

“TWO IMPERATIVES FOR FAITHFUL FATHERING”
LUKE 10:25-29

John G. Paton was a missionary to the New Hebrides in the mid-1800s. One of the greatest influences in his life was his father who after almost every meal would go to a “closet” where he would pray —

“Though everything else in religion were by some unthinkable catastrophe to be swept out of memory, were blotted from my understanding, my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in that Sanctuary Closet, and, hearing still the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, **‘He walked with God, why may not I?’** (Autobiography, p. 8)

“How much my father’s prayers at this time impressed me I can never explain, nor could any stranger understand. When, on his knees and all of us kneeling around him in Family Worship, he poured out his whole soul with tears for the conversion of the Heathen world to the service of Jesus, and for every personal and domestic need, we all felt as if in the presence of the living Savior, and learned to know and love him as our Divine friend.” (Autobiography, p. 21)

Godly fathers emulate their heavenly Father. And as imitators of Him, they give immeasurable blessings to their families. One writer has well said, **“The very heart of Christian nurture is this: to bring the heart of the child to the heart of his Savior.”** [Hendriksen] He’s exactly right. How will we do that, dad?

The passage before us today isn’t about fatherhood. Or marriage. Or anything directly related to family. But as is often the case in Scripture, there are profound implications from this passage on many topics, including fatherhood. These verses instruct us about the nature of eternal life — and some implications of eternal life and our salvation.

WHEN WE LOVE GOD, WE WILL LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS (EVEN THOSE IN OUR HOMES).

The Law of God and salvation can be simplified into the principle of loving God — and from the overflow of loving God, also loving others. As we come to this passage about eternal life, **listen carefully to the Q&A on eternal life...**

- 1. Two Questions About Eternal Life (vv. 25-26)**
 - ✓ “What can I do to have eternal life?” (v. 25)
 - ✓ “What does the Bible say?” (v. 26)
- 2. Two Answers About Eternal Life (v. 27)**
 - ✓ Love God fully, and above all else (v. 27a)
 - ✓ Love others lavishly because you love God (v. 27b)
- 3. Two Implications About Eternal Life (vv. 28-29)**
- 4. Two Implications for Fathers**

1. Two Questions About Eternal Life (vv. 25-26)

- Luke is the only gospel writer to recount this event. Matthew and Mark both tell similar stories but the speakers are very different and the initial question was different (Mt. 22:34-40; Mk. 12:28-31).
 - ✓ The Matthew and Mark story happen during the passion week.
 - ✓ We don't know when this story takes place or even if it happens in the same context as vv. 17-24.

- "What can I do to have eternal life?" (v. 25)
 - ✓ A **lawyer** asks this question; the term "lawyer" is interchangeable with "scribe." He is someone who is knowledgeable about the Mosaic Law and the implications of the Law for daily living.
 - Evidently he had been seated, listening respectfully to Jesus teach, when he **stood** up to ask.
 - He *seems* to respect Jesus by calling Him **Teacher**. Until this point in Luke, this title was used respectfully of Jesus (even Peter, 7:40); after this virtually every use (9x) is either disrespectful or disbelieving. They were unconvinced that He was actually the great Teacher.
 - ✓ Notice that while he is respectful, his motives are not pure. He is **putting Jesus to the test**.
 - The lawyer is not seeking information and not asking for clarity so he can respond rightly.
 - And he is not just "testing" Jesus; he wants to trap Jesus — he is seeking to discredit Jesus.
 - The word even means to tempt — and Luke only uses this word of one other tester — Satan (4:12); it seems that we are meant to relate the two events.
 - Because he knows the Law well (probably better than any of the other lawyer/scribes), he is the best person to attempt to catch Jesus in a misinterpretation.
 - ✓ His question is straightforward, clear, and common: **what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**
 - The question was asked at least one other time (18:18-23); eternal life was a common topic of Jesus' teaching (Jn. 3:15-16, 36; 5:24, 39;...).
 - This is always (and has always been) the most important question in all of life. He asked insincerely as a trap; but the question was still essential, as Jesus demonstrates in v. 28.
 - Notice lastly that as he asks the question, he asks with the assumption that there is something that he can do to merit eternal life — he has a right to the inheritance (similar to 18:18).

- "What does the Bible say?" (v. 26)
 - ✓ The man had a question for Jesus (to entrap Him); Jesus had two questions (to reveal the truth).
 - ✓ **What is written in the Law?**
 - Jesus wanted the unnamed lawyer to demonstrate his credentials (the man was then the one being examined, not Christ!). He did something similar with Nicodemus (Jn. 3:10; cf. 5:39).
 - "You are the scribe and lawyer, what do you know about what God says about eternal life?"
 - But with the question, Jesus is also affirming the integrity and authority of Scripture.

- His answer to the confrontation is to look to Scripture: “what does God say about this?”
- ✓ **How does it read to you?** reiterates and also expands the first question.
 - The first question asked, “what does it say?”
 - This question asks, “what does it mean?”
 - The lawyer is to understand that *he* is being examined and there is a right/wrong answer.
- ✓ Jesus is exposing this lawyer/scribe — “you know the Book; do you *know* the Book (and implications)?”
 - The task of the follower of God is always to know what He says and what the implications are.
 - God is the authority in the universe; and what He has revealed in His Word has that full authority.
 - Do we read and study Scripture to know the implication for *how I am* to live?

2. Two Answers About Eternal Life (v. 27)

- While the lawyer was “on the spot” he had an immediate (and good and biblical) answer.
- Love God fully, and above all else (v. 27a)
 - ✓ He derives this answer from the familiar Deut. 6:5; 10:12.
 - He says that love for God is given **with** — or “out of” — all your heart...; it’s internal.
 - Love for God is not what one does for God, but the affections and allegiance to God that one has.
 - Love for God is not merely submission and obedience to God. It is affection for God.
 - We love God “when we prefer and value God above all things in every situation; when we cling to him and refuse to be separated from him regardless of the difficulties of life; when we [do everything at every time] motivated and directed by love for Him.” [Lundgaard]
 - ✓ This love is with **all your heart...soul...strength...mind**.
 - Don’t separate those out as different from one another; they are all related to the inner man.
 - Our love for God comes from the control center of our lives. Our love for God is not determined by what we do for Him, but from our desire for Him and our allegiance to Him.
 - “I am His and He is mine.” And it is possible to do right things for wrong motives (Rev. 2:4-5).
- Love others lavishly because you love God (v. 27b)
 - ✓ There are implications from loving God — you will **love your neighbor as yourself** (Lev. 19:18).
 - These two OT passages were considered the heart of Jewish faith and reflected in Micah 6:6-8.
 - To “do” (fulfill) the Law means that one will love — both God and man.
 - This Law does not mean “you must love yourself,” but it acknowledges that we are inclined to care for ourselves very well — our neighbors should receive that same kind of care.
 - Implication: there is no love for God without love for man; nor genuine love for man without love for God. They are welded together and are inseparable.
 - ✓ These two truths will become central to the church (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; cf. 1 Jn. 3:11, 23; 4:7...).

3. Two Implications About Eternal Life (vv. 28-29)

- Jesus affirms the correct theology of the answer: **you have answered correctly** (orthodoxly). Jesus had a similar answer to the scribe during the passion week (Mk. 12:34). Instead of the lawyer trapping Jesus, He has exposed and revealed (and “trapped”) him.
- Yet there was something lacking in the answer, so Jesus adds, **do this and you will live**.
 - ✓ Remember the initial question was **what shall I do to inherit eternal life?** He was implying that he deserved eternal life and that there was something he could do to attain it.
 - ✓ Jesus’ answer is concise and clear (quote **Lev. 18:5**) — **do** is a pres. tense — do continually, permanently.
 - ✓ In other words, “yes, you can attain eternal life that way, but you must do so unerringly.” (**Mt. 5:48**)
 - ✓ This is Jesus asking, “do you always love God supremely without wavering? Do you always do everything you can for others regardless of what it costs you?” The answer is obviously, “no.”
 - ✓ OT writers use that verse to *indict* Israel for her failures (**Ezk. 20:11, 21; Neh. 9:29**).
 - ✓ Paul will use also that verse to reveal the unrelenting demand of the Law (**Gal. 3:12**; cf. Rom. 3:20).
- Despite the blunt clarity of Jesus, the response of the lawyer is quite astounding: **who is my neighbor?**
 - ✓ Luke helpfully tells us that he is attempting to **justify himself**. But we can also easily imply that from his statement.
 - ✓ He ignores his responsibility toward God (as if he has done that well) and then, perhaps aware that he hasn’t done well with his neighbor, seeks to minimize that by saying, “well who can tell who that is?”
 - ✓ Isn’t this exactly what we do to excuse our sin — we limit and change and redefine what the Bible clearly says so that while we know we are guilty we can pretend we aren’t. We shift blame...
 - ✓ What is really notable about this objection is that Jesus has already answered the question (**6:27ff**).

• Implication 1: No one can fulfill God’s demands for eternal life.

- ✓ No one can love God wholly and love man as himself perfectly. No man can “do” enough (the lawyer’s supposition, v. 25) to attain eternal life; eternal life is a gift of grace from the Son of Man.
- ✓ Notice all the **alls** in the lawyer’s statement (v. 27); who can do that continually?
- ✓ “Is your will constantly bent on obedience to Him, your mind focused on adoration of Him, your emotions always stirred with warm affections for Him? Not for ten minutes at a time. And let’s not even speak of the scads of unworthy motives that come into play in loving our neighbor. How abysmally deceived we are if we think verse 27 is somehow our solution.” [Davis]
- ✓ No one can ever be righteous enough to save himself. We all need grace all the time.

• Implication 2: When God redeems sinners, they are able to fulfill God’s demands and please Him.

- ✓ When you are identified with Christ and have His salvation, you can love God wholly (acceptably) and love your neighbor as yourself. The demands of both OT and NT become attainable.
- ✓ We are commanded to love God and man and the Lord enables us to do just that.

- ✓ Cf. **Rom. 8:4** — because of the Spirit of God, we can do the things God has demanded (as evidence of our transformed lives; not in order to gain righteousness on our own).
- ✓ Many of you can tell profound stories of how God has worked exactly that in your life. You were self-centered and self-righteous and now God has made you Christ-righteous and other-centered.
- ✓ Gospel: If your life has not been changed in that way, it might be because you aren't genuinely saved. You need salvation from God; He will save you if you repent and believe (**Rom. 10:9-10, 13**).

4. Two Implications for Fathers

A. The most important part of your life is your life with God.

Or, The most important part of your relationship with your children is your relationship with Christ.

- ✓ If you aren't a believer in Christ, you must believe. If you are a believer, you must be growing.
- ✓ If you are a dad, there is no greater test of your life than what you are with Christ. You don't improve on the scale of "dad" by earning more money, or sending them to a better school, or being more structured and disciplined, being acclaimed by friends, or even being popular with your kids.
- ✓ You move up the scale of "dad success" when you increase in Christlikeness.
- ✓ Think about Paul's command to the Colossians about parenting (**Col. 3:21**): the guiding principle of that verse is **3:16-17** — do everything in submission to the Spirit and the **Word** and in accordance w. Christ's **name** (nature), **giving thanks** to him for that relationship.
 - Prov. 4:23 says **"Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life."**
 - Those are words of Solomon to his son — they are parental words.
 - But they are also words for parents (which Solomon tragically forgot).
 - **The greatest gift you can give your children** is your own genuine and faithful walk with Christ.
 - What is your heart for God like? What are your desires? What do you love? What do you want? Does your inner life correspond well to God's expectations of a godly man?
 - What is your practice of worship and service in the church? Are you using your spiritual gifts?
 - Do you practice reconciliation — repentance, forgiveness, and restoration?
 - Are you a model of biblical manhood (**Col. 3:12-13**; Tt. 2:2)?
- ✓ **What a man is inwardly determines how effective he will be as a father.**
 - We lead our children from our own spiritual character.
 - You cannot parent without Christ and the gospel. To attempt to lead your children in a godly way without being conformed to him yourself is impossible.
 - It has been said that a pastor cannot preach beyond what he is living. In the same way a father cannot lead his children beyond what he is living. The best thing you can do for your parenting is to submit yourself to following Christ.

B. Love your children in the way you love yourself. Or, love them sacrificially the way Christ loves you sacrificially.

- ✓ What is it to love? Love is a commitment of my will and affections to your needs and best interests regardless of what it costs me, because of my love for Christ.
 - **A commitment of will** — it's a decision you make every day (sometimes every moment). Loving children is a choice; it is learned, and it is practiced. It is not natural to love; it is supernatural to love, and that love happens when we intentionally plan how we will love our children.
 - **A commitment of affections** — it's common among Christians to say that the essence of *agapē* love is that it is a *commitment* (the implication is that it excludes emotion). But that is not the sense — love is warm (“brotherly”) tender and affectionate (1 Thess. 2:7). We *want* to love.
 - ... If your 4-year-old says, “why do you love me, daddy?” “It’s my duty” is the right answer; but it’s also wrong! Love is never just “duty” — as in, “Why do you love me?” “It’s my duty.” No, it is engaged and tender and joyful.
 - ... A dad can be a dad (leader and authority) and at the same time affectionate (**1 Th. 2:7**).
 - **A commitment to needs and best interests**
 - ... That is to say that love is an action — it does things (**v. 25b**).
 - ... In love dad doesn’t give his children everything they want, but he does strive to give them all that they need and all that is best for them.
 - **A commitment regardless...** —
 - ... Love is inherently sacrificial; it gives and does not take.
 - ... It will cost you to love your children: time, cash, energy, sleep, prayer,... but it’s right.
 - ... “We don’t need to be loved by others. Yes, it feels good. But it is not essential. Loving, not being loved, is essential.” [Piper, *A Godward Life*, 2: 272.]
 - **A commitment that is derived from the gospel** — love is related to our fellowship with Christ (v. 32). So our fellowship with Christ compels us to lead our children to Him (**1 Th. 2:11-12**).
- ✓ How we love our families reflects how we love Christ. When we love Christ well, we will love our families well (which doesn’t mean they will always be “perfect” or “successful”).
 - Do you love your children with grace and servanthood?
 - Are your children more like Christ because of you or in spite of you?
 - What is your reputation as a dad in your home group? In your community?
 - Are you seen by your children as an authoritarian and perfect expert or as a humble co-laborer (we are all sheep)?
 - Do your children perceive you as a task-master or as a loving servant and shepherd?
 - Do your children *know* you love them?

CONCLUSION: Earlier I mentioned **John Paton** and the influence of his father; listen to his account of the last time he saw his father, as he departed for divinity school and then the mission field:

My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are fresh in my heart as if it had been but yesterday; and tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then, whenever memory steals me away to the scene. For the last half mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence — my father, as was often his custom, carrying hat in hand, while his long flowing yellow hair (then yellow, but in later years white as snow) streamed like a girl's down his shoulders. His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me; and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech was vain! We halted on reaching the appointed parting place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said: "God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you, and keep you from all evil!"

Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I ran off as fast as I could; and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him — gazing after me. Waving my hat in adieu, I rounded the corner and out of sight in instant. But my heart was too full and sore to carry me further, so I darted into the side of the road and wept for time. Then, rising up cautiously, I climbed the dike to see if he yet stood where I had left him; and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dike and looking out for me! He did not see me, and after he gazed eagerly in my direction for a while he got down, set his face toward home, and began to return — his head still uncovered, and his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched through blinding tears, till his form faded from my gaze; and then, hastening on my way, **vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as he had given me.** (pp. 25-26)

What affection and love for a son. What affection and love for a father. And both those loves flowing from a deep love for God.

Dad — may we be such men who love God and out of that love, lavish others — especially our children and our wives — with a similar and compelling love.

BENEDICTION: Jude 24-25