

The Father's Christmas Gift to You

In the name of him who is the Light for revelation to the Gentiles and the Glory of his people Israel, dear friends in Christ: Let me say right up front that I'll be addressing a sensitive topic in this message, in the course of which I will say things that some may find offensive. It's not my intent to offend anyone. But I do want to describe the situation accurately so that we eventually come to its proper solution. And I think if you hear me out to the end you'll agree. So please don't tune me out half way because I said something that upset you.

Here it is: some forty years ago our society as a whole was sold a package of lies, and sadly, the society as a whole (not necessarily every individual) bought into this package and swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. The reason for this is multi-faceted. Part of it was the so-called sexual revolution. Part of it was indoctrination by a radical form of feminism. Part of it was people in general and men in particular being selfish, lazy, and fearful of giving offense. In short, it was sinners doing what they do best: namely, rebel against their Creator. And what in particular our society rebelled against was the Creator's good design for marriage and family: his good design that decrees that sexual relations are reserved for a man and a woman who are promised to each other in a life-long commitment of love and fidelity; that in such commitments of marriage the man is called to sacrificially lead, defend, and provide for his wife and children; the woman is called to support and follow her husband's lead as she cares for him and their children; and the children are called to honor, love, serve, and obey their parents.

"Nonsense", the package of lies told us. There's no reason to reserve sex for marriage. If it feels good, do it – as often as you like with whomever you like. If such a casual encounter results in an "unwanted pregnancy", just get rid of it. It's not really human; just a clump of cells. Male headship? No way! That's oppression! Down with the patriarchy! It's evil and archaic. Is your marriage unhappy? End it. Walk out. The kids are resilient. They'll be fine. If the parents are happy being apart, the kids will be happy and well adjusted too. Besides, who needs men anyway? Men by nature tend more toward violence, aggression, competition, and assertiveness. Who needs any of that? Men should act more like women. Then the world would be a better place.

Any of this sound familiar? It should. For forty years these lies have been sown to the wind. And now we are reaping the whirlwind. This is most evident in what's called the crisis of fatherhood, that is, the lack or absence of fathers in the home. Some forty percent of children in our nation currently grow up that way. In some places like the inner cities, that percentage is as high as sixty to seventy percent. And the results are devastating. Children who grow up without a father in the home are multiple times more likely to be murdered, arrested, sent to prison, or unemployed. They are also more likely to drop out of school, have children out of wedlock, become addicted to drugs, and commit suicide. Some of these poor kids don't know even who their father is; and sadly, in some cases their mothers can't tell them because they're not sure – which leads these children to an identity crisis: I know who mom is, but without knowing where half of my DNA comes from, how can I know who I am? They end up lost, confused, and out of place. The situation is only getting worse. Young men who grow up without fathers – as so many have for several generations now – never learn what it means to be a father (except in a biological sense). Thus the fatherhood crisis expands and deepens, and so do its ruinous effects on individuals and our society as a whole.

But let me insert a word of adjustment. I understand very well that in this fallen world sometimes the lack of a father in a home cannot be helped. Some men die. Others are abusive, alcoholic, or unfaithful. Some abandon their families. I get it. It happens. And when it does, it's a tragedy for all involved. But when it happens it's always the result of sin or, in the case of death, sin's consequences. My point being that the fact that human sin sometimes ruins nuclear families does not mean that God's design for families is bad. To say that it is bad is like buying some complicated gadget or toy that requires assembly, putting it together without consulting the instructions, and then blaming the manufacturer because it doesn't work. God's design for marriage and family *is* good even if we sinners mess it up. And adherence to his design is the standard we should strive for even if we can't achieve it perfectly.

This must be our goal both for the good of our own families and for the society at large. One of the best weapons in our arsenal to fight back against the cultural war against marriage and family is to model God's design for the same before the world in our own families. Show them that it works. Show them that it works well. Show them that kids who grow up in a stable home with a father and mother who are committed to each other in an unbreakable bond, and who together raise their children in an atmosphere of love and discipline – these children will most often turn out well adjusted, poised to succeed, and wanting their own kids to grow up in the same kind of environment. Show the world *that* and they'll want it for themselves too.

While doing so, we must also denounce the lies; because sexual relations belong in marriage and no place else, because every child conceived is a sacred life that needs protection, because kids are not resilient – they're fragile, they break so easily; they suffer as the silent victims of every divorce; and because men are not expendable. Every child needs a father.

And when circumstances are such that they don't have a father, they need some other male authority figure to fill (at least in part) a father's shoes. It might be a grandfather, uncle, teacher, coach, scout leader, what have you – a man who acts like a man in charge and assumes some sort of responsibility for the child. Every child needs that structure, that support, that guidance and correction that only a man in authority can give. It's important that he be a good role model, because if a child can't find one, they'll go looking for a male authority figure someplace else. This is why so many teenage boys (and girls too) in the inner cities join gangs. They're looking for the man in charge and the structured chain of command they lack at home. The trouble is they're looking for it in the wrong place. This is a role for only which good men should apply.

Okay, all this being said, I want to mention what is at least another partial solution to the fatherhood crisis. In preparation for this message I watched a number of short video clips on YouTube. They were all variations of the same theme: blended family situations in which a man had married a woman who already had one or more children and whose biological father was totally out of the story. So, picture the scene: it's Christmas time. Gifts are being exchanged. And when the floor is littered with wrappers and the excitement is reaching its ebb, the man presents a child with what he says is a very special gift, a gift that expresses the depth of his love. The child opens it, looks it over with first surprise and then astonishment, and bursts into tears of heartfelt joy. It's adoption papers. Embracing his new son or daughter the man tells them, "I am and will always be your father." It is for the child the best of all possible Christmas gifts. "Now I have a real father."

And that, not coincidentally, is what we are celebrating today but on a much grander scale. You see, ever since the fall into sin, the whole world has suffered from a Fatherhood crisis. We lost our heavenly Father, not by his doing or through his negligence; but by our own

rebellion against him. In so doing, we chose for ourselves a different surrogate father. His name is Satan. We placed ourselves under his cruel and merciless authority. Oh, he pretends to be an indulgent father, giving us what we want, letting us play by our own rules. He fills our heads with the sweet lies we like to hear. He literally spoils us rotten. That's what you get with a father who lets his kids be in charge of every decision; who hasn't got the backbone to say, "No, that's dangerous or it's wrong or it's unwise"; who fails to instruct and guide his children in the way things ought to be. In other words, that's what you get with a father who doesn't act like a man in authority and who, when all is said and done, doesn't love his children. He hates us. He wants us to be destroyed. He gives us what we think we want, he tells us what we want to hear, but the end of these things is invariably despair and ultimately death – both in time and eternity.

Today we rejoice that our first Father, our true Father, does love us even though we failed to return his love and we resented and chafed under his loving discipline. He understands what it means to be a real Father. He's been one from eternity past, even before time began. He is the perfect Father: a Father who *sacrificially* gives of himself to lead, defend, provide, and care for those who belong to him. And so it was that he made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of us, his lost children. In the fullness of time he sent forth his Son for us. He who was of the Father's love *begotten* e're the worlds began to be, was sent to be born of woman, a humble virgin named Mary; born under the law, that is, though sinless himself he was subject to the curse of the law; to redeem those who were under the law – that is, buy us back from death and the devil, as we say in the Catechism, "not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and innocent suffering and death; so that we might receive adoption as sons and daughters. He who was of the Father's love *begotten* was given, that we might be of the Father's love *adopted*.

And because we are his sons and daughters, he has sent into hearts the Spirit of his Son by which we cry out to him, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer fatherless, no longer subject to Satan, no longer a slave to sin, but a true child of God. And if his child, then also his heir through Christ Jesus. The Father's Christmas gift to you is his own Son, your "adoption papers", if you will: the very best gift he could possibly have given you. Merry Christmas. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!