

Fatherhood
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Part One: The Fatherhood of God and the Christian Father

The mystery of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ are the two greatest mysteries of our Christian religion. The mystery is beyond human comprehension. The Father begets the Son from eternity. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. We cannot understand how this can be, but the confession of this mystery is not accidental to our Christian faith. It is essential. We confess at the conclusion of the Athanasian Creed:

This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved.

We use metaphors when we talk about God. He is not literally a shepherd, a rock, or a fortress. When we call God Father we are not using a metaphor. In Ephesians 3:14-15 St. Paul writes:

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

In the Greek, the word father and family have the same root. Paul is saying that human fatherhood gets its name from the Fatherhood of God. We don't understand God the Father in heaven from an analogy with the fatherhood of fathers here on earth. It is the other way around. We learn what a human father is and ought to be by listening to what God says about his Fatherhood. God's Fatherhood is in the first instance the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son. Our relationship to God as Father is through the Son. The Father/Son relationship in the Godhead is eternal. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. Our relationship to our Father in heaven is by adoption in time.

There is the story of an argument between the Muslim and the Christian concerning God. As you know, the Muslim god neither begets nor is begotten. Muslims view the almighty power of their god as his greatest

attribute. Christians view the love of God as his greatest attribute. The Muslim told the Christian that the Christian's God was inferior to the Muslim's god because love cannot exist without someone to love. If God's greatest attribute is love, to exercise his greatest attribute requires someone to love and that makes God dependent on that someone. That makes God weak. The Christian replied to the Muslim's argument by pointing out that the Father loved the Son from eternity. There never was a time when the Father was not the Father of the Son and there never was a time when the Son was not the Son of the Father. The love between the persons of the Godhead is as eternal as God himself.

So the Fatherhood of God, far from being a mere analogy from human fatherhood, is from everlasting to everlasting. To know God is to know him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus said in his high priestly prayer, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3)

The Bible speaks of God as he is and as he acts. God is the Father of the Son. God is the Son of the Father. God is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son. The relationship between the persons of the Godhead that is described by the words, beget, begotten, and proceeding is an eternal relationship.

The Bible also speaks of God as he acts. The Father sends the Son. The Son sends the Spirit. When the Father sends the Son he reveals himself in the Son. In sending the Son, he did not send him in his uncovered deity. He sent him to be incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and to be made man. It is in the manhood of Jesus that we see God. It is specifically at the cross where the God-man suffers and dies for the sin of the world that we see the true nature of our Father in heaven. Love defines him. Love is why he sent Jesus. Love is revealed on the cross where our God and brother Jesus turns aside all divine anger against us sinners and establishes peace.

It is this same Jesus who invited us to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven." We call it the Lord's Prayer because the Lord Jesus taught us to pray it. We call it the Lord's Prayer because it is because the Lord Jesus Christ is our Mediator before God and when the Lord Jesus is our Mediator before God, God is our dear, loving, gracious Father.

There is no Fatherhood of God without Jesus Christ. There is no Christ without the Holy Spirit. The Fatherhood of God is a uniquely Christian belief. The Muslim god is not the Father. Any monotheistic so called "god" who is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is an idol and no Father at all. He cannot answer prayer. He cannot help anyone in any way. He's an invention of the human mind.

False doctrine doesn't stand still. It is constantly mutating, as the devil tries new tricks to con Christians into thinking he's an angel of light. There is the "light" of Freemasonry – out of fashion nowadays, as the younger generation has little time for such things – that promotes a syncretistic religion whereby all gods are basically the same. They talk about the fatherhood of god. There was the religious humanism of the folk music of the sixties that featured Peter, Paul, and Mary singing, "Because All Men Are Brothers," to the tune of "O Sacred Head Now Wounded." With the feminist assault, the syncretistic father-god of freemasonry and the humanistic father-god of the now generation have given way to the gender-free god or goddess of the twenty first century.

On Trinity Sunday, 1999, as I was driving north on I-29 between Mayville and Grand Forks, North Dakota, I heard a sermon on the radio from a pastor of a congregation of the ELCA in Grand Forks in which he said that, while we may call God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it is fine to refer to him, as a female colleague of his liked to do, as "Mother, Lover, and Friend." "Mother, Lover, and Friend" is for some pretty much the same thing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's because they remake God in their own image and fashion him into an idol.

Whether the denigration of the office of father in our homes led to the rise of the androgynous god/goddess, or whether the loss of the right understanding of the Fatherhood of God led to the decline of the office of father, the Fatherhood of God and office of Christian father are bound together. That should not surprise us inasmuch as the father of the home is God's representative.

God is our Father and the Church is our mother. It was St. Cyprian of Carthage who, in the third century, famously said: "He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother." In the twenty first century we must also say, "He who turns God the Father into God the mother cannot claim the church as his mother. To teach that God may be

addressed equally as both mother and father is to deny God. He who identifies himself as I AM does not exist as mother.

There are nouns that use the female gender and are also used to identify God. For example, wisdom takes the female gender and is used by Solomon in the Proverbs to refer to God, specifically the second person of the Trinity. Jesus uses the simile of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings to express his desire to gather Israel together. The use of such language does not make God female.

But then, neither is God male, if by male we mean everything that pertains to human maleness. A male human being has a body that, under normal circumstances, has the capacity to engage in sexual activity with a woman that can result in procreation. God, on the other hand, has no body. He is a spirit. Thus, speaking of God as a male is confusing. Maleness and femaleness entail bodily functions and bodily differences.

The Bible uses anthropomorphisms when referring to God as if God were a human being. He walks in the garden, he has a right hand, and he sits on a throne. These are anthropomorphisms: God is being depicted as if he is a human being. The Mormon religion takes biblical anthropomorphisms literally, and teaches that God possesses human form. In fact, they teach that God used to be a man. Their doctrine of eternal progression says: As man is, so God once was; as God is, so man may become.

God is not a man. He does not have a body. God is a spirit. When we speak of him as he has revealed himself in the Holy Scriptures, we speak of him as the Father who begets and as the Son who is begotten and as the Holy Spirit who proceeds. When speaking of the Son, who became flesh and blood, we follow the pattern of sound words contained in the Athanasian Creed, where we confess concerning the oneness of Christ's person, that he is one Christ, "not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God." God did not change into a man. God cannot change. God remained God when he became a man.

The Fatherhood of God is depicted in Scripture in terms of human fatherhood by the use of similes. For example, in Psalm 103:13, David writes, "As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear

him.” These beautiful words have inspired beautiful hymns. It will be instructive for us to consider how one of these hymns has been rendered in our hymnals in recent years. Consider the hymn, “My Soul, Now Bless Thy Maker,” hymn #34 in The Lutheran Hymnal, published in 1941. Stanza three begins with these words:

For as a tender Father
Hath pity on his children here,
He in his arms will gather
All who are His in childlike fear. (TLH 34 stanza 3)

In Lutheran Worship, published in 1982, the wording of that verse was changed to:

For as a loving mother
Has pity on her children here,
God in his arms will gather
All those who him like children fear. (LW 453 stanza 3)

The Lutheran Service Book, published in 2006, returned to the former wording:

For as a tender father
Has pity on His children here,
God in His arms will gather
All who are His in childlike fear. (LSB 820 stanza 3)

LSB corrected an error introduced by LW. The error in LW was not that it compared God’s love and a mother’s love. The error was that it eliminated the comparison of God’s love and a father’s love. The eternal Son of the Father teaches Christian fathers what fatherhood is all about when he says, “Be merciful, as your Father is merciful.” (Luke 6:36)

We will examine feminism a bit more closely later on today, but at this point, suffice it to say, that an underlying assumption of the feminist creed is that patriarchy is bad. It is inherently abusive, exploitative, and degrading to women. That’s not true. Patriarchy – the rule of fathers – among us Christians derives from the biblical teaching of the Fatherhood of God. That is the very opposite of abusive. The love of God the Father for his dear Son is from everlasting to everlasting. It has never wavered.

It has never been withdrawn. Even when Jesus was bearing the sin of the world and God's wrath against it, so that he cried out, in fulfillment of the Psalm, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" at no time was his communion with the Father broken. When he died his last words were: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46) Our heavenly Father is full of compassion. For Christ's sake, because of the Father's love for his only begotten Son, because of the merits of Jesus, his obedience, his righteousness, and his suffering, our Father in heaven receives our prayers. When we pray, "Our Father," by the invitation of Jesus, we do so with all boldness and confidence that he hears us as a dear father hears his dear children.

The Christian father prays "Our Father" knowing that the office he holds is sanctified by the eternal love that exists between God the Father and his only begotten Son. That eternal love was revealed in space and time on Calvary, where Jesus took away our sins. All our sins and failures as fathers were washed away. There we were reconciled to God. There, where the blood of God's Son is shed for us all, we fathers find the grace to do what God gives fathers to do.

Part Two: The Gospel Foundation of Christian Fatherhood

In Lutheran theology we make certain distinctions that are usually helpful. A common distinction we made is between the two kingdoms in which God rules over us. Luther spoke of the kingdom of God's right hand and the kingdom of God's left hand. The kingdom of God's right hand is his kingdom of grace in which Jesus Christ reigns as King. He rules over us by his grace. He won this kingdom on the cross. There, where he was publicly identified as Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, he won the authority on earth to forgive sins. That is how he exercises the power of this kingdom. The power of the kingdom of God's right hand is not the sword or the gun. It is not coercion. It is the power of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel.

The kingdom of God's left hand is his rule through the civil authorities. We know that God doesn't endorse this or that political scheme. He doesn't favor this or that political philosophy. He can and does rule over people through monarchies, oligarchies, democratic republics, and even outwardly godless forms of government like Communism or Nazism. The kingdom of God's left hand is how God governs our bodies. It has no

power over the soul. The civil authorities have the power of the sword, which ultimately may entail capital punishment. It relies on coercion, not persuasion. It cannot make men better, but it can impose better behavior on those who are afraid of being punished. St. Paul describes the kingdom of God's left hand that he exercises through the civil authorities in Romans 13.

When we pray for our daily bread we pray for good government. We pray that God would deliver us from both totalitarianism and anarchy. Totalitarianism is when the state transgresses into the authority of the church and lays claim to the devotion that the people owe to God alone. Anarchy is when there is no viable state to exercise the civil authority necessary to live relatively safe and peaceful lives on this earth. St. Paul mentions specifically a quiet and peaceful life as the benefit of good government. (1 Timothy 2:2) The twenty-first century has seen many parts of the world lurching back and forth from totalitarianism and anarchy. This is especially the case in areas where radicalized Muslims assume the reins of power. It makes one grateful to be a Christian living in America.

But here in America, we are facing serious problems of our own. As useful as the two kingdoms distinction is, we American Christians might be better served by the threefold Lutheran distinction between the ecclesiastical, the civil, and the domestic estates. The family has been under attack for quite some time, and the church hasn't always been equipped to confront it. The domestic estate upholds both the civil and the churchly estates. God rules over his children by the spiritual and bodily discipline of their human fathers.

Our topic is, "The Gospel Foundation of Christian Fatherhood." This doesn't mean that there is not as well a legal foundation of Christian fatherhood. Indeed, all civil authority derives from the Fourth Commandment. Children learn to submit to the civil law by learning obedience to father and mother in the home.

During the time of Moses, Israel was governed as both church and state. God formed Israel into a nation through Moses. The forty years of wandering in the Sinai Peninsula taught the children of Israel that they did not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. When God rules over the nation in this way we call this form of government a theocracy. Ancient Israel is the only theocracy in the

history of the world. Other would be theocracies, whether of Calvin in Geneva or of the various Muslim Caliphates, are not theocracies at all. God spoke to Moses at the burning bush to send Moses to be his prophet, and ruler of both church and state. God didn't talk to Calvin from a burning bush, and he certainly didn't talk to any Muslims. No, the only genuine theocracy in the history of the world was the theocracy of ancient Israel. God governed the people directly through Moses. While the church and the state could be distinguished theologically, even as we distinguish between law and gospel, the church could not be broken away from the state nor the state from the church. They did not exist apart from the other. Israel was both church and state. Later, when they had kings like all the other nations, Israel was no longer a theocracy.

When the government of the church and the government of the state are the same government, which is preeminent: the church or the state? Put differently, does the state exist for the benefit of the church or does the church exist for the benefit of the state? We Lutherans should not hesitate. Inasmuch as the topic of justification is the chief topic of the Christian religion, just so, the church – which consists of all those who are justified through faith alone – is the apple of God's eye. It is not the state. While the state isn't under the authority of the church, the state's authority exists for the sake of the church even as God directs all things under heaven and earth for the benefit of his elect. (Romans 8:28)

The office of Christian father, like the theocracy God established through his prophet Moses, joins civil and spiritual authority. Just as the foundation of ancient Israel was Christ, just so the foundation of Christian fatherhood is Christ. That is to say, the foundation upon which the office of Christian father depends is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In his discussion of the Fourth Commandment in his Large Catechism, Luther speaks of a "majesty hidden within" fathers and mothers. That's a reference to the divine authority that they bear. God cannot be known as Father except through faith in Christ our Redeemer. It is only after Jesus has taken away our sin and reconciled us to God that we can face God with confidence. The gospel is indispensable to knowing God as Father. And so it is with the Christian father. He cannot be God's representative to his family unless his office is grounded in the gospel.

We are living during a time of deep confusion about the church and her ministry – a time when unbridled religious enthusiasm is given free rein in the name of our freedom in the gospel. The ministry of the church is divided into a plethora of offices, each of which has a so-called divine call into it. These divine calls provide special status for religious people doing religious things. Everybody has his or her ministry and everything remotely connected to the church is a ministry.

Naturally, we fight about this. But I wonder if these fights aren't misunderstood as mere turf wars? I recall, during my time in the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, when we were discussing and debating the relationship between the office of pastor and the office of schoolteacher, a veteran pastor of the synod shared his perspective on the issue by talking of horses staying in their assigned stalls. His understanding of the matter was that if pastors and schoolteachers did what they were supposed to do and did not invade the other's stall, then things would be just fine.

But the debate about the ministry among us has never been so simple. It's not about who gets to do what. It's about what must be done. It's about what the ministry of Christ really is. The ministry of Christ is the ministry of reconciliation. It isn't the ministry of bodily or intellectual discipline. It's the service of the forgiveness of sins. How may we obtain the faith through which we receive the forgiveness of sins from God? Jesus established the office of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments to do just that. We call that office the pastoral office, but it cannot be limited to the work of pastors.

We will speak of the father as the pastor of his home later this morning. He could not be the pastor of his home unless his office as father was grounded in the gospel. A Christian father is not just a father who happens to be a Christian. The Christian father's office as father exists for the same reason the pastoral office exists: that we may obtain the faith through which we are justified by God. Consider the argument that God, through the prophet Malachi, raises against divorce. We read in Malachi 2:13-15,

And this is the second thing you do:
You cover the altar of the Lord with tears,
With weeping and crying;
So He does not regard the offering anymore,

Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.
Yet you say, "For what reason?"
Because the Lord has been witness
Between you and the wife of your youth,
With whom you have dealt treacherously;
Yet she is your companion
And your wife by covenant.
But did He not make them one,
Having a remnant of the Spirit?
And why one?
He seeks godly offspring.
Therefore take heed to your spirit,
And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

The chief benefit of marriage is godly offspring. Divorce is bad because it hurts the children. When a man discards his faithful wife, the gospel foundation of his office as father is compromised. The gospel is Christ giving himself for his bride, washing her clean of all her sins, loving her and caring for her as his own body. To dismiss the faithful wife is to abandon the children to the devil's wiles and lies. The father, who serves his children by loving their mother, bears with her weaknesses, overlooks her faults, and models his love for her from Christ's love for his church. He is a father who can speak the gospel to his children with authority.

Jesus spoke with authority, not as the scribes. He demonstrated the authority on earth to forgive sins. He claimed all authority in heaven and on earth before he sent out his disciples to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. This authority is given to the church and is exercised by the pastor for the church's benefit. This authority is given to every Christian home and is exercised by the father for the family's benefit. I know this authority firsthand because I grew up with it. I was raised by a father with this kind of authority. It was gospel authority. I didn't leave home to find Jesus in church. I found Jesus at home, around the dinner table, as my father taught the gospel to his family.

Every Christian home is a theocracy. It is a theocracy because the office of father is based on the gospel. God spoke his words to Moses and through Moses told the fathers to speak his words to their children. Listen to what he said. In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, God says:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 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. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates.

Note the order of things. First the words shall be in your heart. Then you shall teach them diligently to your children. What shall be in the heart of the Christian father? What is the first word from God? It is this: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" The LORD who revealed himself at the burning bush, the LORD who identified himself as the One who kept the promises he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the LORD who rescued his people from the slavery they had suffered for hundreds of years, the LORD who promised to send his Son to be their Savior, the LORD who chose them, out of all the nations in the world, not because of any merit or worthiness on their part, but because he was gracious, this LORD is their God, and he alone.

That's the gospel foundation of Christian fatherhood. God comes to us in Christ. He chooses us as his children. He forgives us our sins, he regenerates us, he pours his Spirit into our hearts, and he makes us his children. It is as children of the heavenly Father that we Christian fathers carry out the office of fatherhood. The gospel is the foundation for our lives. It is the foundation of our fatherhood. Our relationship to our children is established by the gospel. Nothing we give them in terms of material goods can compare with what we have received from God in Christ. We cannot believe for them. We can give them what we have received through faith. And that is our next topic: The father as the pastor of his own home.

Part Three: The Father as the Pastor of his own Home

When St. Paul lists the qualifications of a bishop in First Timothy chapter three, he includes these words:

One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?).

He repeats the same qualifications in Titus chapter one, where he writes: "Having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination." St. Paul clearly sees a connection between the qualifications of a pastor and the qualifications of a father. The two positions have much in common.

The Christian father is the pastor of his own family. But what do I know? Permit me to share with you some biographical facts that illustrate my incompetence to speak on this subject. My father was ordained several years before I was born. And while he left the parish for the professorship when I was four years old, my father remained a minister of the word, a teacher of theology all of his life. My firstborn was born after my first year at the seminary. My office as pastor and my office as father have been joined since I was twenty five years old. I have very little experience in being a father and not being a pastor.

One cannot understand what he hasn't experienced. Thus I am at a disadvantage. I cannot speak authoritatively on this subject. What would I know about a layman serving as the pastor of his own home? My father was the pastor of my home when I was a boy and I was the pastor of my home when I was a man, but neither he nor I were laymen, so I have no experiential authority to tell you how to be a pastor of your own home when you're not a pastor of a church.

Well, let's talk a bit about experiential authority. What you experience tells you the way things are. And the way things are is the way things ought to be unless somebody can persuade you otherwise. Let us discuss the way things are.

Parents send their children to church to be taught God's word. They send them to a parochial school or they send them to Sunday school, vacation Bible school, or some other kind of a school for religious instruction. While the parents may attend church on a more or less regular basis, most rarely, if ever, attend Bible class. But they send their children to be taught.

What do the children learn? They learn three things about religious instruction. First, they learn that it is for children. That's why they, the children, attend Sunday school or parochial school, or vacation Bible school, while Mom and Dad don't. Clearly, when you grow up, you don't need to study and learn the Bible. This is for children.

Second, they learn that religious instruction takes place outside of the home. You leave home in order to receive instruction elsewhere. The home is not where you expect to find it. You go to professionals who are qualified to teach you. Your parents are obviously unqualified. Otherwise they wouldn't be sending you to someone else to be instructed.

Third, they learn that religion doesn't really have anything to do with your daily life. You don't live in a church. You don't live in a school. You live at home. But home isn't where you receive religious instruction. Therefore, religious instruction doesn't really pertain to your daily life.

Religious instruction is for kids. Older folks, mature people, adults who are in charge of their lives don't need it. This is what your parents are teaching you. They are teaching you that when you get older, more mature, and more in charge of your own life you won't need religious instruction, either.

If this describes the typical Lutheran family, perhaps we should reconsider what the family is, and specifically, what the role of the father in the family is. If the father does not serve as the pastor of his own family, it is unlikely that the children will come to see the Christian religion as integral to their lives. If religious instruction belongs out there in an institution, and doesn't take place within the home, the children are unlikely to consider that instruction as having any relevance to their daily lives.

If you are a Christian father with children still living in your home and you hear or read my words and they describe how you have been raising your children, you may feel a bit guilty. That's good. Really! You should. If you're not feeding your children with God's word then you should feel guilty because that's wrong. It's child neglect. When God chose to bless your union with your wife with children, he made you responsible for their spiritual care. If you haven't been caring for their spiritual needs, you have been neglecting them. If you spend your time, money, and attention on sports, vacations, camps, and other things that you think may benefit

them, you show that you know of your paternal responsibility. But if you do all this and do not teach them God's word at home, you have failed in your paternal responsibilities.

You cannot undo your neglect. You cannot relive your life. So the first thing you need to do as a Christian father who wants to be the father your God has called you to be is to repent of your sins. Acknowledge that your failure to teach God's word to your children at home was a sin against God. Then look to him who bore your sin. Look to him who fulfilled God's law, neglecting no duty, and suffering for our neglect and failure and sin. Look to Jesus, raised up on the cross and see him bear the curse of the law. See him take your place under the law, doing what it told you to do and suffering the penalty you earned and thereby silencing the judgment that stood against you. Take him at his word when he tells you that he forgives you all your sins, because until you are forgiven of all your sins, you are utterly incompetent to serve as the pastor of your own home.

When Jesus told Peter to feed his sheep it was in the form of an absolution. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. Three times Jesus asked him to feed his sheep. The request to do so was also an absolution for Peter's shameful denial. God tells you fathers, in the words of St. Paul,

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.
(Ephesians 6:4)

When God entrusts his children to our care, he calls on us to entrust ourselves to his care. We give to our children the same thing we have received. The Catechism is the form in which we receive it. The Catechism has three or six parts. As far as daily family worship is concerned, three parts will suffice. Recite the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed, and pray together the Lord's Prayer. Also, read a portion of the Bible, or, perhaps in the case of little children, from a Bible story book, and sing a hymn together. It takes ten to fifteen minutes. After supper is a good time. I have several suggestions I would like to share with you, not because they are absolutely necessary, but because they will help you to do the job you are setting out to do.

First, be consistent. That doesn't mean that you will never skip family devotions. It means that you will not let skipping devotions become a habit. Things do come up that make it impossible to be at home when the time for family worship arrives. You do what you can, not what you can't.

Second, the father leads. He leads in the recitations and in the prayers. This is important. The Bible says that the husband is the head and the wife is the body. The head cares for the body. The father is the pastor of his family by taking leadership. It doesn't mean he knows more theology than his wife. Maybe he doesn't. That's not the point. The point is that the leader leads, and leading in prayers is essential to pastoral leadership.

Third, you don't let anyone butt into this time and take it away from you. When you finish dinner and you have begun devotions, and the phone rings, you answer the phone and say that you are sorry, but you can't talk now. You're having devotions. Call back in fifteen minutes. Or, ignore the phone and let whoever is calling leave a message. But don't let anyone interrupt what you are doing. If you do, you are teaching the children what you don't want them to be taught. On this point, you must be stubborn and consistent.

When it comes to the selection of hymns, choose good hymns that your children will be able to sing in church. Children ought not to be placed into a children's ghetto with their own special songs and rituals that set them apart from the congregation that gathers on Sunday for worship. What happens in the home around the dinner table should prepare the children for worship in church.

When reading Bible stories, it is good for the father to question the children after reading them, beginning with the youngest, asking easy questions, and moving on up to the oldest, asking more difficult questions.

Finally, while you may want to limit your devotions to fifteen minutes, you don't need to leave the table just because devotions are over. Especially as the children grow older, spending time together as a family, talking about current events, issues, things at school, what Mr. Jones said in biology class, or whatever – talking about what's happening in light of God's word and teaching is how the children incorporate a sound theological orientation into their lives. The more you talk theology the more you want to do it and the easier and more pleasant it gets.

The pastor isn't a fearsome figure who is there standing in judgment of you. If he is, something is off. The pastor is a preacher of forgiveness and hope, of joy and comfort, a messenger of peace. That's what the Christian father is to be with his family. It doesn't take a formal theological education. All it takes is the time to sit down with the family and bring God's word to the ones God has placed under your care.

There are no guarantees when it comes to raising children. The proverb is true, that if you bring up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it. But proverbs, in the nature of the case, are generalizations, and don't necessarily work out in a precise cause and effect fashion. Children are not machines. You cannot control them. You can only give to them. You cannot require them to receive what you give.

When I was a boy, my father did quite a bit of preaching at vacant congregations in Missouri and Illinois. I understood his sermons. He was a very good preacher. The pastor of the congregation to which our family belonged was a nice man, a very dignified man with a beautiful voice. His sermons were utterly incomprehensible. What I learned in church I learned from the hymns and the liturgy. And I learned the most at home. It wasn't because my father was a theological professor. He was. I had him as a student. He was the best teacher I had at the seminary. But while I grew up on a seminary campus, I didn't grow up in a seminary. I grew up in a home. My father was the pastor of that home. It was at home that I learned, grew, was strengthened, encouraged, and grounded in the truth. I will always be grateful to God for giving me a father who regarded himself as the pastor of his home and who took joy in doing what God gives a pastor to do: to feed the flock of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

Part Four: The Father and His Pastor

The partnership between parents and pastors is vital to the raising of children in the faith. Christians go to church. Churches have pastors. Christians have pastors. But our topic is not the Christian and his pastor. It is the father and his pastor. So we will talk specifically about the relationship between a Christian father and his pastor.

Jesus asked Peter to feed his lambs and his sheep. (John 21:15-17) This is Christ's instruction to all pastors in his church. God commands fathers to feed the lambs under their fatherly care. This means that fathers and pastors have overlapping responsibilities. They are both called by God to feed the same children.

The office of pastor is similar to that of father. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 4:15,

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

While it isn't common for Lutheran pastors to be addressed as father, our doctrine of the ministry certainly allows for it. We believe that the gospel preached and the sacraments administered by the called and ordained pastor are means of grace by which the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies his church. In the Large Catechism, Luther speaks of this church saying:

He has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which He reveals and preaches . . .

The church is our mother. God is our Father. He who speaks for God is our spiritual father.

It was about thirty years ago, when a young parishioner, I would guess he was about four years old, came up to me and said, "Say God, I have a question." I replied, "Casey, I'm not God. I say what God says, but I am not God." Casey replied, "You say what God says?" I said, "Yes." He considered that for a moment, and then replied, "Well, anyway, this is my question."

He was a very practically minded little boy. He wanted to know what God had to say about a particular topic. He asked the one he thought would know. That's what a pastor is for. And that's what a father is for. So the pastor and the father have the same purpose.

Their call is different because their offices, while overlapping, are not the same. The pastor isn't responsible for bodily discipline. The father is. The father isn't responsible for preaching the gospel to the congregation. The pastor is. But as far as divinely established duties are concerned, these offices share much in common.

When we Lutherans talk about doctrine, we keep it in the singular. Doctrines are false. Doctrine is pure. Similarly, when you hear about ministries, your antennae should spring up and take note. What ministries? There is but one ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the ministry of reconciliation. I don't have mine while Pastor Jones has his and Pastor Smith has his. It is Christ's ministry and we all share the same thing. That's why there can be no ranks among us, except by human agreement and in a purely advisory capacity. When it comes to speaking authoritatively for Christ to Christ's church, all ministers are equal. They all share the same ministry.

This means that an attack on a minister is an attack on the ministry. Not literally. Not even theoretically. But, for all practical purposes, it is. Believe me. I know that there are many incompetent pastors out there. There are men serving in the ministry who never should have gone to the seminary. There are men who have lost the right to preach by scandalous living, by persistence in false doctrine, or by a refusal or inability to do what God calls the pastor to do. By all means, remove unfaithful pastors from office. Do so according to the due process prescribed in the word of God. But fathers, don't make it a habit of trashing your pastor. What you say to your children about a specific pastor just might color what your children think of the ministry and what they think of the ministry may color what they think of what is being administered, namely, the pure and saving doctrine of the gospel.

If fathers want their pastors to provide good Christian instruction for their children, they must see to it that they honor the pastoral office. And if pastors want the support of the parents of the children entrusted to them, they must see to it that they honor the parental estate. When teaching other people's children, it is my duty to demonstrate the respect for them that their children owe them. This can be a challenge when it falls upon me to teach the children of their duty to attend divine services and their parents don't attend.

If a father shows respect to his pastor he teaches his children to respect, not just a man, but what that man's office represents. It is Christ the Savior who has established this office and he established it that we may obtain the faith through which God justifies us. The preaching of the gospel is how Christ, the Good Shepherd, feeds his church today. The Bible uses any number of words to refer to a pastor – a minister, a bishop, an elder, a teacher, a preacher – and they all refer to the same office, the office of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. These activities are the work of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life. God calls unworthy and sinful men to take on these duties. The best a loving Christian father can do for his children with respect to their pastor is to support him, encourage him, and call on him to do his duty.

If he won't or if he can't and if the church cannot deal with his refusal or inability to carry out the essential duties of his office, it would be far better for the Christian father to find another church that is served by a faithful pastor than to subject his family to ongoing criticism of a pastor who falls short. Here let us consider our duties as God has revealed them to us. The Christian father's duty to his children far outweighs his duty to the congregation to which he belongs. You cannot be a faithful parishioner unless you are a faithful husband and father. The church doesn't need you. It doesn't need your service. It doesn't even need your money. Your children do. Your wife does. Your family does. Put their needs first.

They need to be fed with the word of God. They don't need to participate in this, that, or the other special activity, club, or youth group. In listening to old folks complain about how young folks have disappeared from church one hears a variety of interesting opinions. Go to a call meeting sometime at a congregation of mostly older people and listen to them talk about the need to get a pastor who will be able to reach out to the youth, about all the youth activities they used to have, and how few youth there are in church these days. It's a common lament. The Christian father's duty to his spiritual father is to do everything he can do to ensure that his children seek out instruction in God's word from the minister Christ has sent to provide it.

Fathers, if you want your children to grow up in the faith and hold onto it when they are old, you must treat the faith as something worth fighting for. You support your pastor, not for his sake, but for your children's sake. You support his ministry, not for his sake – the ministry doesn't belong to

him – but for the sake of Christ whose ministry it is. What this means is that you take your children to church and Bible class with you. Don't let them skip church for any reason. If they fight you on this you must fight back and you must win. You must never give up and never let them have their way. Even when they are grown and live somewhere else, it remains your duty as a father to tell your children that they need to be in church on Sunday morning. Their relationship with you is contingent on listening to you tell them their duty. Never cave in. Don't let anyone psyche you out. God gave you your children and God gives you the duty and that means the right to tell your children they must be in church on a Sunday morning.

When a man who refuses to attend divine service tells you that he will not go because he was required to go as a child, he is not telling you the truth. Perhaps he thinks he is, but he isn't. In many cases, he may well be rebelling against the rules imposed on him as a child. But when Mom and Dad attend church every Sunday, attend Bible class when it is offered, and do not permit their children to attend a sports event, a party, or remain in bed sleeping when church is scheduled, their children will learn what normal is, and what is normal experientially will become normal morally.

Legalism is a spiritual poison that infects us all. Legalism is a teaching of the devil implanted in the flesh by the father of lies. Legalism is the notion that we gain eternal life by means of obeying the law. The legalist thinks the law shows you how to get God to give you what you want. Legalism calls for outward obedience to rules, but doesn't do anything to change a person's heart. Only the gospel, that is, the forgiveness of all our sins freely given to us for the sake of Christ's vicarious obedience and suffering, can give us the desire to do what God wants us to do.

Lutherans know that legalism is wrong. But they are easily confused about what it is. They deduce that if we should want to do what the law requires, this means that we mustn't obey the law simply because God says so, if we don't feel a desire to obey it. When they lose their desire to attend church they assume that, without the desire to go, their going would be a sham. So they skip church until the Spirit moves them to go. But the Spirit is at church – the very place they are not going. They fall further and further into the futility of their own imaginations and end up spiritually dead.

Of course, you should want to go to church. And you should want to be faithful to your husband or wife. But if you don't feel particularly faithful and notice someone very attractive that you think might provide you with sexual excitement, should you perhaps, since your heart really isn't in it, set aside your devotion to your spouse and do what your body is telling you to do?

Ask your husband or wife. Ask your children. Ask your parents. You get the idea. You do your duty whether you feel like it or not. And it is your duty to go to church. It is your duty to require your children to go to church. It is your duty to go to a church that teaches the pure and wholesome word of God. God does not tell you to attend a heterodox church. It is your duty to go to church where the word of God is preached in its truth and purity and to listen to the gospel proclaimed there.

I have heard every argument for skipping church. When my children became old enough to work for a paycheck they told their employers that they would not and could not work on Sunday mornings or on Wednesday evenings during Advent and Lent. The employer knew the rules at the outset. Most employers (they usually worked in some capacity at a restaurant) would try at least once to get them to work on Sunday morning. You know how it is. Somebody couldn't make it to work and the boss was in a bind. The children would agree to come to work after church, but they would never miss church or leave church early in order to go to work. None of my children ever suffered a penalty from an employer on that account. If anything, the employer gained confidence in their reliability. I don't share this with you because I like to talk about my kids (though I do like to talk about my kids), but to encourage fathers to take a stand on this matter and don't move from where you stand. Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

The best way a father can support his pastor is to support the proclamation of the pure gospel. I don't know any pastor worth his salt who wouldn't rather have parishioners attending church and Bible class, discussing theology, and talking about it with their children, than parishioners who shower them with gifts, praise, and attention. Speaking for myself, as a pastor, I went into the ministry because I love the word of God. I love sound Christian theology and I want to teach it to others because I believe it's the most precious thing you can have. When I see a

father who agrees and wants his children to have this treasure, it is the greatest gift that I as a pastor can receive from a parishioner.

Part Five: The Husband and Father, Wife and Children

It was Mother's Day, and I had stopped by the hospital after church to visit a parishioner. We were talking about mothers and he shared with me some wisdom. He said, "The greatest gift a father can give to his children is to love their mother." Think of the beautiful picture that St. Paul paints of the love of Christ for his church and the submission of the church to Christ. This husband and wife relationship is not two people separated from the world off somewhere on a perpetual honeymoon. The husband is a father and the wife is a mother. Their relationship to each other is inseparable from their relationship to their children.

This is not always the case. God, in his wisdom, chooses to bless some married couples with children while withholding that blessing from other married couples. We may not pry into the hidden will of God to try to explain what he has not explained. We don't know why God blesses this couple and doesn't bless that couple. The withholding of a particular blessing does not mean he is withholding his love. He often blesses such couples in different ways. Children are always a blessing. Human life is precious. When God gives us what is precious it is a blessing. In the beginning, Moses records that God blessed them and told them to be fruitful. Children are a blessing from God.

The government God has established for the raising of children is a government of a father and a mother who are husband and wife. Nowadays, with the insistence that every conceivable arrangement or configuration of sex, marriage, and family be given equal consideration to every other arrangement, even to note that there is a normal way that things are to be arranged meets with objections from the politically correct, that is, from those whose morality changes with the changing moral standards of the world. God loves the single mother and the single father. God watches over the orphans and the widows. God governs us in a variety of ways. But there is a normal and what is normal is what is reflected in the fourth and the sixth commandments God gave to Moses. The fourth commandment teaches children to honor their father and their mother. The sixth commandment teaches husbands and wives to be faithful to each other. Clearly, the fourth commandment applies to us

throughout our lives. Even when our parents no longer tell us what to do, we honor them. And sexual fidelity to one's spouse requires celibacy for single men and women, boys and girls. Fornication, even when engaged in by single men and women, is an assault on marriage. It steals from marriage what is proper to it.

According to God's law, and according to the ordinary blessing of God, the husband is a father and the wife is a mother. The husband has a relationship with his wife as husband. He has a relationship with his children as father. What he does as husband a father is doing. What he does as father a husband is doing. He can no more separate his husbandly duties from his fatherly duties than he can become two men. The offices are distinct, but since they are held by the same man, they cannot be separated. Sometimes, they cannot be distinguished.

The way the husband treats his wife is the way the father treats the mother. How he treats her is what he teaches his children to do. The same applies to the wife. How she treats her husband is what she is telling her children to do. Actions speak louder than words.

The word iconic is probably overused, but it applies well to this topic. The father and mother are icons. They are images of God. Much has been written and said about St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11 about head-coverings for women. Since it is no longer required for a woman to cover her head in church, it is assumed that the significance of the head-covering no longer applies. But doctrine does not change, even if the customs by which we express it do. St. Paul writes:

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

That this is true, whether or not Christians express this truth by what they wear or do not wear on their heads, is brought out a few verses later where Paul writes:

He is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.
(Verses 7-9)

Christ honors the Father who sent him. He is the image of the invisible God. The man honors Christ. The woman honors her husband. Christ honors his Father by going to the cross. "No one takes my life from me," he says. He gave it up freely in obedience to his Father. His obedience was out of love for the Father and out of love for those his Father loved.

The husband honors Christ by imitating him. Even as Christ gave up his life for the church, his bride, and thereby made her holy by his blood, just so the husband lives his life for his wife, putting her needs above his own. He is willing to sacrifice himself, not for her transient emotional gratification, but for her. It is for her as the holy bride, the spotless and faultless bride, the bride without blemish, that he devotes himself. He is to be her pastor. When Adam saw his wife being tempted by the father of lies and murderer of souls he remained silent and by his silence acquiesced to her deception. That was his sin. He listened to her instead of speaking to her the word of God. The husband serves his wife by acting as her spiritual head. That's his job.

The wife honors her husband by submitting to him. Her husband cannot impose submission on her. She submits herself. This submission entails respect and trust. She respects him for Christ's sake. She doesn't criticize him, insult him, complain about him to her friends, and challenge his headship. Instead, she arranges her life in relationship to him in such a way that it is obvious she regards him as the representative of the home. Jesus said to Philip, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Just so, Christ is found in his church. The church is identified as the church as she honors Christ. The wife who respects her husband respects herself, just as the husband who loves his wife loves his own body.

This is what the children witness. The relationship between husband and wife is the pattern of life from which they live their lives. It is how they learn what life is all about. The father is the icon of Jesus. The mother is the icon of the church. The children learn at home what Jesus and church are all about.

Adultery, desertion, pornography, violence, drunkenness, profligacy, and other assaults on marriage are assaults on children. The very idea that the state can provide for children is not only an absurdity easily disproved by any moderately competent social scientist; it is also an attack on

marriage. What children need is not government money for single mothers. They need mothers who are married to their fathers.

The biblical teaching of the husband being the head of his wife and the wife being the body of her husband is incomprehensible apart from understanding the gospel. A Christ-less religion cannot establish a patriarchy that isn't exploitative, domineering, and cruel. This is why Islam cannot honor women. Where Jesus is but a prophet and not the Savior of sinners, the people of God are not sanctified. There is no holy church. There are not dear children of the dear Father. There is nothing but a legal relationship. Christian patriarchy is grounded in the gospel, even as the Fatherhood of God is understood where the Son is lifted up on the cross to take away our sins. Islam degrades women, not because men are in charge, but because the blood of Jesus Christ is not there to cleanse anyone of sin, and there is no washing of water by the word to make God's people holy and blameless before him.

Patriarchy without Christ is poison mean. But I wonder if it is as cruel as the soulless matriarchy of the welfare state where bureaucrats make decisions affecting millions of fatherless children. They don't know these children and they cannot know them. They cannot love them. Even if these bureaucrats – who are overwhelmingly female – are filled to the brim with maternal love and devotion, it doesn't help the children one bit and it certainly doesn't make government functionaries apt substitutes for the children's fathers.

Fathers and mothers who love each other as husbands and wives are best suited to raise the children with which God blesses them. Hiring others to raise their children so that they can enjoy whatever material benefits come from two incomes will not benefit the children. Children need a mother in the home more than they need more stuff.

With the advent of effective birth control methods just over half a century ago, the church lost her voice on the blessing of children. Oh, they were still a blessing, but not one a married couple couldn't do without if they had financial, educational, career, or other goals that required more immediate attention. The domestic estate suffered. Now we are hearing from various places about the demographic challenges facing the church in the twenty first century. It is not difficult to understand that when the care of children and their immortal souls is measured against

accumulating more and more stuff that will perish with this world and found wanting, that children will conclude that they aren't worth as much as the junk that replaced them. A generation or more of indoctrination in the gospel of self-esteem will not give the children as much confidence in their worth as the gospel will give them.

I do not choose the word indoctrination casually. That's what it is. The false gospel of self-esteem is being taught to our children and grandchildren, not only in the public schools, but in many parochial schools as well. It ought not to be reinterpreted or modified. It needs to be exposed and rejected for the lie it is. The gospel is for sinners who need a Savior from their sin. It is in the home where the parents of the children are married to each other that God's law exposing our sins and God's gospel forgiving our sins is most effectively taught.

What is a child worth? How can we teach our children that their true value is not measured in silver or gold but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ? We can teach them this by confessing in word and deed the truth that children are precious gifts from God and that the fruitful womb is his reward.

At the heart of the Christian religion is the crucifixion of Jesus who saves his church, his body, by giving up his life for her and washing her clean in Holy Baptism. That this is the heart of our faith requires us to confess its necessity. It cannot be central if it isn't necessary. We need the forgiveness of sins because we are sinners. But it is precisely the knowledge of sin that our culture denies. Professor Marquart used to talk about the unholy trinity of the 19th century: Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. Darwin attacked God the Father our Creator by his theories of how we could be what we are without our heavenly Father making us what we are. Marx attacked God the Son our Savior by making sin what's wrong with the system and thus salvation becoming a social and political process to overthrow the oppressive system rather than our personal deliverance from sin, death, and the devil. Freud attacked God the Holy Spirit by defining away sin. If the ego suffers because the superego cannot control the id, well then, pretend that the id isn't so bad after all and tell the superego to chill. It's the conflict that's bad. So there's no sin. There's only dysfunction.

It looks like Christianity is on the ropes. So what else is new? It has always looked like that. The same Jesus who told the seventy that he was sending them out as lambs before wolves also said that he saw Satan fall from power. We Christians are not defenseless in the face of cultural assaults against the gospel and the holy institutions God has established. The gospel is its own power. It is what binds husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, and their children together as God's family. Jesus didn't look almighty on the cross. But that's where he crushed the serpent's head. The message of the cross remains for us the wisdom of God and the power of God.

Part Six: The Christian Father and Modern Feminism

Defining modern feminism is a daunting task. Into what category should we put the topic? Is it a movement? If so, of what sort is it? Is it social, political, ideological, economic, theological, or a combination of them all? With all the variations of feminism, is there a common theme that unites feminists of every description? Is feminism something that can be expressed in words that combine to make assertions and cohere in a sensible way? Or is it a feeling that can't be put into words?

The standard dictionary definition of feminism is that it is a movement for social, political, and economic equality of men and women. We find no mention of God, the church, theology, or the structure and nature of the family in this definition. So then, it is theologically neutral – right? Just as one can hold to sound Christian theology while advocating for or against a protective tariff, the Electoral College, or wearing blue jeans to work, one can hold to sound Christian theology while favoring or opposing the goals of feminism.

But it is not that simple. There is an underlying assumption of feminism that needs to be examined. If this assumption is left unexamined, the feminist movement can quickly undermine sound doctrine. The assumption is that we can measure a human being by such concepts as social, political, and economic equality.

Let's make it personal. I will use my wife and me as examples. We are identified with each other in such a way that whatever social status the one has the other has as well. As far as political equality is concerned, each of us can and does vote, and neither of us has ever run for political

office. As far as politics in the home is concerned, I am the head and she is the manager of daily affairs. In regard to economic equality, what is hers is mine and what is mine is hers. I have earned most of the money – until our children were grown, almost all of it – but her job as manager of the home gave her the responsibility of spending much of it. There was never a question of whose money it was. It was ours. We have always shared what we own. No, we don't wear one another's clothes and she doesn't borrow my pool cue, but beyond that whatever we hold we hold in common.

Thus, the question of social, political, and economic equality between my wife and me is a moot point. It doesn't apply. Such matters are entirely beside the point.

To which the feminist will respond: You are missing the point. Your wife may choose the arrangement you and she have with each other. That is her prerogative. But she should have the right to choose a different kind of arrangement that doesn't entail marriage and children, and if it does, to arrange such matters in a way where there are not predetermined roles.

To which the traditionalist Christian will respond: You are missing the point. The traditional relationship between a man and a woman in marriage and the family is not merely a social construct that evolved over time and may be exchanged for a different sort of arrangement. In fact, in the beginning, God made us male and female, and joined a man to a woman and a woman to a man, and blessed that union with children. The man and the woman did not choose to be men or women. They did not choose to define marriage this way or that way. They didn't even choose to have children. God, their heavenly Father, made these choices for them.

Feminism is indeed a political creed. But that does not mean it has no theological implications. Far from it! It defines man and woman as political entities in the first instance. It identifies politics as the natural arena within which men and women obtain their goals. Politics is about power. It is ultimately the power of the sword.

Christian theology is the power of the Spirit. The power of the Spirit is not coercive, punitive, or domineering. The Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. He makes the unwilling willing. He uses the gospel to change hearts and

lives. Politics is ultimately coercive. The civil powers do not and cannot care about the hearts of men and women. They can deal only with external behavior. That is what they are there to govern. When we define the goals of manhood or womanhood as political goals we define man and woman as political animals and we deny their essence as children of God created in the image of God and animated by the Spirit of God.

Feminism reduces human relationships to their politically expressed least common denominator. Then it complains about the result! Here's the bitter fact that feminism cannot tolerate. Patriarchy is inevitable. It's not a question of whether. It's a question of what form it will take. The reason patriarchy is inevitable is because God made men and woman to be different. They are not equal. Questions of equality or inequality are false and foolish questions to ask because the very question is mixing apples with oranges. It is a confusion of categories. Equality is a construct that doesn't correspond to reality.

When patriarchy becomes the enemy, Christianity becomes the enemy. This is not because all patriarchal systems are Christian. Far from it! As we have seen, the patriarchy of Islam is very different from the patriarchy of Christianity. It discards the gospel in its entirety and substitutes an oppressive legalism in its place.

When feminism attacks patriarchy, it attacks the first article of the Creed. "I believe in God the Father, almighty, maker of heaven and earth." In the beginning, God made Adam out of the dust of the ground. He said that it was not good for him to be alone. He put him into a deep sleep and took a rib from his side and made a woman. He brought the woman to the man and the two became one flesh.

The special status of celibate men and women is recognized in the Bible, by the Lord Jesus personally, by St. Paul the apostle, and was reflected in the early government of the church where widows were given special consideration. That marriage is normal is not to say that the single life excludes anyone from the mainstream of church life or family life. In fact, single men and women are members of families as much as married men and women are.

I say this to counter the feminist claim that we who support the Christian view of marriage and the family take away from a woman the choice of

whether she will be joined to a man, consigning to her marriage as the only good option available to her. But that is not so. The fact that families are often torn by the absence, failure, or death of the father or mother lends a value to the service of aunts, uncles, brothers, and sisters who may assume, out of need, paternal and maternal duties.

But again, I am assigning value to a woman on account of what she can do to benefit the family. No. I am not assigning value to a woman. It is not my place as a man to do so. The God who created her in his own image and redeemed her by his own blood and sanctifies her to be his temple is the One who assigns her value to her. He values her and he values what he gives her to do. When she gives her life in service to God by being a faithful wife and mother she gives what God regards as precious. The piety of a Christian woman is more valuable than all material wealth. Its value is practical. It is practical in the most fundamental sense of being put into practice for the benefit of the children God gives her.

Here is where the issue lies. Feminism can tolerate a woman as a mother as long as the woman is in charge of her life. As long as it is her choice and she makes the critical decisions pertaining to it. But a Christian woman who marries a man, entrusting herself to his headship and care, and trusts that God will bless her with the children he chooses to give her and that God will provide for the children he gives her – how is that empowering her? How is that emancipating her? How is that granting her the equality to which she is entitled? She must be the one to define what womanhood means for her. This, of necessity, entails reproductive rights. It is she who may decide if and when she is to be a mother. Whatever rights the unborn child has, they cannot supersede her fundamental right, as a woman, to choose if she will bear a child. If she is required to bear a child against her will she is not truly free.

Christians who want to be feminists are faced with some very difficult contradictions. They may think that feminism agrees with the Christian faith. After all, St. Paul writes that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female.” (Galatians 3:28) There is a superficial similarity between the feminist creed and certain biblical statements. What the Christian must keep in mind, however, is that feminism as a social movement defines the human being not according to our creation in the image of God as male and

female, but as we choose our identity for ourselves. Our choices determine our identity. I may choose to be what I feel I ought to be. And my will in this matter is sovereign.

The Christian must object. Jesus says that whoever humbles himself will be exalted and whoever exalts himself will be abased. Jesus teaches us that our true worth as men and woman is not ours to achieve. It is ours to accept through humble faith in the promises of God.

Christian patriarchy is not men pushing women around. It is Christian families who are bound together by the word of God. The Fatherhood of God is revealed where Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, offers himself up on the altar of the cross to be the propitiation for our sins. He takes away the anger of God against us. He reconciles the world to God. There is no Fatherhood of God apart from the gospel of Christ. Thus, Christian patriarchy is the very opposite of what feminists say it is. Far from being domineering, dehumanizing, and mean, it exalts womanly service as precious and praiseworthy. It often feels like mundane drudgery and the woman feels burdened by it. The feminist creed exploits this feeling by telling her that she is being oppressed by those she has devoted her life to serving.

But the feminist can offer her no real help. She doesn't need political or economic power. She needs spiritual encouragement. Her Christian husband is the one best situated to help her. He loves her, not because of her beauty he sees, but because she is God's gift to him. Her beauty is displayed in her care for her children, which is her holy offering to God. This is her gift to her husband. For such a prize, he doesn't seek his manhood in sexual conquest, running around like an ally cat, to prove he is what he doesn't feel he is. His wife shows him what a man is by joining him in raising children who will honor him as the head of his home, not because he has earned it, but because God our heavenly Father has established fatherhood in the home as the strength of children and the comfort of the wife.

There was once a pious Christian woman by the name of Hannah who was barren. She couldn't conceive. She prayed to God that God would give her a son and promised that if he did she would give the son back to God. A little girl thousands of years and thousands of miles away heard the story and prayed that God would give her many children. She was a

Christian child. She was a girl. God made her a girl and she knew it. God answered her prayer. In spades! She is today the mother of eleven sons, a daughter, and forty three grandchildren. She has no need for what the feminist cause or creed offers. She sought God's blessing in the institutions of marriage and motherhood that God established in creation, redeemed by Christ's blood, and sanctifies today by the gospel. And God blessed her. What demonstrates the wonderful and hidden working of God is how this woman who has sought none of the power that feminism promised her generation of women, has through her children and their children more influence than any woman I know.

Amen

Rolf D. Preus

[Back to Sermons Page](#)

[Back to Christ for Us Home Page](#)