

Text: Col. 3:18-4:1

Title: "Godly dads"

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Introduction : On April 22, 2004, an article appeared in *The Washington Post* entitled, "In a First, Mice Are Made Without Fathers." The story reports on an article in the journal, *Nature*, which describes the results of some research done by Japanese geneticists who had successfully produced a mouse that grew to adulthood without the contribution from a father. The article noted that only females could be born this way, and it went on to say, "This just shows that in the absence of a paternal genome *you can manipulate things*, and with very low efficiency you can get a live mouse" [emphasis mine].

Satan and sinful man, who operates under the influence of Satan, have been manipulating things when it comes to God's design for fathers for a long time now. Today we no longer have to theorize about what life is like for a society that has concluded that fathers are optional. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 1 in 4 children in American today live in a fatherless home (www.fatherhood.org; accessed 6/10/2025). That is 17.6 million children.

Studies show that fatherless children are at greater risk of poverty, behavioral problems, infant mortality, prison, teen pregnancy, addiction, obesity, and dropping out of school. One study on the annual cost to our government associated with absent fathers is titled, "The One Hundred Billion Dollar Man" [op cit.]

Fathers become optional only when we deny our need for God's design for the family. But as those who have been

redeemed to be a witness to the wicked world we came from, we need to be a church in support of godly dads.

This passage is filled with phrases which teach us that the rationale for the family unit must be the sovereign design of the God who created it: “as is fitting in the Lord” v. 18, “for this is well-pleasing to the Lord” v. 20, “fearing God” v. 22, “as for the Lord” v. 23, “ye serve the Lord Christ” v. 24, “you have a Master in heaven” 4:1. How do we know what a godly dad is? The God who designed the role tells us plainly in this passage. Godly dads are His will for us.

I will only mention two things it says this morning about a godly dad: (1) a godly dad fulfills his responsibility to his wife (vv. 18-19); and (2) a godly dad fulfills his responsibility to his children (vv. 20-21).

I. A godly dad fulfills his responsibility to his wife (vv. 18-19).

Illustration: My kids grew up playing in soccer leagues, so we were able to watch them develop their soccer skills over the years. Maureen and I both regret not taking more home videos of those experiences, but had we those videos available, one of the things you would notice about our kids’ teams when they were very young is that their teams all loved to go where the ball was going. No one wanted to play their positions. We used to hear the coach yelling a lot, “Play your position!” As the kids got older and played in high school, they learned to do that, and so we did not hear that as much from the coaches.

Application: A godly dad must play his position. He must focus on his responsibility to his wife, not on the wife’s responsibility to him.

Paul organizes the passage we have read by letting us know who is supposed to be focusing on what. As readers, we are all assigned a position on the field of the home. He indicates in each section who the direct addressees for that particular section are: "Wives" v. 18, "Husbands" v. 19, "Children" v. 20, "Fathers" v. 21, "Slaves" v. 22, "Masters" 4:1. Pastor Ashbrook, in his book, *Family Fundamentals*, likened this to hearing your name over the public address system at an airport.

Yet I know from the experience of almost 40 years of marriage that verse 18 is a verse that I as a husband have found easier to focus on, and Maureen as my wife has had a natural attraction to verse 19. My temptation is always to think that if only my wife were more submissive, I could be more loving. And Maureen has at times intimated that if only I were more loving, she could better follow. Both thoughts may be true, but they are out of position, coming from the wrong spouse in the marriage.

Certainly, the nature of the experience of loving my wife when she is submissive is very different from times when she is not; and for her, the nature of being submissive when I am loving is very different than when I am not. But I want us to see that there is no excuse to be found in our spouse for our ever failing to love or submit.

It is the commitment to do what is fitting to the Lord that produces a submissive spirit in the wife, and it is the desire to be like Christ who loved the church that will produce in a husband a genuine love for his wife ((Eph. 5:25, "just as also Christ loved the church"; vv. 17, 23). Imagine trying to love a wife as unsubmissive as the church has been to Christ.

What do you do, husbands, if your wife is not following you the way you wish she would? You continue to focus on verse 19, and you leave verse 18 to the wife and the Lord. The godly dad focuses on his responsibility; he is not focused on his wife's responsibility.

So on this Father's Day, our focus is on verse 19. What responsibility does it mention? It says that the responsibility of the godly dad for his wife is forgiving love.

Illustration: Matthew Henry (1662–1714) wrote of the marriage relationship: "The woman was formed out of man — not out of his head to rule over him; not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him; but out of his side to be his equal, from beneath his arm to be protected, and from near his heart to be loved."

Scripture has much to say about the love a husband ought to have for his wife. Ephesians 5 emphasizes the sacrifice necessary to that love, where Paul teaches that our love as husbands should be like Christ's for the church, "who gave Himself for her."

1 Peter 3 emphasizes the understanding, respect, and honor necessary to the love of a husband for his wife: "You husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered."

1 Corinthians 7 describes the romantic and physical component necessary to that love, "the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." All of this is critical to God's design for marriage., but our passage is unique in its emphasis on forgiveness in the love of a husband for his wife.

The word translated *be bitter* in v. 19 [πικραισέσθε, *become bitter or embittered*] is a word that is used literally of the stomach of the Apostle John when he ingested the little book which the angel told him to eat in Rev. 10:9-10. The bitterness of the stomach contrasts the sweetness of honey in the mouth. In Rev. 8:11, many die from drinking the waters that the great star Wormwood made bitter during the third trumpet judgment. Here the idea of *poison* or *toxin* is very clear.

So what is Paul's counsel for a father's love in the home? It is that husbands are not to allow any angry lack of forgiveness to act as a toxin or poison that can destroy the love they should feel for their wives. Husbands are to forgive, and as with all forgiveness, they do so because they are forgiven (Matt. 18:21-35).

Wives will need forgiveness, just like they will need love. Husbands need both too, but evidently wives are better at loving and forgiving than husbands are, so the special admonition for us this morning is "Husbands, you make sure you love in a forgiving way." Men, if our marriage is experiencing the torments of the enemy, we need to begin here - loving our wives with a forgiving love.

II. A godly dad fulfills the responsibility he has to his children (vv. 20-21).

Illustration: Col. Francis Wayland Parker was a Civil War veteran who is remembered as the "Father of Progressive Education." Col. Parker's ideas were very influential in the development of the public educational system we have in America today.

His philosophy of education is summed up in a book he had published in 1894 called *Talks on Pedagogics*. In that

book Parker said, "Self-activity is the fundamental principle of education . . . Education depends upon the use the being makes of the conditions in which he finds himself the center" [quoted in Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education*, 98]. This emphasis on the centrality of self, foundational to Parker's view of education, was based on Parker's view of human nature. Parker wrote, "The spontaneous tendencies of the child are the records of inborn divinity."

In 1889 he had published an article in the *N.E.A. Journal* entitled, "The Child." In that article Parker said in part: "Every child is a born worker . . . There never was a lazy child born in God's busy world"; "The child is a lover of humanity . . . There never was such a thing as a selfish child born—they grow selfish later." He said the child "inevitably gravitates toward good" and "that which is best for the unspoiled child gives it the greatest pleasure."

Application: Paul does not say, "Children, live spontaneously so that your true divinity may be realized." Paul says, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord." Children are to learn to deny their self-will so that it conforms to the will of their parents. We need to teach our kids to obey us, which is important preparation for their adulthood (v. 22, "Servants, obey"). The father takes the lead in this important responsibility to his children (Paul's follow-up in v. 21 addresses "Fathers," not "Parents").

The Bible has much to say about how parents, especially fathers, are to go about teaching their children to obey. Our passage this morning emphasizes one aspect of that instruction that is often overlooked: the teaching of obedience must involve a winning of the heart (v. 21).

Illustration: SIR THOMAS FULLER (1608–1661) “A father who whipped his son for swearing, and swore himself while he whipped him, did more harm by his example than good by his correction.” We need to be careful that we do not do more harm by our examples than good by our corrections.

The word translated *provoke to anger* (NASB, *exasperate*) is used in 2 Cor. 9:2 in a positive context. Our word *provoke* can be both a positive thing and a negative thing. 2 Cor. 9:2 makes clear that provocation can involve comparisons. The Corinthian zeal provoked the Macedonians to give. Here Corinth is being compared to Macedonia in a positive light.

But in Col. 3:21, we are told not to take this approach with our kids. We must show concern for how we might affect their hearts. We need to win the hearts of our children so that the day comes in which they want to obey. The provocation of comparisons can make them lose heart.

Dads, how are your kids’ hearts doing this morning? Do they want to obey you? Have they wanted to obey the gospel they hear from you? (Rom. 10:15-17, 21).

Conclusion: Mark Twain (1835–1910) wrote, “When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years.”

Twain describes an experience common to many of us, who remember with fondness the father who faithfully disciplined us and tried to teach us to obey. Now that we are older, we have come to the realization that this is exactly what we needed to prepare us for the challenges of adult-

hood. Life is filled with the need to deny self in order to obey authority. My dad taught me that in many ways. The weeds in our garden were an especially useful tool in this regard.

Dads, let's be fathers that will cause sons and daughters to look back with thankfulness someday on the way we taught them to obey. Doing so will not only help them, it will be an eternal blessing to us as well according to verse 24: "Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ." Let's serve the Lord Christ by being a godly dad, loving the mother of our kids, and teaching our kids to obey from the heart.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,