The Authority of Fathers

Over the past few years numerous sermons and lectures have dealt with the role of the woman and her place in the family, the church and society. One definite reason behind this is that the majority of Christians who seriously looked into spiritual matters in the past were women. Naturally, the result of this unhealthy situation was an increase in the amount of biblical teaching about the woman's place in God's Kingdom.

In spite of this teaching being very much "in keeping with the times", the impression was often given that all the problems concerning woman's subjection were solved. But more and more I am learning to understand that the crucial problem is not the "rebellious woman", but husbands and fathers who run away from their responsibility.

Most men are either born passive, with no sense of responsibility, or they tyrannise their family without any judgement of healthy leadership. Both extremes are characteristics of a fundamental insecurity in men who know neither their God-given role, nor the ordination and responsibility connected with it.

In the book "The Institutes of Biblical Law", R. J. Rushdoony, whom I believe to be one of the most outstanding theologians of our day, makes the following comments about the disappearance of male leadership in families:

"Currently the men, having withdrawn in every respect from their responsibility as men, are busier with personally satisfying themselves than with sound order. The women who worry about their own and their children's well-being, see themselves increasingly confronted with the problems of a sick society and the consequent collapse of healthy standards and order. In reaction to fewer and fewer existing protective structures and orders, they develop matriarchal resistance. The trend towards a matriarchal society in western culture is obvious today. However, I want to emphasise the following: A matriarchal society is not characterised by the women reigning in it. It is much more a society where men fail in their leadership function, so that the women have to bear double the burden of responsibility!"

I can only fully agree with this. A man makes his biggest mistake when a woman lays her life at his feet at the wedding altar, and he lacks the necessary understanding and spiritual insight to be able to pick her up, and structure and shape her life. After it has been lying there for a few years, she will eventually take it into her own hands, in her confusion, frustration and pain, and go her own way. Then the man cannot hold her any longer and in his ignorance and insensitivity he shouts: "Woman, you are a rebel!"

The effects of lacking fatherhood are also easily recognisable in the younger generation. Recently I read a psychological study about seven young women who had all tried to commit suicide. This research showed that none of those women had had any sort of durable, deeper relationship with their fathers; three of them did not even know who he was. Another psychologist from New York Medical College recently said, "In all my years of psychological research I have never discovered a case of homosexuality in a man who had a good and warm relationship with his father." I would like to bring this observation into a wider context and briefly show what is happening in today's world, as seen from a spiritual perspective. In my opinion: there is a spiritual battle being fought, which presents a major attack against the Kingdom and the sovereignty of God. This battle is being waged on four fronts:

1. The Social Front
'Secular humanism' is trying to turn us into an equal society where there are no classes, no grades and no differences - not even those differences God has made between people. I am not a supporter of some kind of caste system which causes discrimination and suppression, but I am against the sort of "everybody-is-the-same-mentality", which allows a worker to tell his boss, "I would rather drink coffee than work today, and if you want to give me my notice because of that, I will notify the union." This is a spirit which destroys respect and responsibility, for the sake of what are thought to be "rights".

2. Hostility Towards Every Kind of Authority
Irrespective of whether we are talking about a policeman, a politician, or a man of God - in the course of general disrespect it seems to be fun to denigrate a man in authority. With great satisfaction television informs us of how despicable authority is, and encourages us to trespass against, disobey, or ridicule it.

3. The Loss of Role Models
Everybody is telling us what to do, but no-one is showing us how to do it. We have lost our heroes. There is now nobody our young people can look up to and say: "That's how I would like to be as well." Today's role models are freaks who play games with the police.
4. The Absent Father
Another very specifically aimed and concentrated attack is directed against manliness, and particularly against fatherhood. Very few television programmes, for example, portray healthy families. Often the families shown only have one parent, or the father is a bungling idiot, who is incapable of dealing with his cheque book or with his children. He needs his wife and his children to mother him and to worry about him, just for him to be able to cope. The message is clear: We do not need real fathers anymore.

Most psychologists tell us that it is from the father that the child takes his concept of God and of authority.

If, however, the educating and forming influence of the father is missing in the life of a child, and especially if there is no replacement for it, there will be deep effects on the young person's attitude towards God. Consequently, a whole generation has not got the right concept of God.

The Fatherhood of God
God Himself is the origin of all fatherhood. In the book of Isaiah, Jesus is called the "Eternal Father". By calling God, "Father", we do not only pronounce a word, but we address a role that God fulfils towards His people. I saw a sticker recently with the following words: "Trust in God, she will care for you." A newspaper from San José recently reported about a group of Christian theologians who thought the Bible to be written by a group of sexist and suggested Christians should pray: "Our Mother who art in Heaven."

People want to make all sorts of things out of God instead of just letting Him be the God of the Bible. For them, fatherhood is only sex and the act of conceiving; they fail to realise that leading, giving advice, protection, and care in all aspects of life are part of it as well.

God Himself is our example of a father; concerning leadership in both natural and spiritual areas. God rules His family here on earth as Father. He created His family here on earth, so that the authority of His kingdom is practised through the father of the family. God is a Father, who reigns through fathers. Every leadership in the church, in society, and over people has its source in the authority of God, the Father. Rushdoony writes about this:

"...To rule is the special call of a man as husband and father and of the family as an institution. ... The call to make the earth in subjection to Him and to reign over it, is essential for a family to function in the Kingdom of God and for the role of the man as head of the family."

Where the family is being destroyed, the foundation for God's reign on earth is also being destroyed.

The Hebrew Example
For many of us this judgement of the family is strange. The other day I met a friend who is writing a thesis about the Kingdom of God at Harvard University. In these studies he proves that the scourge of modern theological thinking comes, to a large extent, from Germany. The anti-Semitic attitude of many German theologians caused them to turn away from the Hebrew way of thinking, and instead they viewed the New Testament through the eyes of Greek philosophy. But the New Testament was written by Hebrews. These men had a strong understanding of the family, the tribe, the elders, the older brothers and the authority of the father. The Greeks had another kind of authority: theirs was based on the individual and the democratic city state.

For the men who wrote the New Testament this authority was deeply rooted in the family, and reached from there, to the tribe and to the whole nation. All authority came from the father. This made it possible for the Jewish nation to keep its identity and strength for the last two thousand years through all persecution. It was the Father who kept the family together.

In Old Testament times there was a mass of different sects in the Middle-East: All kinds of praying to idols, which ended up in perversion, female gods and child offerings. How did God answer this chaos? He called a father! He said, "Abram (which means 'called father'), leave the house of your fathers and go into the land which I am going to show you. I will make you a blessing for the whole earth and make you a father of many nations." (compare GEN 12:1-3 and GEN 17:1-6). Abraham ('father of many') was a strong leader, who understood about being a father to his family. His descendants changed the course of history, not only in the Middle-East, but also in the whole world. He was the father of Isaac, who was in turn the father of Jacob and so on. You can follow this line from Jesse to David and to our Lord Jesus.

God's answer to this confusion and loss of sense of direction is the same that it was nearly four thousand years ago - fathers! The only way God's love and fatherhood can come into this world is through men who understand how to reign and be true fathers.

God's Centre of Education
- The Family

The New Testament shows the following way for men who want to be used as leaders in the work of the Lord: "One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (1.TIM 3:4-5).

I believe that "being the head" is meant in a natural as well as a spiritual aspect. To "bring up your children in obedience" means to act through His Word, and not to beat them into obedience through anger.

Every man who wants to be a leader should know that the best possible place he could imagine for this training is in his own family. These verses teach us that a stable, secure family, led by a man who knows how to practise his fatherhood, is the basis for every important job in the Lord.

Therefore, true leadership in the Lord does not depend primarily on professional theologians. God first trains His leaders in the family: In my place of training are Judy, Karen, Beth, Bobby and Eric. The Lord says, "Before you can start to rule over one of my people, learn to bring peace and order into your own house." When I don't manage to do this in my own family, I don't have the right to tell others how to do it. Because I learned to be a good husband to my wife and a
good father to my four children, I experienced the main changes in my character that were necessary for me to be able to help people as a leader of God. I still have not reached the aim, but I am working towards it.

The family is the basic cell for the church and society. Fathers who are strong in the family will become strong leaders in the church. Even the church needs fathers. Paul was a spiritual father to Timothy. He educated him "in the Lord." The lack of men who have the authority and the courage to be real fathers to others is the main reason for the weakness of the church. In the first part of this sheet, the Lord showed us that authority, discipleship and stable relationships are very important for God's people. The church is encouraged to rediscover the secret of fatherhood and to gain new strength and life from it.

In many people's lives there exists a great vacuum because they have never had a deep relationship with a responsible father. Young people don't know how to handle life, especially professional life. They need fathers to help them. And when their fathers don't take up this responsibility, then the church is encouraged to fill this gap in faith.

The Authority of Fathers

In addition, I want to talk about seven different points which I believe are under-developed in most husbands and fathers. One can learn a lot, especially in these areas, when you are prepared to take your place of "education" (in the family) willingly. Then a father starts to discover anew the strength and power which is within him.

1. Faithfulness

This is one of the first lessons a father has to learn. To be faithful towards His Word even when it is difficult. He has to be faithful towards his marriage, he has to love his wife and be sensitive towards her, even when it is not so easy. He is in a covenant with his children and learns to be faithful, even when they run away, take drugs or go mental. What was it that made the prodigal son come back? A father who was faithful towards the covenant with his son. When this son had reached his end, he knew that there was a place for him in the house of his father. He knew the faithfulness of his father towards the covenant.

2. Communication

It is very important to talk to each other. A faithful father can do this with his six-year-old child as well as with his seventeen-year-old child. He learns to express himself clearly, to go to problems directly without changing the subject or avoiding them. He has to be able to listen to his family and to take what they have to say. As a husband, he does not react insecurely when his wife does not agree with him. He is able to listen to her. As a father, he does not lose control when his children want to tell him that he is not right. He listens and understands. When somebody gets angry and lets it out, he understands the situation which has caused it. He can see that behind a teenager's hysterical behaviour is the onset of puberty, and in the indifference and rebellion of his son, his longing for love.

3. Stability

A family father has to learn to react towards rejection and manipulation with security and calmness. He shouldn't withdraw himself, but show understanding and love, especially when he receives rejection from his wife. For example, the child threatens him with, "If I am not allowed to watch TV I will run away!" The father answers, "OK, I will help you pack." Or his wife speaks quietly into his ear, "Darling, you are going to buy this new jacket for me, aren't you?" And the father answers, "No, I told you already that we are not going to buy any more clothes this month." Stable fathers recognise manipulation and rejection, and learn to react calmly and strictly. Everybody who takes up responsibility in the Kingdom of God has to learn this lesson.

4. Brotherly Fellowship

I believe that many Christian fathers fail, not for the lack of trying, but because they don't know what to do. It is therefore of inconceivable value to have stable and healthy relationships with other men and fathers in a Christian environment. Within the great variety of a lively Christian fellowship you will find enough help and advice, as well as correction. There is nothing better to help a distressed father through hard times than brothers who are at his side.

5. Authority

A father has to have the authority to make decisions which everybody has to follow, even when nobody has the same opinion. For example, the father announces, "Children, on Sunday after the service we are going for a family picnic." Child number one answers, "I hate picnics." Child number two says, "I have already made other arrangements for the afternoon." Child number three, "I have to read a book for school." Child number four. "Just hearing the word 'picnic' makes me feel sick." A father who takes his authority in the right way would say, "I repeat, on Sunday afternoon we will have a family picnic." Speaking to child number one, "You are still going to come." Child number two, "Call your friend and change your arrangements." Child number three, "You can read your book on Saturday as well." And to child number four, "You will recover." A father can reign over his family with one word without tyrannising them.

6. Priorities

As head of an active family, a father is often confronted with the difficult and painful problem of setting priorities according to biblical measures. There is an exciting football game on TV and just then your wife comes back from the neighbours with whom she has had an argument and she wants to talk to you about it. Priorities! Or your child is taking part in a play for the first time and it is on a Friday evening when you have a conference. To set priorities means: to put my family before sport, friends, hobbies, work, work in the church, spiritual welfare, talks to people and work on the house. To get the right balance into so many different demands, is a challenging task for every man.

7. Ability to React

Situations come up all of a sudden in everyday life, where there will be no time to pray or fast beforehand. Such situations are part of God's training program for a man who is learning to be a leader. Even working with God's people, situations are going to occur when it is important to keep cool and to react fast.
Consequences of Fatherly Authority

Fatherhood practised with true authority certainly has a widespread effect within the family, as well as the church. I want to have a closer look at some of the effects:

1. Blessing

When I had a closer look at Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I realised that the blessing of the family father is not laying empty hands on empty heads. When the Jewish father lays his hands onto his son and blesses him, he gives him something eternal, Godly, supernatural. His hands onto his son and blesses is not laying empty hands on empty heads. The blessing of the family father

When I had a closer look at Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I realised that the blessing of the family father is not laying empty hands on empty heads. When the Jewish father lays his hands onto his son and blesses him, he gives him something eternal, Godly, supernatural. My relationship with my own father was very difficult. It took me nine years to get over the rejection and hurt which I experienced. A few years ago my father fell seriously ill. The Lord arranged that I was allowed to spend every weekend with him over the last three months before he died. I took care of him and was able to show him my love. During these weeks a wish grew in my heart: “Lord, there is something I want to ask you for, before my father leaves to be with you. I ask you that he will give me his fatherly blessing.”

In all the time that I knew my father, I only ever heard him pray one single prayer which he used every time he prayed. He did not know how to pray for someone, let alone how to bless someone. One day, as my wife and I were about to leave his room, I placed his old bony hand in mine and said, “Father, please pray for me.” He closed his eyes and began to pray - the same prayer that he had recited for all those years. To begin with I was a bit disappointed. All of a sudden, however, his voice changed and gained authority and strength, “Father, I pray to you that my son will experience your blessing that his ministry will reach to the ends of the earth. And I ask you, oh God, for your blessing, care and protection wherever his feet may tread while serving you in the uttermost parts of the earth.” As soon as my father’s prayer ended he fell into a coma, but I knew that he had prayed down God’s blessing onto me.

This blessing also applies to fleshly matters. The scriptures confirm again and again that God blesses a man and his family with finances and health.

Strong Fathers in Families Will Lead to Strong Leaders in the Church.

2. Sense of Reality

Who of us still realises that children need to grow up within certain boundaries? Our society has created a whole generation of immature, frustrated, irresponsible and limitless young people just because someone said, “Don’t forbid them anything! Pull the borders down!” Let little Joseph follow his instincts!” Little Joseph turned his school upside down, drove his parents crazy, took drugs and died of an overdose or ended up in prison. And some still ask why!

Children have to make mistakes and experiment with life, but they need borders to prevent them from killing themselves, or destroying their lives. This is the duty of the father. As soon as your service begins, you are being blessed and people watch you; you easily begin to float on cloud nine. Your wife, children and well-meaning brothers will quickly pull you back down onto the ground of reality.

It is a great joy for me to see how young men establish a strong and effective service in God. They take their place in the body of Christ without having to go through all the hurts, backlashes and breakdowns that many of my brothers, and also myself, have had to go through. They have someone to tell them when they are going astray, who exhorts them to keep their families in order, to keep their feet on the ground, and to encourage them when they are about to give up. Many of us never had that. There is a new generation of leaders growing within the body of Christ; men who had spiritual fathers themselves who trained them in the Lord, and who are therefore in the position to lead others.

A child has to be brought up and trained by a mother and a father. Both play an important role, but there is a difference between fatherhood and motherhood. The mother makes the child be sensitive, whereas the father will make the child look away from himself and be strong. I want to clarify this with an example: We are walking along the street with our three-year-old son. He falls. The mother says, “Oh, my little one, did you hurt yourself?” The father says, “Come on, get up and stop crying, you’ll survive.” A child needs both in order to have a normal development. He needs someone who can give him love and care, for his sensitivity to be developed, to which a father can also contribute; and he (especially a son) also needs a father to look up to, who will lift him up again and divert his attention away from himself. A child is trained by the father to look life in the face, and to take up the challenge it presents.

3. Appreciation / Respect

A few months ago, I was on a journey with my family. We split up our journey to visit a friend with whom I had developed a deep relationship over the years. The city where the man worked had major social problems, and for this reason this brother was under much pressure. His marriage and family had also suffered under this great burden. After a few days, we got into a long conversation. I asked him, “You are very discouraged, aren’t you?” He agreed and began to pour out his heart. Once he had finished, I asked him, “Please tell me, has anyone that you love ever told you: you are doing a good job?” Tears filled his eyes as he confessed, “Bob, I have been in this ministry for nine years and I don’t think I have ever heard the words, ‘Well done’. I was taught that it is wrong to receive appreciation from others.”

When Jesus Himself came to a difficult point in His ministry, the Father wanted to tell His Son something very important and essential. Every time the Father spoke to the Son for everyone to hear, He used words of assurance and appreciation: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matt 3:17). It was obviously important for Jesus to know that His Father was happy with Him.

This point is very important to me. We have robbed ourselves of a valuable, life-giving gift from God - appreciation - by fearing praise and appreciation from others. When suddenly someone praises us for our work, we become nervous and ashamed for fear of not being humble enough. We all need a
father whom we love and adore, who will give us serious scriptural assurance when we need it. I am not talking about flattering, manipulation or attempting to gain friends the easy way; I am talking about the sincere, deep appreciation of a father.

One 30-year-old man is particularly notable in our assembly because of his extraordinary talents. He achieves everything a man could desire. He attended one of the best schools in the country and did very well, got a doctor's degree in x-ray medicine and x-ray physics, and found an excellent job. Despite all this, he suffers very much from an inferiority complex and he finds it difficult to build up any kind of deeper relationship with people. This man never heard the words, "Son, I am proud of you" for the first twenty-eight years of his life. God is beginning to heal the wounds, but they are very, very deep.

4. Authority

Our young people are rebellious and have no respect because they do not learn to accept authority within the family. The parents let their children do whatever they want, and then they are surprised that they turn out to be little tyrants.

One biblical principle is: You cannot love God if you do not love your brother. I believe the same applies to obeying any authority. God rules through His body. By learning to obey our spiritual leaders, we learn to obey God. Once I personally had begun to learn to submit them- selves to me.

Many people fear authority. The reason for this is that people very often misuse authority; people who are not fathers, and who do not have the heart of a father. God is a Father; He rules through fathers and will not allow someone who has not proven himself as a father to lead His people. Authority is not dangerous in the hand of a man who is a good father.

5. Manhood

One point of attack against our families lies in the effeminacy of men. Again, I would like to quote Rushdoony: "Since family-oriented education is no longer practised, men have been robbed of their main duties and consequently of their manly authority. Therefore, women lack the basis for their originally God-given role, and have no other choice apart from being either luxurious ornaments for the men, or aggressive opponents. Basically, women are being trained to be men and it is therefore not surprising that many women are profoundly unhappy. The men are by no means happy either, as their task as fathers to educate has been taken away from them and transferred to the state. This has started a process of effeminacy. Young men are particularly affected by this."

I have had many interesting experiences in my efforts to help couples and families over the years. Again and again, I have seen the same root cause of so many apparently insoluble problems: the husbands had developed feminine mannerisms in taking up their duties within the marriage, I am not talking about the sexual aspect, but that the husbands feel, think, react and act in a way that is really typical of women. Explained in an exaggerated manner, it really means that two women are trying to live together. As this does not work out, the wives become frustrated, hurt and emotionally unsatisfied. However, as soon as the men become ‘masculine’ the situation changes. I understand masculinity - in this context - to be the ability to keep one’s life and emotions under control, and not to act or react like a woman in a difficult situation. Effermenate men always need assurance. In comparison, a real man likes to be respected, but he is not concerned whether people like him or not. A man in a position of leadership does not hold back unnecessarily, nor is he careful with his decisions in order for others to agree with him. He leads regardless of what people think of him.

It is important to realise the difference between a healthy desire for respect and appreciation, and the lust to please men. A man should react like a man when being chastised. In some conversations I had with men who had to be corrected, I would have liked to have exclaimed, "For heaven’s sake man, finally take up your responsibility and pull yourself together!" It is not wrong to be affected deep down and to cry, but a man accepts himself and his faults.

He does not blame his parents, his education, society or anyone else. A man takes the initiative. He does not only solve problems once they have arisen, but he realises when God acts, takes up the responsibility, and says: "this is the way." No one can expect that someone will follow him if he does not know where to go himself. Someone who only has a big mouth, the John Wayne or James Bond kind of person, is as weak as the softy with wobbly knees. We do not want to make the mistake of adapting Hollywood images of manhood. Our true image is Jesus.

6. Character

I would like to point out some characteristics that are promoted through the practice of healthy fatherhood.

Endurance: Endurance is a sign of reliability. Our society suffers from a lack of sense of responsibility, and the inability to pursue something to the end once it has been started.

Handling confrontation: Most men become unsure or avoid the situation when it comes to a direct confrontation. If we cannot even get through a confrontation within our family, or with others, how can we possibly stand up against the world?

Inner strength: I use the word "inner" because I do not mean the muscles. I recently read the following passage written by a widow: "My husband was an extraordinary man. Two years after our wedding he had an accident at work where his spine was broken just below the neck. He had to lie in bed for the following 23 years. He was unable to have sex and was altogether completely helpless. I had to work during those 23 years in order to feed the family. My husband, however, showed so much inner strength that I could hardly wait to sit at his bedside after work to get strength and assurance from him." When I read those lines I asked myself if I would ever become a man. I wonder if I would have fallen into self-pity, bitterness and apathy in such a situation. What a man! And what a woman!
7. Change
I would now like to point out a few things that require correction and change through healthy fatherhood.

A false emphasis on grace: An effeminate Christendom does not understand the purpose of the Father in leading His people to maturity and has a one-sided emphasis on grace. Jesus gave grace. He said to the adulteress: "Neither do I condemn thee." But He added: "Sin no more." I myself preach about grace. I am a child of the grace of God, but I am also a child of His chastisement. I love His rod as much as I love His grace. They belong together. The twelfth chapter in Hebrews shows clearly what I mean.

Wrong motives for the ministry: If a man has any motive for his ministry other than pleasing the Lord, a close relationship to his spiritual Father (which is established for his own protection and the protection of the body of Christ) will be destroyed.

Exaggerated emphasis on churchly forms: I am talking about insufficient understanding of authority and leadership, that is satisfied with hierarchical structure rather than a real fatherly relationship. A real father is not somebody with a professional, theological facade, but a person who is loved by people and who can be touched.

Misure of authority: A real man never has to threaten somebody or make somebody else look ridiculous. He leads through his word. A man who keeps his flock together like a little dictator, using Bible scriptures and spreading fear, is no father.

Changing roles: Men should be like men, and women like women. Men should look like men and women should dress like women. This is not my teaching, but from the Bible. Fathers who act like fathers give their children an example they can look at.

Pampering: In the family it is the over-careful father or mother, who never lets their children out of their sight. They pamper their children and don't give them the chance to make their own mistakes and grow up like normal children. For example the father says, "I am going to buy my son a knife for his birthday." The mother answers, "But he is only nine years old, he is going to cut himself." The father says: "That's OK. It will heal again and he will learn how to handle a knife." Parents who still treat teenagers as if they are four years old, cause them to step over the border more than anything else. "Don't do this", "Do this", "Be quiet", "Shut your mouth and do what I tell you to do." This creates many problems.

In the church, it is the pastor who pampers his people and doesn't let them take a step by themselves without having talked about everything in detail. Only people who have just started to walk with God sometimes need to be treated like that. You are not allowed to stand still, but have to grow, to mature and to learn how to become independent in the Lord. The call of my heart is: God give us men! Men who go home to be real fathers. Men who not only show us the way, but who are walking in front of us and are able to lead others. Men who take up their duty and men who learn their lesson, change because of it and who are willing to do the will of God.

by Bob Mumford

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