great deal of time honoring fathers for all the good things they do. But I don't want to forget that there are those among us who need a different message. If you are one of those unfortunate enough to have such a father, I want to share with you some of the things I believe the Scriptures say to you.¹

Discussion:

- I. Your father's sins are not your fault.
 - A. **Ezekiel 18:20** is quite clear. "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." Just as the children of impeccably righteous fathers cannot take the credit for their father's righteousness, you are not to blame for your father's sins.
 - B. Perhaps your father abused you and as he did, he explained that it was because of your sins and he had to because it was your fault. Your father lied. I am not speaking here of proper discipline supported by scripture which produces the peaceful fruit of righteousness (cf. **Hebrews 12:11**). I'm talking of abuse that wounded body and spirit and produced the awful fruit of brokenness and despair. Perhaps your father sexually abused you. He may have said things like he couldn't help himself when he was around you. He lied. It is not your fault because you were female, because you were pretty, or because you were developing physically. If you were the son and were sexually abused by your father, it was not your fault. It does not mean you were born homosexual, as all too many victims of incest end up believing.
 - C. Your father's sins were not your fault. Your father's sins today are not your fault. Your father's sins with you were not your fault. His wickedness is upon him, not upon you. I am so sorry that you have heard things all your life that led you to believe you were somehow to blame. I am so sorry that you will hear things from other people that will make you feel the same way. But please, write down **Ezekiel 18:20** to remind you that when God looks at you, He doesn't lay your father's wickedness at your feet. Your father's sins are not your fault.
- II. You were not responsible to make your father stop.
 - A. One of the reasons you may believe your father's sins are your fault is because some of the people you have told about the sins have said extremely ignorant things like, "Why didn't you stop him?" "Why didn't you say, 'No?'" "Why didn't you report him?" Folks who say these things simply do not understand the near psychological impossibility for a child to do any of these

¹ I am not a counselor, a psychologist, a therapist, or any other trained professional. Nothing in this lesson, whether the outline or the audio presentation, should be construed as professional therapy or counseling or taking the place of such pursuits where needed. I am simply a gospel preacher sharing what I believe the scripture says to folks in these very trying situations.

things. For those of you who may have said these kinds of things, keep in mind that we train children to obey their fathers. The father is the rule and the authority. Not to mention that to the child the father is so large, he is impossible to overcome. Not to mention the father usually applies all kinds of subtle threats and manipulations to cause the child not to report, rebel, or react negatively. Finally, don't forget that every child becomes quickly aware that other adults believe other adults before they believe children. Sadly, we stack the deck against children in these cases and then we blame them when they act the way we raised them.

- B. However, in addition to this. The scripture demonstrates it was not your responsibility to stop your father. Consider **I Peter 1:13-17**. It is each person's own responsibility to conduct himself with fear, holiness, and obedience to God. It is not your responsibility to make anyone else conduct themselves with fear and holiness. It was not your responsibility to make your father conduct himself with fear and holiness. That was his responsibility.
- C. Also, consider the way God established the roles of the family. According to **Ephesians 6:4**, it was your father's job to raise you up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. It was not your job to teach your father the discipline and instruction of the Lord. **Proverbs 22:15** says, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him." This passage demonstrates a place for proper discipline, not abuse. However, notice that it explains children have folly in their hearts. Children are foolish. There is no shame in that. It is the way God made us. It was your father's job to teach you the wisdom to overcome your own sins as you grew up. It was not your job to somehow unnaturally have the wisdom to know how to get your father to deal with his sins against you. Don't play the, "If only I had..." games. "If only I had known such and such." "If only I had done such and such." You were a child. You did childish things and your father took advantage of you for that instead of fulfilling his role to help you grow properly to adulthood.
- D. Despite the insensitive and ignorant things people have said to you, it was not your responsibility to stop your father.

III. You are not guilty because of your father's sins.

- A. Many victims of abuse grow up not only believing their fathers' sins were their fault and they were responsible because they didn't stop their fathers, they are guilty of sin because of what their fathers did. This is especially the case for victims of sexual abuse in childhood. Because they have learned that sexual activity outside of marriage is sin, they are convinced that they are guilty. I believe the scripture demonstrates that is just not true.
- B. The Bible does not specifically mention child sexual abuse, however, I believe **Deuteronomy 22:23-27** demonstrates a principle that applies to this situation. When the woman was forced in a way that she could not cry out, she was not considered guilty. The man who forced her was guilty and should be put to death. In the same way, when fathers abuse their children it is in such a way that generally precludes the "crying out." The child is not to blame. If you were that child, you were not responsible. Your father sinned, but his involving you did not make you a sinner. You were not guilty. You do not need to hang on to that shame. You didn't do anything shameful. Your father did.

IV. Your father's sins in your childhood do not justify yours today.

- A. **Exodus 20:5-6** makes a very confusing but important point. The text says God visits the iniquity of the fathers on the sons up to the fourth generation. His point is not that a wicked father may have righteous sons whom God will punish anyway. Rather, the point is that the wickedness of a father lives beyond him. It is certainly possible for a wicked father to have righteous children (**Ezekiel 18:10-18**). However, when a father is wicked toward his children in their formative years it impacts them and influences them for wickedness as well. According to childhelp.org, 1/3 of all abuse victims grow up to abuse their own children.²
- B. You need to understand that you are not to blame for your father's sins. You were not responsible to make him stop. You are not guilty because he sinned and even involved you in his sins as a child. However, your father's sins do not justify yours. No doubt, our parents

² <http://www.childhelp.org/resources/learning-center/statistics>

influence us, but for all their influence we will stand before God in judgment for our sins no matter who influenced us.

- C. Understand this in two arenas. First, your father's sins do not justify your sins against your father. As **Romans 12:18-21** says, vengeance belongs to God. Our responsibility is to grow in Christ's grace that we may overcome evil with good and not try to repay that evil with our own. Second, the fact that your father sinned against you does not justify you committing sins against your children. Regrettably, despite our desire to be different from our parents in their sins, when pushed in stressful situations, we fall back on what we know. What we know is how our parents acted. Sadly, we often repeat the very things our father did. Or perhaps we don't go as far as he did, but we still sin against our own children and then act like the fact that we didn't go as far as our own father justifies our behavior or mitigates it. Clearly, we are not responsible for what our fathers did. We are not responsible for how it impacted us. However, we are responsible for overcoming it by God's grace and strength. The same passage that said our fathers were responsible for them and we aren't says we are responsible for us (**I Peter 1:14-17**).
- D. I'm not saying overcoming this influence is easy. It is part of the reason we are enslaved to sin. Nevertheless, we are responsible to submit to God now and our father's sins do not justify ours.

V. God loves you.

- A. When a father so mistreats his children, one of the saddest consequences is that the children have a very hard time believing God loves them. This can happen for two reasons.
- B. First, because you naturally wonder how a loving God could ever allow such tragedies to happen to you. I can understand that. However, please understand that God's love has given us free will. Sadly, that free will means the victims of sin can be very hurt. Please recognize that God's love was not demonstrated by taking away the free will of others. It was not demonstrated by making sure we never suffer any hurts. God's love was demonstrated by sending His Son to die for us so we can be saved (**Romans 5:6-9; I John 4:9**). God's love was demonstrated by leading us to an inheritance in heaven (**I Peter 1:3-5**). **Romans 8:18** says the suffering we endure here will pale in comparison to how amazing the glory of eternity will be for us. That is God's love for us.
- C. Second, because our earliest views of God are actually shaped by the powerful people in our lives like our fathers. If our father abuses us and hurts us, we learn a lesson that powerful people (including God) won't love us. They only use us and abuse us. The only point I can make is your father is not God and God is not like your father. Your father may not have loved you. God does. **I John 4:8** tells us so. God is love. **Psalms 36:5, 7** describes God's love. It is precious and extends to the heavens. I am so sorry that your father did not demonstrate that love to you as he should have. But no matter how your father treated you, God loves you.

VI. Take refuge in God.

- A. Having been raised by an abusive father, you learned you couldn't trust adults. As with most dysfunctional families, you learned you couldn't trust others. Your family taught that lesson well. The only person you could trust was yourself. You turned ever inward. You likely even turned to sins to medicate the mental, emotional, and spiritual pain you felt. Drinking, drugs, gambling, gluttony, lust, sex, raging, any or all of these became the means with which you medicated the pain. You may have hidden behind a façade of bravado, pride, false confidence, personal achievement, perhaps even legalistic righteousness. These were attempts to have complete control in every aspect you could to make up for the lack of control you had over your father. Or you may have gone the other way. You may have decided that since you were out of control, why bother trying. You may have simply gone headlong into sins believing you were already so bad it didn't matter.
- B. Whichever direction you went, you were making the mistake of taking refuge in self. Either, like the Pharisees of **Luke 18:9**, you trusted in yourself, or realizing you couldn't trust yourself, you gave up altogether. There is another option. Trust God.
- C. **Psalms 27:10** says, "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in." Quit trying to be in control. Rather, crucify yourself and live by faith in Jesus (**Galatians 2:20**). Give control over to God. Recognize that you will never be able to heal yourself. You will

never be able to relate well to others. You will never be able to forgive your father. You will never be able to have a healthy life unless you give yourself completely over to God. Let Him be your rock, your refuge, your strong and mighty tower (**Psalm 18:1-3**). Taking refuge in God doesn't mean life will always be easy. It doesn't mean you will never be hurt again. What it means is God will get you through it and bring you out on the other side.

Conclusion:

I have almost no idea what kind of fathers any of you had. However, sadly, I am certain some of you know all too well the things I've talked about this morning. Please recognize what God says to you. You are not to blame. You are not at fault. God loves you. Take refuge in Him. If we can help in any way, please let us know.