THE PASTOR AS FATHER

by

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Of the many roles a pastor is called upon to fill in the course of his vocation, that of a father to the congregation is one his most important. This role has been neglected to the point where Protestant pastors are rarely referred to as church fathers.

A better understanding of the roles of pastors and elders, leading an extended family of believers as spiritual fathers, is especially needed now as the church experiences an existential crisis that parallels the increasing absence of physical fathers in society at large.

The diminution of the spiritual fatherhood of pastors is relatively recent and this thesis will seek to show, through relevant scriptural references, a review of church history, theological reasons, and bio-social evidence, the essential and necessary place that the role of father should occupy in the pastor’s work.

In emphasizing the importance of this role, both in seminary education and practical pastoral application, it is hoped that the biblical model of the “church as family” will again benefit from the pastor’s role as father to that family.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The Need to Understand the Pastor’s Role as Father of the Flock

My interest in the topic of the father role of the pastor has been sparked by my perceived need for a better metaphor for the pastor’s primary role in the church. This need has been confirmed by interactions with both parishioners and elders.

In my shepherding role as an elder in my church (a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America), I frequently meet with members. When we discuss our jobs as elders, we often do so using the shepherding analogy: the members are Christ’s “sheep”, entrusted to our oversight as “shepherds”, and we assign each elder to his own small “flock” within the church. This practice is well and good and is scriptural as far as it goes. However, the metaphor was much more useful when people actually interacted with sheep. I dare say most of our urban “flocks” and “shepherds” have never been close to sheep, except perhaps at a petting zoo. Although still a useful metaphor in the historical and biblical context, its cultural relevance today is questionable, at least in urban and suburban America.

My perceptions about the shepherding metaphor were confirmed by a recent incident in the life of my church. I was approached by a young member who was going through a difficult time. She has two young children, and her husband (a drug addict who is also a member of the church) abandoned her after having been physically and verbally abusive.
Knowing her situation pretty well, when we met, I leveled with her and asked her, “Listen, Susan, I want to give you the best support and advice possible. I have a daughter about your age. Would you rather I speak with you as I would with her, or keep this less subjective and speak to you like a shepherd?” She became quite emotional and replied, “Please talk to me like I was your daughter, like you were my father; I would like that very much.” That interaction led to some deep introspection on my part and was an impetus for me to pursue further the topic of the pastor/elder as father.

The shepherding role as directed toward members is often quite different than when applied to other shepherds. Meeting in our church session (or board of elders) I have had the opportunity to witness a significant amount of conflict between elders. It has become apparent to me, as I have gotten to know these men over the years, that many of them have actually been looking to the senior pastor to provide a father figure to them in the same way as Susan asked for it from me. This is particularly true for those elders (and pastors) who themselves had poor spiritual modeling by their own fathers or who had absent fathers.

As a father of three children, as a man who had a good Christian father myself, and as an elder who has had experience shepherding and teaching in my local church, I see the need for the fathering role to be emphasized, or, as the case may be, resurrected in the church. My experience has led me to understand how deep-seated the need is for both churched and unchurched people to understand God the Father and what His role as Father was meant to be in our lives. By extension, the local pastor is a human representative of God. After all, Sunday after Sunday, he is charged with preaching God’s Word—conveying the very mind of God to his flock to the best of his ability. That mind he is attempting to convey is the mind of the Father. The pastor is God’s man—a father to the flock that God has entrusted to him.
In this thesis, I will review the historical perspective of the pastor as father through the ages of church history, beginning with the theology of God the Father. I will also analyze biblical teaching as it relates to spiritual fathers in the church. Additionally I will show how today, more than ever, we are a society desperately in need of spiritual fathers, and how the pastor is in an ideal position to provide that fathering model. Finally, I will discuss the implications for pastoral ministry and education, and what a “well fathered” church might look like.

**Understanding the Distinction between Pastors and Elders**

I will describe some of the differences between pastors (teaching elders) and ruling (lay) elders later in this paper. Pastors obviously have a higher visibility in the congregation and are, in the Presbyterian form of government, God-called and elected representatives of the local church to the Presbytery. Although all elders, in my opinion, are to serve as father figures in their churches, the pastors have a singular role, by title and responsibility, of serving as fathers to both the other elders as well as the members of the congregation.

The pastor’s is a type of surrogate role for God the Father, much as the role of the priests and elders of the Old Testament. Similarly, as I will show, the New Testament fathers were, like the Old Testament patriarchs, models for our modern pastors. I will attempt to provide ample evidence to support my thesis that the pastor, as the “head father” of the local church, plays a key role in communicating the fatherhood of God to his congregation.
CHAPTER 2
WHAT’S IN A NAME? HE TITLES OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Pastor

Pastors, called teaching elders in the PCA, wear many vocational hats in the course of their pastoral work. They often serve in a variety of roles:

1. CEO’s of faith-based non-profit organizations/businesses
2. Directors or moderators of elder boards and congregational meetings
3. Managers of church staffs
4. Managers of ministry leaders
5. Representatives of the church to the community
6. Committee membership in their Presbytery and General Assembly
7. Counselors
8. Worship Leaders

As the spiritual leaders of their congregations, however, their primary function is that of pastor. In addition, the main contention of this thesis is that the fatherhood metaphor is the best means of describing the functional identity of the pastor. It is helpful, in that light, to review and define the various titles of the pastor as used throughout Christian history.

Without question, “pastor” has been the most commonly used title for Protestant clergy in modern times. Interestingly, this term is not used at all in most of the English
translations of the New Testament. Taken directly from the Latin word *pastor*, it is usually translated scripturally as “shepherd.” An example of this usage is found in Ephesians 4:11-12: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

The Greek word for shepherd as used here and throughout the New Testament is *ποιμήν* (*poimēn*).²

Likewise, in the Old Testament, the Hebrew, *רעה* (*raah*), can mean: to pasture, feed, nurture, protect, and shepherd.³ Therefore, we could use the noun, *pastor*, or the verb, *pasture* (i.e., “feed”) congruously. The shepherd, after all, leads his sheep to feed in green pastures just as the pastor leads his people to feed on God’s Word. His title is linked to this task. An Old Testament text that illustrates this is 2 Samuel 5:2: “In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. In addition, the Lord said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’”

**Elder**

The title of “elder” is much more broadly used in Scripture than is pastor. In the New Testament, the term is used 175 times in eighty-five verses and is consistently the translation

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¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations in this thesis are taken from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version (ESV), copyright 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. Use by permission.


of the Greek word, \(\text{πρεσβύτερος} (\text{presbyteros})\), literally meaning “old man” or “older man.” Its use for church leaders is seen in 1 Peter 5:1-2: “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed.”

In the Old Testament, “elder” was a term or title for the head of a tribe, or someone appointed to a position of power or influence based on age, wisdom and experience. In Numbers 11:16-17: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you.’” We see that Moses was instructed by God to select seventy men from among the elders (Heb. זָקֵן [zaqēn]) of Israel to assist him in the leadership of the people.

The New Testament first refers to elders in Acts 11:30, in reference to the church at Jerusalem. We know that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in every church (14:23). We aren’t told who they were or how they were chosen, but the criteria for their selection and their duties as overseers were clearly defined in 1 Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” We also know that the Apostle Peter referred to himself as an elder in 1 Peter 5:16: “I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder . . . .”

Today, the use of this term in protestant churches is quite sporadic Although it has been used traditionally in Presbyterian and Reformed churches, many others have never used the term or have discontinued its use, for whatever reasons. There has been a recent

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4 Louw and Nida, s.v. ”\(\text{πρεσβύτερος}\).”

5 Barry, s.v. ”זָקֵן”
resurgence of its use, however. Mark Dever, a leading Southern Baptist pastor and author, writes:

As late as the early twentieth century, Baptist publications were referring to leaders by the title of elder, but as the twentieth century wore on, the idea seemed to vanish, until today it has become very unusual or a Baptist church to have elders. Currently, though, there is a growing trend to go back to this biblical office—and for good reason. It was needed in New Testament times and it is needed now.⁶

Using my denomination to illustrate, the PCA has elders (or overseers) that are divided into two categories—the teaching elder (or pastor) and the ruling elder. The ruling elders are not entitled, by our Book of Church Order, to use the title of pastor.⁷

Although there is formal parity between the teaching and ruling elders, as regards each having one vote on the elder board, there is a differentiation in function and title. The pastor can administer the sacraments, is the appointed moderator of elder board meetings and congregational meetings, and is entitled to preach regularly. In addition, he is almost always a paid staff member, unlike the ruling elders who generally serve in volunteer roles.

Priest

This title has been used for clergy in churches that have an episcopal hierarchy (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican) for nearly two millennia. In the Old Testament, the office of priest was divided into three ranks: high priest, priest, and Levite. Although all were members of the tribe of Levi, the high priest was the ceremonial head of the nation of Israel and had special functions, such as officiating on the Day of Atonement, when he alone entered the Holy of Holies. The priests were male descendants of Aaron (also a


⁷The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America, The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, (Lawrenceville, Ga., 2012), 21-1.
Levite) who looked after the ceremonies and sacrifices and dressed in symbolic vestments. They were also teachers, passing on the sacred traditions of the Hebrew people. The Levites were other male members of the Tribe of Levi, who assisted the priests by singing Psalms, keeping the courts clean, preparing sacrifices and offerings, and similar temple duties. The Hebrew word for priest is קֹהֶן (kohen), which was used to denote the one who offers sacrifices. the Latin term for “priest” is sacerdos.

Remarkably, the Greek word for priest, ἱερεύς (hiereus) is used thirty-one times in the New Testament, but never to refer to an officer or minister of the New Testament church. In The Book of Hebrews, we learn that the need for priests was eliminated with Christ’s fulfillment of the sacrificial system at the time of His crucifixion. Protestants have acknowledged only one priest from that time onward—Jesus, who is a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:17). Indeed, the New Testament describes all believers as priests (1 Pet. 2:5), who are to offer their own bodies as living sacrifices.

Bishop

The Greek title ἐπίσκοπος (episkopos) is used in the New Testament in the same way as presbyteros. It is often translated as overseer, but the two are used interchangeably. It is used fourteen times in fourteen verses of the New Testament.

8 Barry, s.v. קֹהֶן.


11 “English to Latin”, s.v. “biscopus.”
The word is taken from the Latin vulgate term, *biscopus*, which is clearly derived from *episkopos*. As the post-apostolic church constructed centers of worship in cities like Rome, Alexandria, Carthage, and Antioch, bishops were elected to oversee the elders of individual churches in those regions. Roman Catholics believe that these bishops traced their authority directly back to the Apostles, though Protestants deny this doctrine of apostolic succession. Denominations that continue to ordain bishops include: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Latter-day Saints, Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), Pentecostal Church of God and other smaller ones.

**Pope**

The continuing development of the Catholic church hierarchy led to the establishment of a high priest or head bishop, which is now referred to as the pope. The English word “pope” derives from the Greek παππας (*pappas*) and from the Latin *papa*. These both can be translated into the English as father or, by transliteration, papa or poppa.

Bishop Siricius (334-399 A.D.) was the first to apply the term “pope” to himself in 398 A.D. and the first for whom the term was used by the church at large. Notably, in that office he issued the first papal decretal in 385 A.D. By this time the church had achieved Roman legal status through Constantinople’s Edict of Milan, issued in 312 A.D. Historians, however, differ as to the identity of the first pope as J.P Eckman notes:

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Protestant church historians generally maintain that institutionalized Roman Catholicism began with Gregory’s appointment as bishop of Rome in 590. Though he refused the title of pope, administratively he organized the papal system of government that characterized the entire medieval period. Thus all the major bishoprics of the West looked to him for guidance and leadership. Likewise the veneration of Mary, purgatory, an early form of transubstantiation, and praying to departed saints found their infant pronouncements in his writings.\footnote{J.P. Eckman, \textit{Exploring Church History} (Wheaton,Ill.: Crossway, 2002), 39-40.}

Reverend

The title “reverend” comes from the medieval Latin word \textit{reverendus}, which is literally translated, “to be revered”.\footnote{“English to Latin” s.v. \textit{“reverendus.”}} It has been a title of respect applied to the clergy since the fifteenth century. As used in my denomination, it signifies a teaching elder (pastor) who has undergone formal ministry training, has been ordained by his respective Presbytery, and has received an external call to vocational ministry such as a pastorate or missionary placement. Frequently, 1 Timothy 5:17 is cited to support this special treatment and method of addressing pastors: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”

Many Protestant churches, however, do not use the term since they believe the title should be reserved for God alone. One scriptural reference used to support this stance is Psalm 111:9: “He sent redemption unto his people: He hath commanded his covenant forever: Holy and reverend is his name.”\footnote{\textit{The Holy Bible, King James Version} (New York: Oxford Edition,1769).} The word translated “reverend” in this passage
comes from the Hebrew יִרְאָ (yra) which includes within its semantic range the meanings; reverenced, feared, and awesome.\(^{17}\)

**Father**

Father is not used in Scripture to denote a particular human office other than the head of the family. Referring to God the Father, however, the metaphor is used fifteen times in the Old Testament and 205 times in the New Testament (165 in the Gospels and forty in the Pauline Epistles). We will look at this attribute of God in more detail later.

Although rarely used today in most Protestant churches, the use of “Father” to denote a spiritual leader of the church is commonly used in Catholic, Episcopal and Orthodox churches—the same ones that use the title of “Priest.” To support such usage, they appeal to passages such as 1 Corinthians 4:15: “For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Clearly, Paul was referring to himself as their spiritual father.

Greek Orthodox Friar Richard Ballew comments:

> From the beginning of Church history, as was true throughout Israel, those anointed by God for service were called by certain names: “prophet”, “teacher” (rabbi in Israel), and “father.” In that same spirit, other titles have emerged, such as “reverend”, “pastor”, “professor” (teacher), or “brother” (for some evangelical pastors and Catholic monks). These designations speak of both warmth and dignity. Just as in our family units there is one who with love is called “father”, so in God’s household we have honored and will continue to honor those who have brought us to the new birth through our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, what better term for them than “father”?\(^{18}\)

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\(^{18}\) Mark Bellew, "Why Orthodox Call their Pastor Father”, Greek Orthodox Christian Church of Greater Omaha, Nebraska, available from [http://www.synaxis.org/callnoman.htm](http://www.synaxis.org/callnoman.htm); Internet; accessed 15 December 2013.
CHAPTER 3

GOD THE FATHER

Why God’s Attribute of Father is Important

Before we explore the pastor’s role of father, it is useful to examine the pastor’s true model, God the Father. Just as it is impossible to make sense of God’s other attributes without first understanding His role or attribute of father, it is impossible to understand a pastor’s place in the church without understanding his role as “father of the flock.” An early and important picture of God the Father is seen in Deuteronomy, which describes God’s relationship with Israel. In Deuteronomy 32:6 and 18-20, we read:

6 “Do you thus repay the Lord, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?” . . . 18 “You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth.” 19 The Lord saw it and spurned them, because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters. 20 And he said, “I will hide my face from them; I will see what will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness.”

God is pictured as both the father of His people but also of His son. Consistent with other passages, God, as a good father, disciplines his children in both correction and encouragement.

There are other key passages that portray the imagery of God as Father. In Psalm 103:13, we see His compassion, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.” A parallel passage is found in
Malachi 3:17, “…I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. The fatherly tandem (divine and human) of discipline and delight is exhibited in Proverbs 3:12, “for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

The fatherly imagery of God, as shown above, is quite easy to relate to since we all have fathers, whether active or inactive in our lives. Reformed theology has historically distinguished between the “communicable” and “incommunicable” attributes of God. The communicable attributes are those personal ones we share with Him, identify with and understand easily as humans. The incommunicable ones are those that pertain to Him alone and are, to a large degree, unknowable, given man’s finite comprehension the Divine.

The texts of systematic theologians Grudem\(^1\), Berkhof\(^2\), and Pink\(^3\) have listed the incommunicable attributes (the lists are by no means exhaustive) of God as follows: eternality, holiness, immutability, impassability, infinitude, omnipresence, omniscience, omnisapience (having all wisdom), self-existence, perfection, unity, and immateriality. The communicable attributes include: goodness, love, grace, justice, sovereignty, jealousy, spirituality, veracity, mercy, longsuffering, anger, holiness, and righteousness.


The fatherly tandem (divine and human) of discipline and delight is exhibited in Proverbs 3:12, “for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

I would argue that God’s “patriarchy,” or His attribute of father, is His most communicable attribute. Many people would struggle to explain at least a few of the other attributes listed, but the commonality of experience with and understanding of fatherhood is universal. Mark Kelly agrees:

The Fatherhood of God is perhaps the most overlooked attribute of God in the Christian world. Christians worldwide pray to God by uttering the familiar words, ‘Our Father who art in heaven.’ ‘Father’ is the most familiar term for God in Christian Tradition, and perhaps the most theologically significant title for God in all of Scripture.⁴

Indeed, the first created son of God was Adam. In Luke 3:38, we read, “the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.” In our human generation we are sons and daughters of God through Adam’s line. Adam’s (the Hebrew word for man) true identity and sense of belonging began with that father-son relationship. Adam’s charge from God was to be, in effect, a father to the world, to exercise dominion over it. For this reason, the consequence of Adam’s original sin was greater than Eve’s since he was the federal or family head. The curse of the fall, for Adam, affected the entire human race thereafter in that all of his offspring inherited his sinful nature. Eve’s curse was limited to the pain that women would thereafter endure in childbirth and the envy of women to have “dominion” over men.

The prophecy found in Malachi 4:5-6 helps us understand God’s emphasis on father-child relationships more clearly:

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

God’s redemptive will was to turn His people’s hearts to Him and also the hearts of children to their own fathers. This is a double-blessing of salvation: as we are saved, our affections change toward both God our heavenly father and our earthly fathers whom God gave us. This is a beautiful picture of reconciliation, particularly for fathers and children whose relationships have been less than ideal: there is hope through Christ. Curiously, this is the only passage in the Hebrew Bible where the words heart, father and son appear together.

Therefore, as we shall see, God’s attribute of fatherhood is inseparable from His other attributes, and as important as any. In The Lord’s Prayer, Jesus mentions or alludes to several attributes of God (holiness, sovereignty, immutability), but he addresses God as Father, or the more intimate “Daddy,” placing this attribute in a special category—the first name He uses for God. Father is the name and identifier by and through which all of God’s other attributes are communicated.

**Feminism’s Attack on God’s Male Identity**

The historical understanding of God’s gender has probably undergone more scrutiny in the past century than at any time in history. This scrutiny has been fomented by several groups, but most adamantly and consistently by the feminist movement in the Western church. The origins of this movement are well documented. It has come in three significant
“waves.” The first wave was in 1895, with the publishing of *The Woman’s Bible*,\(^5\) which was written by an early “women’s liberation” activist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In it, the subservience of women to men was ridiculed, and the prescription of gender-specific roles, as described in Scripture, was refuted. She wrote:

> Whatever the Bible may be made to do in Hebrew or Greek, in plain English it does not exalt and dignify woman. My standpoint for criticism is the revised edition of 1888. I will so far honor the revising committee of wise men who have given us the best exegesis they can according to their ability, although Disraeli said the last one before he died contained 150,000 blunders in the Hebrew, and 7,000 in the Greek.\(^6\)

It would appear that to support her gender bias, she threw the Bible out with the bathwater.

The second wave began with the Women’s Rights movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s. This was concurrent with, and connected to the rise of Liberation Theology, Gay and Lesbian Theology, the Pro-Choice Movement, and the so-called “Sexual Revolution.” One of its main goals was to reject the patriarchy of the Bible and paternalism in society at large.

A necessary step in achieving that goal was to make God Himself gender-neutral, both linguistically and relationally. This has been an ongoing process, as we can see from this 1975 editorial from the Princeton Theological Seminary, as cited in a book on gender-neutral writing by Hugh Kerr:

> A literary consideration of increasing importance for us these days relates to the avoidance of exclusive in favor of inclusive sexist language. In the last several issues, we have been quietly transposing sex-specific language. We do not want to


be legalistic about this, and quotations, biblical and otherwise, will mostly stand as originally written. However, we think this is a literary revolution of major, even theological, importance. For our writers, this will mean not only careful attention to grammar but, in many instances, a new way of writing altogether. If we cannot make changes easily in a manuscript, it will either be returned for revision or we will allow the author to assume responsibility for the implied discrimination. We believe that Christian faith is more interested in persons than in restrictive traditions (cf. Mark 7:9). If some feel dehumanized because conventional language (even little pronouns) exclude them or offend their self-awareness, then we want to change our syntax and not expect them to change their identities.7

The third wave washed ashore with the general acceptance of feminist theology in the mainstream seminaries and (so-called) Christian colleges and universities by the 1990’s. Many of them have taken a radical and revolutionary stance on this issue, since the Bible is, literally, clearly patriarchal and thoroughly androcentric. In order to achieve their goals, they have had to adopt a new hermeneutic, called “dynamic equivalence”. As opposed to “formal equivalence,” or a word-by-word approach to biblical translation, the dynamic approach is a “thought-by-thought” method of translating which is meaning driven. Its fault lies in the higher likelihood of misunderstanding since the dynamic interpreter is trying to interpret the meaning of the original text and is more prone to translator bias often related to current cultural influences. This has opened the way for a more “politically correct” interpretation of the Bible, which has become de rigueur in liberal theological circles. Indeed, the Greek theos, from which we obtain the word theology, is masculine, so with good reason is the use of dynamic equivalence a necessary interpretative tool for these revisionists to deal with the inherent “male bias” of the word by word translations.

Although there have been several attempts to develop a gender-neutral Bible,

the first academically respected one was the *New Revised Standard Version*, which attempted to eliminate language deemed “sexist.” This and other gender-neutral versions were produced by and for non-evangelical organizations like the National Council of Churches. Not until the publication of *Today’s New International Version (TNIV)*, in 2002, has there been a “neutered” popular evangelical translation. This was a major inroad, since the NIV translation, which the TNIV updated, heretofore had been the most popular English contemporary translation, with more than 450 million copies distributed since its first publication in 1978.

The TNIV policy included eliminating generic masculine pronouns, like the generic *he*. To illustrate, the NIV’s interpretation of Luke 17:3, “if your brother sins,” in the TNIV becomes, “if any brother or sister sins against you.” However well intentioned, this changes and compromises meanings and thought patterns in the Bible.

In defending faithfulness to the original meaning, Vern Poythress points out:

> If we give in at this point, further down the road we will give up calling God *Father*, because this too is perceived by some as offensive. In fact, it is far more offensive than a generic *he*! If we give in here, we should get ready to pray to “Our Parent in heaven …” because the new Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich Greek *Lexicon*, with no new evidence, has already added the new definition *Parent* for Greek *pater* when referring to God (p. 787).

Of note, due to the resistance that Zondervan received from conservative evangelicals, they continued to sell the NIV and TNIV both until 2011. That year the new and gender-neutral NIV 2011 replaced both the NIV 1984 and the TNIV.

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8 *NRSV Standard Bible* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009).

So wholesale has been the rejection of masculine-predominant language and imagery in Scripture, that liberal feminists (male and female) have launched a persistent and concerted assault on long held presuppositions about gender roles, particularly the gender of God. Unsurprisingly it has become, for them, an issue of dogmatic morality. They maintain that if we are to reach a classless and color-blind state (and speaking for liberal theologians, the Bible must be culturally formative in their hermeneutics), gender neutrality must be included in the new reformation and the institution of tolerance as its ultimate virtue—the “so-called” Christian’s categorical imperative.

To cut at the root of Christian patriarchy, then, one must attack its foundations in the Divine Patriarch—God the Father. The self-described “radical lesbian feminist” Mary Daly, a Jesuit theologian from Boston College, writes:

The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered services to the type of society by making its mechanisms for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in "his" heaven is a father ruling "his" people, then it is in the "nature" of things and according to divine plans and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated.11

It is this idea of a male-dominated world, and a Father God dominated cosmos that feminist/liberal theology rejects with such force.

The Attack on God the Father by Philosophers and Psychologists

Modern philosophers and psychologists have also rejected the notion of God the Father with a vengeance. The roots of the modern critique of God and particularly Father God can be found largely in the unholy trinity of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. Their ideas

about both God and fatherhood have been used to deconstruct not only God but Father God.

In describing Freud’s opinion on this, Karen Armstrong writes:

> The idea of God was not a lie but a device of the unconscious which needed to be decoded by psychology. A personal god was nothing more than an exalted father-figure: desire for such a deity sprang from infantile yearnings for a powerful, protective father, for justice and fairness and for life to go on forever. God is simply a projection of these desires, feared and worshiped by human beings out of an abiding sense of helplessness. Religion belonged to the infancy of the human race; it had been a necessary stage in the transition from childhood to maturity. It had promoted ethical values which were essential to society. Now that humanity had come of age, however, it should be left behind.\(^\text{12}\)

Freud’s idea of religion being an infantile and transitional stage in human development is interesting but absurd. He did recognize, however, the innate need within all children for a “father-figure” who is powerful, protective, and just. The unanswered question is, who can fill that void or desire without a perfect model, i.e., God?

Freud claimed that religion is psychological self-justification, that we created God to fill our need for an idealized father-figure. Marx claimed that religion is a sociological self-justification, and Nietzsche wrote that, “Christianity came into existence in order to lighten the heart; but now it has first to burden the heart so as afterwards to be able to lighten it. Consequently it shall perish.”\(^\text{13}\) A key element in their deconstruction of God is the deconstruction of the importance of the father. He is replaced by various types of parental social institutions. In addition, without a patriarchal emphasis in culture, we actually do tend to move into a “nanny” state. As Don DeMarco comments:

> The vital element that is omitted in the thought of these three godless

\(^{12}\text{Karen Armstrong, } \textit{A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam} \text{ (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 378.}\)

\(^{13}\text{Friedrich Nietzsche, } \textit{Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits} \text{ (Lincoln, Neb.: Bison Books, 1996), 119.}\)
thinkers is a relationship with the Father. . . . Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, whose influence on the modern world is immense, were particularly vehement in their rejection to the Fatherhood aspect of God. They all believed and taught that the condition for human liberty is the death of God the Father.\textsuperscript{14}

In the worldview of these thinkers, God the Father represents a type of authority which restricts human freedom, their highest virtue. Atheism itself is essentially fatherless. Fatherlessness, as shown by the data, leads to personal and social anarchy, a phenomenon which, not surprisingly, is on the upswing today. These "Masters of Suspicion," a term coined by Paul Ricouer\textsuperscript{15}, reject the law and love that only God the Father can provide. Without this ultimate authority, there is no hope or true purpose or identity, leading ultimately to despair and hopelessness. Quoting again from DeMarco:

If man does not view God as a loving father, he will view him as a tyrant or as an oppressor, and therefore will rebel against him as a slave would against the master who kept him enslaved. The abolition of the fatherhood of God is at the same time the abolition of the fatherhood in man. And with this abolition, the state of lawlessness, presumably, comes the freedom to be oneself. Hence, in a fatherless universe, free choice becomes the opium of the masses.\textsuperscript{16}

In the final analysis, God the Father represents ultimate authority and identity: we either accept him or reject him.

\textbf{God as Patriarch}

The assault on God as father, or patriarch, continues at full speed by those Christians who would alter this preeminent attribute of His, for fairly obvious and agenda-advancing

\textsuperscript{14} Donald DeMarco, \textit{Reversing the Deculturation of Fatherhood}, Catholic Education Resource Center; available from http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/parenting/pa0142.htm; Internet; accessed 6 November 2013, 142.

\textsuperscript{15} Paul Ricoeur, \textit{Freud and Philosophy: An Essay On Interpretation}, The Terry Lecture Series, (Yale University Press, 1977), 32.

\textsuperscript{16} DeMarco, 142.
reasons. If our understanding of God’s identity is that of Father, everything changes, including our relationship to Him. God demands the very thing that the modernists reject: the acceptance of his sovereignty and the acknowledgment that they were created by him, and made in his image. The fact that the God of the Bible is defined in Scripture in masculine terms and is a father by role, dictates submission. This is unacceptable to those who will not “bend the knee” to God, particularly one which is antithetical to their gender-neutral, “tolerance equals the highest virtue” theology.

First, God’s patriarchy is important because He is the only divine father, the only perfect father, the only father who is eternally begetting, or generating His eternally begotten Son. This doctrine of Eternal Generation is key to understanding the importance of God as Father. Several noted theologians and confessions have attempted to explain it:

• Jonathan Edwards, “The Father is the deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated and most absolute manner, or the deity in its direct existence. The Son is the deity [eternally] generated by God's understanding, or having an idea of Himself and subsisting in that idea.”

• Robert Dabney, "In a word, the generation of the Son, and procession of the Spirit, however mysterious, are unavoidable corollaries from two facts. The essence of the Godhead is one; the persons are three.”

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The Westminster Confession of Faith II.3, “God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost: the Father is of none, neither begotten, not proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.”

At this point, we must note the fact that God, a spiritual being, is not innately sexual, though He repeatedly represents himself in His Word as masculine, and that He is a father, both of Jesus and of mankind. Interestingly and importantly, we know that God exhibits what appear to be female traits also. There are several texts where we see this, one where Jehovah describes Himself maternally: “As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you” (Isa. 66:13). But even though these descriptions are given in Scripture, God is never given a female name or pronoun but is always referred to in masculine terms, such as he, his and him. Likewise, all of God’s names are grammatically masculine in gender, including; Elohim, Yahweh, Shaddai, Adonai, Theos, and Kurios. Father can never mean mother, although God the Father also encompasses many of what we understand to be female personality traits, such as maternal love.

Thomas Rees does an excellent job of explaining the patriarchal nature of God: “the essential nature of God, and His relation to men, is best expressed by the attitude and relation of a father to his children; but God is Father in an infinitely higher and more perfect degree than any man.” God’s patriarchy or fatherhood really has much to do with understanding His authority, which is similar to a father’s authority as the head of the family.

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C.S. Lewis gives a brilliant discourse on why it is God who dictates to us by what names and terms we should address Him:

Goddesses have, of course, been worshipped: many religions have had priestesses. However, they are religions quite different in character from Christianity.... Since God is in fact not a biological being and has no sex, what can it matter whether we say He or She, Father or Mother, Son or Daughter? Christians think that God Himself has taught us how to speak of Him. To say that it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable.21

The best counter, of course, to the modernists, feminists and other cultural revisionists of God’s attributes, particularly His patriarchy and fatherhood, is the Bible itself. As God’s all-sufficient revelation to man, orthodox Christians believe that there is an inspired reason for its use of the masculine imagery of God the Father, even as Jesus Himself addressed His Father in Matthew 6:9: “Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” Here, Jesus instructed his disciples to share with him the same Father he had known for eternity. This is a clear indication of the place of primary importance the person and symbol of God as Father plays in the life of all believers.

CHAPTER 4

THE SCRIPTURAL CASE FOR THE FAMILIAL NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The Trinity as “First Family” of the Church

Having established that God’s attribute of Fatherhood, which is both scriptural and essential to a fuller understanding of the Godhead, the next logical question to answer is how God’s attribute of fatherhood should be applied to the church. To begin with, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are eternally existent in a relationship defined by an intrinsic and inseparable love. As his creations and adopted children, we are commanded to model Christ, in our love both for him, for our earthly families, and for his bride, the Church.

As we affirm the truth of the Nicene Creed that the nature or essence of the members of the Trinity is the same, we understand that what distinguishes them, in Bruce Ware’s words, are:

(1) the particular roles that each has within the Trinity and in the work each carries out in the world, and, (2) the respective relationships that each has with the other divine Persons and within the creation that the triune God has made…. The Trinity, as a model for both the human family and the church family, gives us a model of a loving relationship where there is a unity of purpose and a harmony of mission, yet with differentiation in lines of authority and submission within the Godhead.
The family unit is to function similarly: the members have equal standing before God, are all made in His image with the dignity which that imbues, and yet each have distinct roles within the family. These roles are to be carried out with the preordained structure that God gave at creation and are to reflect the relationships, governance, and economy of the Trinity. This helps us to understand how both families and churches were created to interact: there is individual and corporate submission to a head (God, the Father mankind, and His institutional representatives, the father and the pastor-father).

That father, as head, leads by example, and His overarching trait is love. John 4:8 states, “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” James Boice explains further, describing the three tests found in First John that determine whether one is truly a child of God:

They are the moral test, which is righteousness; the social test, which is love; and the doctrinal test, which is the test of truth or of belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as God incarnate. The tests have been developed one by one, but it has been obvious even as John talks about them that they belong together and that each is important.\(^1\)

He goes on to explain which of these is the most important:

The first reason is that love is of God’s own nature; therefore, Christians are to “love one another”. The second reason concerns God’s gift in Christ; therefore, Christians are to “love one another.” The third reason concerns God’s present activity in and through his people; for this reason too, Christians are to “love one another.” Up to this point love has been seen mostly as a duty binding upon believers. Now it is seen for what it most truly is, a driving disposition arising out of the divine nature that by God’s grace is now also within the Christian.\(^2\)

It is this divine nature of the Trinity—a relationship wholly devoted to mutual love—that is to be the example for the church. The very analogy that Paul uses, of

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\(^2\) Ibid.
the bride and bridegroom, including his description of family roles and responsibilities, underscores the typology of the church as family as seen in Ephesians 5:32: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

The Edenic Family Model

Adam and Eve were God’s first human model of family, and their roles and relationships, as ordained by Him, continue to be applicable and in force for people today. God’s model was not flawed, but its execution by its prototypes was. Adam and Eve were given distinctive roles in their family, with different but complimentary biological, emotional, and cognitive architectures with which to execute those roles.

Their family served and serves still as the model of the functional and foundational unit of all culture and society. It is helpful to examine the working dynamic of that model. Adam was intended to be the head or leader of a family of image-bearers of God.

When God pronounced that it was not good for Adam to be alone (Gen. 2:18), He created Eve for Adam, and from Adam, and gave her to Adam as a helpmate. This family structure or model is amplified in the New Testament: “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7). Woman was the “weaker vessel” from the beginning. There has been much debate about what type of weakness is being discussed here, but women in general are clearly weaker in the physical sense, and so to preserve the family, God gave man the role of protector.
Beyond that, there is another way in which woman was created to serve as a second-in-command in the family. In Genesis 3:17, God rebuked Adam for allowing Eve to take the leadership role: “And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife . . . .’” George Knight explains the practical outworking of this principle:

The husband and wife should seek to come to a mutually satisfactory decision after discussion and thorough prayer and seeking the principles of God’s Word, and they should do so under the leadership and guidance of the husband, who should initiate this process. In a world of sin in which both husband and wife are beset by the limitations sin brings to our understanding and to the evaluative and decision-making process, there will be times when a consensus may not be reached. In this situation, it is the husband’s responsibility to exercise his leadership role and make the decision. The wife needs to submit to that decision (unless the decision is clearly and intrinsically evil).

An essential part of the creation mandate or ordinance was for man to be the leader of the family. This divine division of duties cannot be changed without dire consequences, some of which I am detailing herein. Man and woman are different by divine design. They work in harmony to raise children, but the woman’s main responsibility is nurturing her family as evidenced in God’s directive in Gen. 3:16: “In sorrow though shalt bring forth children . . . .” An obvious biological role of nurturer is seen in the processes of gestation, birth and lactation. The father’s role is to protect, provide, and lead his family. This is clear in the command God gave him to have dominion over the earth, including his family (Gen. 1:26-28).

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Overseers, Elders and Pastors

The family model seen in the Godhead and built into His creation also has important implications for church leadership. Scripture is explicit regarding the criteria for church leaders. The signal passage where these criteria are laid out for elders is found in 1 Timothy 3:2-7:

2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Paul makes clear the relationship between an elder’s proven ability to be a good father in his own home and his fitness for being a father of the church. This is an important safeguard for the church. If a man is a good father and husband, he would very likely fulfill the other necessary characteristics of an elder. Elders are to conduct the oversight of the flock of Christ in the same way they are to oversee and lead their family flock—with love, self-sacrificing devotion, gentleness, discipline, and self-control, wholly given over to a life of holy service to God. In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul continues to illustrate the theme of family, vis-à-vis the church:

14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

The Christian family, like the church, is composed of a body of believers. The father is given the responsibility to lead his wife in family worship, and to lead his children as follows: “Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). As Vern
Poythress comments: “In sum, the theme of God’s household runs through 1 Timothy and is validly used as the basis for inferences about Christian behavior, not merely as an incidental illustration.”

The Church Family or “Flock”

Paul, in Romans 8:16-17, clarifies the “childhood” of all believers thusly: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” There are some who teach the “universal fatherhood” of God, since He created all people, but Paul, in this text, clearly alludes only to believers as the true children of God. This is corroborated in several other texts, such as Galatians 3:26: “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith,” and John 1:12-13: “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”

God’s rightful children, His flock, are all adopted, and the idea of living as adopted children in the family of the church conveys many rich connotations. Spurgeon eloquently posited, “No man has any right to be a son of God. If we are born into his family it is a miracle of mercy. It is one of the ever-blessed exhibitions of the infinite love of God which

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without any cause in us, has set itself upon us. If thou art this day an heir of heaven, remember, man, thou wast once the slave of hell.”

In the same way that the Bible lists the criteria, roles, and responsibilities of pastors and elders, it does likewise for the members of the church. We have seen what the criterion for membership in God’s church is—true faith in Christ. As to the responsibilities of members, the first is submission. The elders are worthy of honor and submission as recognized by God. Those in submission to them are to do as they are instructed in Hebrews 13:17: “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you” (NIV). The writer of Hebrews is plainly exhorting the flock to submit joyfully and not begrudgingly. How much more enjoyable would pastoral work be if this were the case consistently!

Scripture also instructs members of the flock in how to treat each other, in specific detail. Although we are equal in our “elect” and saved status before God, we are to recognize differences in age and gender in our dealings with one another here on earth.

This is succinctly discussed by Paul in 1 Timothy 5:1-2: “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.” Paul here is merely expanding on the fact that a healthy church should operate as a healthy family. This happens only when a good

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pastor has done a good job as his church’s spiritual father, following the example of God the Father.
CHAPTER 5

BIBLICAL MODELS OF SPIRITUAL FATHERS

Adam

Often referred to as the father of the human race, Adam is only mentioned twenty-one times in nineteen verses of the entire Bible. The Hebrew, אָדָם (ʿā·ḏām), is first mentioned (in reference to the man and not mankind) in Genesis 2:20: “The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found helper fit for him.” The word Adam, in Hebrew, is interpreted as man or mankind.

To better understand Adam’s role as head of the family, it is helpful to know Eve’s God-ordained role. According to Genesis 2:18, Eve’s role was to be Adam’s “helper.” The Hebrew word for Eve, חַוָּה (ḥǎw·wāh), is defined as: “helper, assistant, i.e., one who assists and serves another with what is needed.” Eve, then, was created both to love Adam and help him in their work of fulfilling the creation ordinances. Adam and Eve were given dominion over the entire earth, Adam to be the head, husband and father, and Eve to be his helper, wife, and mother to his children.

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1 John Barry, ed., Lexham Bible Dictionary, (Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2012), s.v. אָדָם

2 Barry, s.v. חַוָּה

He failed, however, both in his obedience to God and in the leadership of his family.

In fact, he led his family’s rebellion against God (Adam would have failed to meet the New Testament requirements for eldership!).

The remedy for Adam’s failure is explained in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49:

45 Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

Believers, therefore bear two images or natures—one of Adam and one of God. This gives us a great perspective on the roles of parents. Fathers and mothers are able to give mortal life through procreation but Christ alone is a life-giving spirit.

Calvin explains this:

Now as to his calling Christ the last Adam, the reason is this, that as the human race was created in the first man, so it is renewed in Christ. I shall express it again, and more distinctly: All men were created in the first man, because, whatever God designed to give to all, he conferred upon that one man, so that the condition of mankind was settled in his person. He by his fall ruined himself and those that were his, because he drew them all, along with himself, into the same ruin: Christ came to restore our nature from ruin, and raise it up to a better condition than ever. They are then, as it were, two sources, or two roots of the human race. Hence it not without good reason, that the one is called the first man, and the other the last.4

Understanding this doctrine is essential to understanding the limitations of earthly fathers. The most important role a father has, is to lead his children to know and believe in the “second Adam,” the “life-giving spirit” which is Jesus Christ.

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Abraham

Abraham is mentioned 234 times in 220 verses in Scripture, over ten times more than Adam, which underscores the patriarch’s importance. The Hebrew, עליך הָאֲבָרָהָם (ʾāḇrāhām), literally means “exalted father.” Thus “Abraham” is a synonym for father, a name God gave him with divine purpose. God made an everlasting covenant with him in Genesis 14:4: “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.”

Abraham did become the father of many nations. Jews and Muslims trace their physical heritage to him directly, as the father of both Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham then, was biologically a father of many nations, and it is likely that his descendants number in the hundreds of millions.

In the spiritual sense, Abraham is a father to many more. Paul interestingly describes Abraham as “the father of us all” in Romans 4:16. Paul was explaining to his readers that the Jews’ hereditary relationship to Abraham, although meaningful, was not sufficient in itself, to merit salvation or a right standing with God. Rather, it was Abraham’s faith that made him exemplary, as Paul explains in Romans 4:1-3, “1 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’”

Abraham’s faith established his sonship with the Father, and served as an example to us all that only by faith are we able to gain the inheritance of salvation and become sons of Abraham, as it were. A.W. Pink further explains how Abraham is the father of believers:

How is Abraham the "father" of us all? In what sense is he such? Not, of course, literally, by procreation, but figuratively, by typification. Just as naturally the son inherits certain traits from his father, just as there is a resemblance between them, just as Adam “begat a son in his own likeness, after his image” (Gen. 5:3), so there is a resemblance and likeness between Abraham and those who are “Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). In a word, Abraham is to be regarded as a sample believer.6

In the same way that Abraham was a “sample” or example of belief and faith in God being the means of salvation, he was also a sample father. Christian fathers are to lead their children to faith in God as the Spirit led Abraham.

Abraham was unique in Scripture in that he was a type of the heavenly Father and of Christ. As a type of the Father he desired children, and offered his firstborn son (by Sarah) as a sacrifice for sin. As a type of Christ, “This is seen in him leaving his father’s house at the call of God; in that he is the one in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed; in that he is the kinsman-redeemer of Israel; in that he is the holder of headship of the nations.”7

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6Arthur Walkington Pink, "Abraham: The Father of Us All," (Chicago: Moody, 1950), 198-201, original emphasis.

7Ibid., 198-201.
Abraham, more than any other figure in the Old Testament, served as an example of what a good father and “father of the flock” should be like. He was a flawed and sinful man, but God gave us his example to apply to our understanding of fatherhood, both biological and spiritual. Jesus juxtaposed this biological and spiritual fatherhood symbol of Abraham when speaking to the Jewish leaders in John 8:39-40: “They answered him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.’” What did Abraham do? We are told in Galatians 3:6-7: “just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness?’ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.”

Clearly, the sonship of believers is ultimately a relationship with God the Father. But, if Abraham is an example for us, then fathers of the flock—pastors—also serve to bring their spiritual children, their congregations, into closer sonship relationships with God. An obvious question is why Scripture even talks about believers being children of Abraham. Why did God not choose rather to say children of God? I believe it is because He loves us so much that He wants pastors and elders to experience the same joy and reward that He receives when a man or woman becomes a son or daughter of His through faith. For the same reason, he gives spiritual gifts to us so that we can experience, in a small way, His joy in the work that He does.
Paul

We know much about Paul from the New Testament. He was born a Roman citizen from the city of Tarsus, in what is now Turkey. His family was descended from the tribe of Benjamin. He was educated at the feet of the Pharisee rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) and became a zealous and respected Pharisee, fluent in Hebrew and Greek. The historical record gives some evidence of Paul’s family relationships. Insofar as we know, he was childless and unmarried, but in Acts 23:16 we are told of his nephew: “Now the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.”

So why do I include Paul as an example of a father here? Because that is how he described himself repeatedly in Scripture.8

- 1 Corinthians 4:14-17: “14 I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 16 I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 17 That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.”

- 1 Corinthians 15-16: “15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 16 I urge you, then, be imitators of me.”

- 2 Corinthians 6:13: “In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.”

- Galatians 4:19: “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”

8 Italics added in all four citations.
•1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12: “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. . . . For you know how, like a father with his children, 12 we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

Although Paul does not instruct his readers to call him father, because there is only one true Father, he does speak to them as would a father. When he wrote, “I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel,” he makes it clear that he is a surrogate father regarding spiritual things.

Paul, after all, had led many of these recipients of his letters to Christ—they were very much his spiritual children. In the same way that children are to respect and imitate their natural parents, Paul was encouraging believers to respect him and imitate him, not because of his personal qualities, but because he was imitating Christ and constantly pointing them to the Gospel. When he wrote, “I became your father,” he meant that they could trust that he would lead them, nourish them, and disciple them in spiritual matters, since his goal for them was the same as his personal goal, to attain, “the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14) Paul was saying that, as children of God through spiritual regeneration, we are born again into the family of God. The men and women in our lives who were instrumental in bringing us to saving faith, are truly spiritual mothers and fathers to us. That is why Paul used language like this, “I have begotten you through the Gospel.” (1 Corinthians 4:15)

Paul speaks above about having “countless” guides, but not many fathers in the faith. We have many people who are instrumental in shaping our character: teachers, tutors,
coaches, and others. There are few who actually fill the role of spiritual father or pastor in our lives. Paul was speaking and writing with the authority and love of a spiritual father. Elders and pastors may or may not have led people to Christ, as did Paul, but they have same responsibility in their roles as spiritual fathers as he did.

Paul communicated that there are clear similarities between earthly and heavenly families. The radical part of this analogy is that he was speaking about the nature of the church family, which is eternal—the earthly one is not. This is what we call the visible church. Relationships based on Jesus are forever. One gets this feel from Paul’s writing—his intimacy, compassion, and tender concern for his spiritual children are examples of Christ’s, and a model for church fathers-of-the-flock for the rest of time.

John

John and his brother James were the first disciples called by Jesus. By comparing Matthew 27:56, “among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee,” with Mark 15:40, “There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome,” it could be inferred that Salome was their mother and as sons of the sister of Mary (the mother of Jesus), they would have been his cousins. As with Paul, there is no scriptural reference to John having had a wife or children.

Nevertheless, John uses paternal language in his letters much as Paul did. The following verses, with my italics added, are illustrative of this point:

• 1 John 2:1: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.”
• 1 John 2:12: “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake.”

• 1 John 2:13: “I write to you, children, because you know the Father.”

• 1 John 3:1: “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.”

• 1 John 3:7: “Little children, let no one deceive you.”

• 1 John 5:2: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.”

• 3 John 4: “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”

These verses express John’s spiritual fatherhood. When he writes, “my children,” he clearly personalizes and makes possessive his relationship with his readers, much like any good father would. He also identifies himself, along with all believers, as being a child of God. This maintains the truth that while we have only one heavenly Father, we might have several spiritual fathers here on earth.

In 1 John 5, John is emphatic about the way children of God can identify good spiritual fathers: they love God and obey His commandments. Since the second Great Commandment deals with loving others, spiritual fathers must manifest these traits in order to engender love themselves, point the way to Christ, and have credibility in the gospel.
Peter

Although we have fewer of Peter’s writings to examine, he clearly follows the same custom of addressing his disciples as his spiritual children. In 1 Peter 5:13 he writes, “She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son.”

Conclusion

The greatest church fathers all addressed the members of their flocks as spiritual sons and daughters, and stating both directly and by implication, their own roles as spiritual fathers. Sometimes churches, as corporate entities, are addressed in the same way, reinforcing the pastor’s role as church father. The pastor’s role as father is an honor and also a great gift that God has given the Church.

9 Italics added.
CHAPTER 6
QUALITIES OF A GOOD CHURCH FATHER

The qualities of a good church father must necessarily reflect, or mirror the communicable qualities of our heavenly Father. No human can do this perfectly, but a father to the flock should constantly and consistently be aware of his role and continue to improve. Listed below are some of the most important qualities.

In assessing current or prospective pastoral and elder candidates, these qualities should serve the congregation and leadership well as they encourage and evaluate their shepherd-leaders. A father’s job is so multi-faceted it would be hard to list every important quality he needs. Likewise, each father has certain gifts, talents and passions. The qualities below, however, should be evident in all good church fathers.

Authority

The first occurrence of the word authority in the New Testament is found in Matthew 7:29, where the crowds noted that Jesus “was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” The Greek word translated authority is ἐξουσία (exousia)\(^1\), which has a semantic range that includes: to have the authority to rule, to exercise power, or to have jurisdiction over one or more people.

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It is used eighty-six times in eighty verses of the New Testament and refers most often to Jesus’ authority and the authority given to His disciples. This authority included the signs miracles as well as the authority to forgive sins and execute judgment.

The sources of authority for a church father are duplex. First, his authority comes from God, as Paul described in Colossians 2:9-10: “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” Secondly, his authority comes from a local church. Just as Christ called His first disciples, all “called” pastors receive that inward call to ministry. The confirmation of this call is made by a local church body (external call), and in my denomination by the local Presbytery as well. In the PCA, a man approved for licensure receives the following charge from his Presbytery, “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by that authority which He has given to the Church of its edification, we do license you to preach the Gospel. . . .”

In the early church, Paul established the model for distributing pastoral authority through the churches as described in Titus 1:5: “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.” To confirm the authority of elders and pastors, Paul instructed Titus: “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. Remind them to be

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submitive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work.” (Titus 2:15-3:1) Similarly, in 2 Peter 2:10, there is a stern condemnation of those who “despise authority.”

Timothy Witmer\(^3\) makes five important observations regarding the authority of a spiritual father which I will summarize here as follows:

1. All human authority is derived. As mentioned above, the ultimate authority derives from God.

2. The exercise of authority is designed to serve the [well-being] of those under its care. The focus of a pastor, in dealing with his flock, should always be on their spiritual welfare. Regarding the civil authority, Paul writes in Romans 13:4, “he is God’s servant for your good.”

3. This authority is to be directed by God’s Word. The guiding standard for the exercise of all pastoral power and authority is the Bible.

4. All who hold such divinely bestowed authority are ultimately accountable to the One who gave that authority. Church fathers are held accountable to a very high standard, by the ultimate standard-bearer. As such, they should approach their work with humility, steadfast prayer, and a constant sense of their accountability to the Lord.

5. The flock is called to submit to the authority of the elders. They need to be taught and reminded that a healthy church cannot function as such without submission to godly elders.

Because there is a natural tendency for power to be abused, the church is given important safeguards to prevent that, thereby protecting the church. Ray Stedman comments, “A plurality of elders is necessary as a safeguard to the all-too-human tendency to play God over other people. . . . The true authority of elders and other leaders in the church, then, is that of respect, aroused by their own loving and godly example.”

Love

As mentioned, love is a defining attribute of the Godhead and is to be one of pastors, indeed of all believers. As the father should be a model for teaching his children to love God, their mother, and their siblings, so should a father of the flock model love to, with, and for his spiritual children. In reviewing the criteria given for elders in 1 Timothy and Titus, all elders should have, as a central tenet, love for the members of their church. One of the most poignant descriptions of this type of love is found in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8: “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.” The picture painted here is one of a mother’s nurture, care, and affection for her needy, helpless infant. While caring for her infant, a mother rarely rests and is always ready to attend to the various emotional and biological needs of the child. This is the model for the love church fathers should manifest to their flock.

A recent article by a Christian mother and pastor’s wife who has had personal experience raising babies and, in particular, breast-feeding them, is instructive in applying this passage. Hanna Anderson writes:

When Paul describes the gentleness of a nursing mother, he’s not describing a passivity or assumed tenderness; he’s describing a gentleness that comes from a place of deep self-sacrifice, self-giving, and tireless commitment. Nursing an infant requires gutsy, down-in-the-trenches, hour-by-hour dedication. And it is motivated by the depth of love that a mother has for her child.\(^5\)

In a survey by Thom Rainer, he asked a few hundred laypersons to write down what they desired in a pastor. The most common trait that they listed was, “love of congregation.”\(^6\) A representative comment stated: “If we know that our pastor loves us, everything else falls into place. If he doesn’t, nothing else matters.”\(^7\) As we know from Scripture, Christians are known by their love, or lack thereof. It is even more paramount for the fathers of a church to manifest love for each member. Without it, a church cannot be “healthy.”

**Trustworthiness**

This is another relational and communicable attribute of God. In Hebrews 2:13, we read: “I will put my trust in him,” speaking of God. Spiritual fathers, as surrogates or representatives of God to their flocks, must engender trust, or they will not be credible or effective in ministry. Children learn to trust their parents over time. Although authority is something given to a pastor by God and the Church, trust is largely earned through time

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\(^7\) Ibid.
spent with the flock. Trust is closely related to faith. As a member of the church gets to know his pastor better, his store of trust is multiplied.

At a national level, trust in pastors has dropped in recent years; prior to that, trust in the clergy had been pretty stable. In 1977 it was sixty-one percent and in 1985 sixty-seven percent, but in 2012 it had dropped to fifty-two percent. Professionals in seven professions were trusted more highly than pastors. Consequently, pastors must work hard to reestablish trust if they are going to change the world for Christ. Alexander Strauch explains why this is the case:

An elder must be an example of Christian living that others will want to follow. Peter reminds the Asian elders "to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3b). If a man is not a godly model for others to follow, he cannot be an elder even if he is a good teacher and manager. The greatest way to inspire and influence people for God is through personal example. Character and deeds, not official position or title, is what really influences people for eternity. Today men and women crave authentic examples of true Christianity in action. Who can better provide the week-by-week, long-term examples of family life, business life, and church life than a local-church elder? That is why it is so important that an elder, as a living imitator of Christ, shepherd God’s flock in God’s way.  

Knowledge

Since a criteria for a pastor is to be able to exposit and teach the Word, it is implied that he must be knowledgeable regarding it. My denomination has a very detailed curriculum of seminary instruction that must be completed before one can be ordained to serve in pastoral ministry. Some denominations have more stringent academic requirements, others less, but most good churches require a pastoral candidate to have the ability to show

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proficiency in his knowledge of Scripture, systematic theology, church history, the biblical languages, etc.

For a pastor, knowledge is the handmaiden to teaching and preaching. Knowledge without such practical application “puffs up” (1 Cor. 8:1). Even more important than the knowledge acquired in seminary is the first-hand knowledge of God that is only gotten through faith, working in one’s personal prayer and study of the Word. The best spiritual fathers, like Paul, have formal theological education (whether via distance education or education in residence) balanced with practical pastoral knowledge that is only gained through experience in ministry.

**Discernment**

I believe that this is one of the most important, though often underemphasized or misunderstood skills or gifts of a spiritual father. Discernment is discussed by Paul in Philippians 1:9-10: “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.” Interestingly, Paul ties knowledge to discernment. The connection becomes clearer when we consider that the noun translated discernment, the Greek αἴσθησις (aisthēsis), is defined as “to have capacity to understand, to have insight, to have sapient knowledge.” This is the only place in Scripture where the word is used.

We are given further insight as to how discernment is gained in Hebrews 5:14: “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by

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constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” Here the word “discernment” is from the Greek αἰσθητήριον (aisthētērion), a word related to αἰσθησίς meaning, “capacity to understand, faculty for distinguishing the real nature of something.”

The following is an illustrative quote by A.W. Tozer:

“Among the gifts of the Spirit scarcely one is of greater practical usefulness than the gift of discernment. This gift should be highly valued and frankly sought as being almost indispensable in these critical times. This gift will enable us to distinguish the chaff from the wheat and to divide the manifestations of the flesh from the operations of the Spirit.”

Humility

Several years ago, Bill Hybels popularized the use of the “three C’s” (Character, Competence, and Chemistry) as a metric for hiring or approving ministry leadership candidates. Quoting Hybels: “The selection process for building Kingdom dream teams is based on ‘three C’s’: “first character, then competence, and finally chemistry . . . Character, Competence, Chemistry.”

They are used in my own church. Character deals with the ethos or personal integrity of a man. Competence has to do with a person’s skill-set and ability to perform a given set of functions. Chemistry is related to one’s relational skills and ability to work well as the member of a team.

Humility is an essential component of both character and chemistry, yet it is probably one of the most difficult qualities to measure or evaluate. We usually think of good

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10 Ibid., s.v. “αἰσθησίς.”


12 Bill Hybels, Courageous Leadership, (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Zondervan, 2002), 81.
fathers as being strong, decisive, loving, protective, and good providers, but humility is often left out of the mix.

In many ways, humility is the keystone to which all of the other character qualities are anchored. This is because pride is such a great temptation for men in positions of power and is a causative factor in nearly all sin. That is why Peter issued this caution to elders:

1So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:1-3)

Humility is both the preventative medicine and antidote for pride. A pastor needs to constantly ask God for the type of humility that Christ exemplified as a servant to His disciples. As Andrew Murray suggests:

We may find professors and ministers, evangelists and workers, missionaries and teachers, in whom the gifts of the Spirit are many and manifest, lacking in the grace of humility. There are those who are the channels of blessing to multitudes, but of whom—when the testing time comes, or closer fellowship gives fuller knowledge—it is only too painfully manifest that the abiding characteristic of the grace of humility is scarcely to be seen. All this tends to confirm the lesson that humility is one of the chief and the highest graces. It is one of the most difficult to attain, and one to which our first and greatest efforts ought to be directed.13

What then are helpful ways to evaluate humility as an attribute? At a recent Catalyst conference, pastor and leadership consultant Ron Edmondson14 listed several traits of an humble pastor:

• Readily admits mistakes
• Forgives easily.

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• Celebrates the success of others louder than personal success
• Is willing to risk trusting others.
• Maintains an attitude of thankfulness.
• Recognizes his limitations.
• Readily shares authority with others.
• Invites feedback and constructive criticism.

Such traits should all be components of the “character” and “chemistry” of good fathers of the flock. It is easy to see how an humble father engenders trust and love. Having a servant’s heart requires, first and foremost, humility.
CHAPTER 7

The State of Fatherlessness in Society

The church is, in many ways, a reflection and product of its social and cultural milieu. The history of the New Testament churches is instructive in this regard; the Apostles were continually dealing with the damaging effects and influences of the dominant culture on and in the church. Examples include outright idol worship, sexual perversity and gross immorality, and other culturally accepted practices in largely pagan societies.

I contend that the United States, and perhaps the world, has never witnessed an epidemic of fatherlessness such as we are faced with today. Some of the causes have been mentioned above and undoubtedly relate to the sexual revolution of the 1960’s and 1970’s, but the damage that our society is experiencing as a direct result continues seemingly unabated. Journalist Melanie Phillips sees it as a form of cultural suicide, which has been gradually increasing over the past several generations:

Committed fathers are crucial to their children's emotional development. As a result of the incalculable irresponsibility of our elites, however, fathers have been seen for the past three decades as expendable and disposable.

Lone parenthood stopped being a source of shame and turned instead into a woman's inalienable right. The state has provided more and more inducements to women -- through child benefit, council flats and other welfare provision -- to have children without committed fathers.

This has produced generations of women-only households, where emotionally needy girls so often become hopelessly inadequate mothers who abuse and neglect their own children—who, in turn, perpetuate the destructive pattern.

This is culturally nothing less than suicidal. A society reproduces itself by nurturing and protecting its young. If it abuses and harms its children instead, it will end up abusing and harming itself.
If we lose the ability to care for each other, we will lose any sense of a common humanity and stake in a shared future. That is, indeed, what we are doing. Stable and healthy family life, where children are raised by their mothers and fathers, is the building block of society. It is no coincidence that those primitive societies where fathers happened to be excluded remained primitive or died out altogether.¹

Even secular journalists and social scientists cannot avoid dealing with the brutal reality that fatherlessness emblematizes today’s “state of the family.” Although they do not typically ascribe moral causes, they do picture what happens when society experiences the wide-scale absence of fathers.

It has been shown that infants who have more one-on-one time with their fathers show richer exploratory and social behavior than those infants not exposed to that.² Children who experience a feeling of closeness with their fathers are twice as likely to attend college or obtain stable jobs after high school.³ In sum, children who are connected to their fathers from infancy through adolescence are better prepared to “connect” with the outside world and significantly more likely to experience success from elementary school through high school, college, and into the work force, in addition to largely avoiding the emotional and psychological morbidities that fatherlessness creates.


The unfiltered sociological and epidemiological data from the 2011 U.S. Census and the U.S. Dept. of Justice speaks for itself:

• Nearly twenty-five million children live apart from their biological fathers. This represents thirty-three percent of all children counted. By ethnicity, things get much worse; the percentage in black homes is sixty-four percent, in Hispanic homes, thirty-four percent, and in white homes twenty-five percent. These numbers starkly contrast with the census data from 1960, when only eleven percent of children lived in father-absent homes. This represents a three-fold increase in just over fifty years!

• The same census statistics show that children in father-absent homes are almost four times more likely to be poor.

• Seventy-one percent of pregnant teenagers lack a father.

• Sixty-three percent of youth suicides are from fatherless homes.

• Seventy-one percent of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes.

• Seventy-five percent of adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes.

• Seventy percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions have no father.

One of the best summaries of these data sets was articulated by Cornell University Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner, an expert in developmental psychology:

Controlling for associated factors such as low income, children growing up in [single parent] households are at greater risk for experiencing a variety of behavioral and educational problems, including extremes of hyperactivity or withdrawal; lack of attentiveness in the classroom; difficulty in deferring gratification; impaired academic achievement; school misbehavior; absenteeism; dropping out; involvement in socially alienated peer groups; and, especially, the so-called ‘teenage syndrome’ of behaviors that tend to hang together—smoking, drinking, early and frequent
sexual experience, a cynical attitude to work, adolescent pregnancy, and in the more extreme cases, drugs, suicide, vandalism, violence, and criminal acts.\textsuperscript{4}

The evidence speaks for itself: households without fathers are virtual Petri dishes for social pathologies. This is possibly the greatest social threat facing the very sustainability of civilized, cultured America, and by extension, the American church.

**The State of Fatherlessness in the Church**

It is difficult to find reliable data on the total number or percentage of fatherless children attending church in the United States, but we do have fairly good data on the percentage of divorced families in the church. According to Bradley Wright, a sociologist at the University of Connecticut, about sixty percent of people who identify themselves as Christians but rarely attend church have been divorced. Of those who attend church regularly, nearly thirty-eight percent have been divorced.\textsuperscript{5}

Using divorce as a bellwether for fatherlessness or those suffering from “father-wounds” in the church, forty to sixty percent in the average church have been divorced.\textsuperscript{6} This roughly mirrors the population at large and represents a potentially huge number of churchgoers who have been affected or are being affected by broken homes. We have noted above some of the social ramifications of fatherlessness, and those dysfunctional behaviors are often at play in the church, and are all too frequently unaddressed.


\textsuperscript{5} Bradley R.E. Wright, *Christians Are Hate-Filled Hypocrites...and Other Lies You've Been Told* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 2010), 133.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
The best place to look for the fatherless in church is among the divorced, but particularly single mothers. Because of the stigma associated with being a single mother (we no longer use the term “unwed” in order to minimize that stigma), many, unfortunately, do not attend church due to shame, embarrassment, or guilt. In the main, there is a sense that they just don’t fit in an environment where divorce is viewed as something sinful, and where single moms head a small minority of the families in the church. Too frequently, they do not see other single moms in church with whom they can identify.

Disproportionately, these are low-income women who are recipients of some form of government assistance. Therefore, a major obstacle to reaching the fatherless is attracting single mothers to the church. According to Jennifer Maggio, the author of *The Church and the Single Mom*, and a nationally recognized expert on the subject, approximately sixty-seven percent of single moms do not attend church.\(^7\) It is clear that the fatherless among us, to a large extent, seldom if ever darken the doors of the church. It is as if we are in a near free fall toward a society that no longer values or encourages fathering as a necessary social institution. This appears to be the endgame for those whose ideal society is gender-neutral or sexually egalitarian with respect to roles.

One clear need that fatherless families bring into the church is for good male role-models, which many of them have never had. Psychological research has shown that fathers fulfill critical roles in rearing children that mothers do not.

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These include heterosexual role development. Fathers provide models of what normal behavior between men and women should be like, which cannot take place when there is just a mother in the home. The father-mother interplay is essential as a model for heterosexual relationships. Fathers are generally more adept at preparing their children to understand their sexual identities and to function in society within those sexual roles. Largely, this is because men are more active, and engage in play and physical activities more that mothers who are, by nature, more expressive. Boys who do not have fathers are much more likely to be seen by peers as effeminate, which is detrimental to their normal development as males.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into greater detail on the importance of having a father to provide children with healthy sexual identities and all that entails. The range of maladaptive and dysfunctional behaviors that result from father-absence is nearly endless. Psychological and sociological studies, which are generally amoral in their approach, have repeatedly documented the need for unique father and mother roles within the family unit.

The modern church, however, must contend with the fact that fatherless homes are now not only accepted as normal in society, but are encouraged by a welfare state that

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9 Ibid.


endorses a “unisex” approach to parenting and often penalizes marriage by subsidizing single mothers. Unisex, or “androgynous” parenting is supported by certain controversial studies such as one conducted by sociologists Timothy Biblarz and Judith Stacey:

“Current claims that children need both a mother and father are spurious because they attribute to the gender of parents benefits that correlate primarily with the number and marital status of a child’s parents since infancy. At this point no research supports the widely held conviction that the gender of parents matters for child well-being.”12

Today’s pastors, more than ever, must be prepared and equipped to help their churches provide what society at large is in desperate need of—father models.

The Need for Elders to be Spiritual Fathers in the Church

God ordained a system of church leadership and governance we call eldership. Vocational pastors, although they provide unique roles as fathers of the flock, cannot carry out the fathering imperative alone. Every elder is given the responsibility and should have the desire to be a father or father-model to parishioners. Shepherding and fathering are intertwined in the elder’s role. Elders should play a key role in being reflectors of the fatherhood of God. This is a sober and time consuming responsibility, but one which is increasingly important. Dr. Ken Canfield comments:

So how can churches help fathers to become living reflections of the fatherhood of God? First, there is a need for modeling, where men see examples of father closeness. Spiritual leaders in the faith community (pastors, elders, deacons and teachers) can be front-line examples and models to men who have been abandoned by their natural fathers. When a group of Christian men were asked, “Who has most influenced your development as a man and impacted you the most between ages

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twenty-one and forty years?” the most common responses fell under the category of leaders in their church.\textsuperscript{13}

In practical terms, the elders of each church must come up with the best way(s) in which they can serve as father-models, supplementing the work of the pastor. This is an intimate form of shepherding, as opposed to the public, corporate and business responsibilities of the elders which tend to crowd out the fathering portion of their jobs. Too often, the bulk of the elders’ work is spent on “board of directors” issues to the neglect of the fathering and “pasturing” work discussed here.

Again, we are living in an age in which fatherless homes are more prevalent that at any time in modern history, except perhaps during times of world or civil wars. Reverend Witmer recommends that elders can be most effective by focusing on fathers in the church, “According to the Bible, each family has an under shepherd as well. This under shepherd is the head of the family who has been given the responsibility to shepherd their little ‘flocks’ in the name of Christ. Imagine the benefit to our churches if dads were equipped to provide every aspect of shepherding care.”\textsuperscript{14} He uses Puritan Richard Baxter’s advice as a model in this regard:

Ask the master of the family whether he prays with them, and reads the Scriptures, or what he doth? Labor to convince such as neglect this, of their sin; and if you have opportunity, pray with them before you go, and give them and example of what you would have them do. Perhaps, too, it might be well to get a promise from them, that they will make conscience of their duty of the future.\textsuperscript{15}


This model is excellent, but it is unlikely that Baxter could possibly have imagined the ungodly state of modern society and the church when he was writing in the 1700’s, when it was commonplace for the father to be present in the home and for Christian values to predominate in society as a whole. Today, elders must be more creative and indeed, spend more time in the task of serving as father-models given the numbers of the fatherless in the modern church.

Evangelism

In order to reach the lost in our communities, we need to know where they are. I live in a part of the country (Phoenix) that only has fourteen percent of its population in church on an average Sunday, according to researcher Dave Olson of the American Church Research Project.16 That is much lower than the national attendance average of nineteen percent17, and fairly typical for the western U.S., except Utah, where the Mormon church skews the numbers.

My thesis is that the fatherless will be attracted to churches that are intentional about reaching out to and welcoming single mothers heading households of fatherless children, and churches that provide nurturing church environments where exceptional father-models are highly visible and available, beginning with the pastor. I believe that the opportunities to serve our communities in this way provide both a ministry of evangelism and mercy.


17 Ibid.
The Greek word for orphan, ὀρφανός (orphanos) can mean either without parents or fatherless.\textsuperscript{18} We have relatively high rates of adoption in the U.S., related to our wealth and the high number of infertile couples wishing to adopt. On the other hand, the number of orphans or children who have present mothers, and have been abandoned by their fathers is staggering and increasing yearly. If we really practiced what James 1:27 says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” we would re-prioritize the way we carry out both our mercy and evangelism ministries.

The Female Pastor, a True Oxymoron

My thesis that pastors and elders serve in a primary role as fathers of the flock precludes a woman serving as either pastor or elder, since “father” is a divinely appointed male model. Thus females are excluded from this role by definition and design, and the notion of a female pastor is a true oxymoron—a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction.

Notwithstanding that argument, the movement in American churches to ordain female pastors has become commonplace. It actually began with the Quakers in the early 1800’s.\textsuperscript{19} Among mainstream denominations, the Reformed Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America began ordaining female elders in the 1970s, and the practice been adopted by American Baptists, Assemblies of God, Disciples of Christ,


Church of God-Anderson, Church of the Brethren, Nazarenes, Episcopalians, Free
Methodists, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., United Methodist Church, and the Wesleyan
Church.  

The following points provide theological, biological and psychological evidence why
women should not and cannot serve effectively as fathers of the flock, as prescribed in
Scripture:

1. Theological Reasons Females Cannot be Pastors

Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that God is a Father, as I have noted, and gives us
the divine model for leadership that is seen in the Trinity, at Creation, in the biblical model
of the nuclear family, and in the family model of the church. Nowhere in Scripture, is any
reference made to the office of elder being held by anyone except males. The qualifications
for male-only pastors and elders are laid out without equivocation in the New Testament
passages dealing with elder selection. In Titus 1, Paul issues a command to appoint elders
who meet these clearly male criteria: “the husband of one wife,” “his children are
believers,” “He must not be arrogant,” and “He must hold firm to the trustworthy word”
(Titus 1:5–7).

In the same context, Paul addresses the roles of both older and younger women as
distinct from those of men. In Titus 2:3–5, he writes:

3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to
much wine. They are to teach what is good, 4 and so train the young women to love
their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and
submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

In Scripture, there is congruity between the nuclear family and the church family.

20 Patricia M. Y. Chang, Adair T. Lummis, and Barbara Brown Zikmund, “Clergy Women: An Uphill
Both institutions are served by male heads. In the examples from Titus above, the roles of elders are unambiguously designed for actual fathers or father-figures (for that minority of male elders or elder candidates who are unmarried) like Paul. The biblical model of the church family is central to our understanding of the way in which the church body is to work—one unit with many members, each with unique gifts. Church members are adopted “sons and daughters” (2 Cor. 6:18). The biblical record is clear that in the church there are not only sons and daughters but mothers and fathers, and that the role of spiritual fathers, as in the home, is intentionally designed for males, not females.

Bacchiocchi, Lee, and Fagal list four scriptural reasons21 to indicate the restriction of pastors and elders to men only: 1) The initial group of elders were the apostles themselves, all of whom were men. They instituted the practice of appointing male elders in the churches. 2) The qualification for an elder to manage his household well, as has been mentioned, could never be applied to a woman. 3) The structure of the passage found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, listing the qualifications of elders immediately follows the prohibition of women teaching as leaders in the church in 2:11-14: “11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” The authors comment that, “The collocation of this prohibition immediately before the qualifications for eldership suggests that the two are closely related.”22 4) The function of the elder was to exercise

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22 Ibid.
fatherly authority in his congregation, over and for both men and women (1 Tim. 5:17, 3:4-5).

Men and women, from creation, were intended by God to serve each other in different but complementary ways. Their relationship to one another is not one of superiority or inferiority, but is complementary. Appointing a woman to a role as a spiritual father in the church would be akin to giving her a role of fatherhood in her family. This is nowhere found in the biblical record, and is thus unscriptural. Paul emphasizes the subordinate role of women in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: “women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” This is clearly analogous to the model of Christ and the church (the Bride of Christ), and to the model of husband and wife.

2. Biological and Psychological Reasons Why Women Should not be Pastors

Having shown that men and women are different by divine design, and have unique and complementary roles in the family and in the church, it would be further enlightening to show specific biological and psychological reasons why women cannot effectively act in the role of fathers of the flock.

A pastor’s role in the church is one of high visibility. Sunday after Sunday, his members give him nearly an hour of solitary attention as he stands at the head of the church and preaches, administers the sacraments, and generally leads the congregation in corporate worship. There are few vocations in public life where the speaker is viewed and assessed weekly by a group ranging from children to seniors, including singles and families and men
and women in a racial and ethnically diverse setting. It is little wonder why Theodore Roosevelt’s term, “bully pulpit” has become part of the American lexicon. Teachers typically present to age and/or gender-specific groups. No so with pastors. Their literally elevated position in the pulpit or at the podium gives them maximum attention and visibility.

The preaching pastor’s unique and special role on Sundays, which sets him apart from lay elders, gives him the distinction of doing double duty, as outlined in 1 Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes of the “primacy of preaching” and states that, “the primary task of the Church and of the Christian minister is the preaching of the Word of God.”

Given the importance and high visibility of that “golden hour” on Sunday mornings, the pastor has a singular opportunity to be seen by the whole congregation as the father of the flock. This thesis argues that the pastor’s role as father is the divinely intended medium by which Lloyd-Jones’ “primary task of the church”—the preaching of the Word of God—is to be performed. The solitary nature of this performance is one in which both biology and psychology play important roles.

A major biological reason has to do with visual stimulation. A number of peer-reviewed scientific studies have shown that men respond to visual stimulation in different ways than women. Psychologists at Emory University showed how men and women process visual sexual stimuli differently, focusing on the activation of the amygdala, the emotion

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control center of the brain. They used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to show that by having a group of male and female participants view several types of sexual and social interaction for 30 minutes:

The fMRI scans revealed significantly higher levels of activation in the amygdala, which controls emotion and motivation, in the brains of the male subjects compared to the females, despite the fact that both males and females expressed similar subjective assessments of their levels of arousal after viewing the images. ‘If males and females found the pictures equally arousing, you would assume they would have similar patterns of brain activation,’ said Hamann. 'But we discovered the male brain seems to process visual sexual cues differently.'

This study clearly showed, using advanced imaging techniques, that men are stimulated or aroused visually to a much greater extent than women. Ergo, male parishioners would, by their nature as men, be more likely to be distracted and possibly sexually aroused by viewing a female pastor.

A more recent study done at the University of Bristol focused on the eye movements of male and female control groups:

Researchers examined where men and women looked while viewing still images from films and pieces of art. They found that while women made fewer eye movements than men, those they did make were longer and to more varied locations. These differences were largest when viewing images of people. With photos of heterosexual couples, both men and women preferred looking at the female figure rather than the male one. However, this preference was even stronger for women. While men were only interested in the faces of the two figures, women's eyes were also drawn to the rest of the bodies -- in particular that of the female figure.

The ramifications of this study for female pastors would include the fact that the female form draws more attention from both genders than does the male. Female pastors would

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present a greater likelihood of being visually distracting to men, and possibly even more so to women! This could effectively diminish both the impact of the sermon but also the ability for the congregants to be drawn to the father-figure of the pastor when their eyes and brains are focused on “the female figure.”

The impact and distraction of visual stimulation was recently corroborated regarding the legal profession. Trial attorneys, like pastors, are highly visible and have the opportunity as rhetoricians to spend hours in front of their observers in a courtroom. Circuit Judge Royce Taylor, of Rutherford County, Tennessee, recently reprimanded female attorneys in his circuit for wearing sexually suggestive clothes to work. He wrote them a letter, from which I include the following excerpts:

"All you have to do is go to church and see what people used to wear—hats, gloves, long dresses—have long been done away with," he said. “I have advised some women attorneys that a jacket with sleeves below the elbow is appropriate or a professional dress equivalent,” Taylor added. "Your personal appearance in court is a reflection upon the entire legal profession."26

Similarly, theology needs to trump biology when we are dealing with ecclesiological matters, and there is no getting around the fact that women, because of their physically more complex and stimulating forms, cannot be perceived as father figures, at home or in church.

Training and Assessing Church Fathers

If the role of spiritual father is central to the work of the pastor, then men interested in ministry and churches looking for pastors should have good assessment tools. The Scriptural gifts and traits of pastors have been listed at some length already.

My experience in ministry, admittedly anecdotal, has been that the best spiritual fathers have been men who themselves had good fathers. These leaders were men of faith, trustworthy, manly, loved their wives greatly, were kind and patient with their children, morally strong and good protectors and providers.

Understanding the pastor’s role as the father of the flock raises some practical considerations that could be added in the assessment or self-assessment of men being considered for or considering the pastorate. Not surprisingly, many of these directly relate to the candidate’s relationship with his own father. I will list those relationship areas which I believe are essential for the examination of men who aspire to be fathers of the flock.

1. Did the candidate experience fatherlessness himself? Does he harbor any lingering resentment? Did he manifest any of the dysfunctional behaviors listed above, and if so, how were those resolved? We know that absent fathers contribute to serious problems in children and adolescents such as excessive anger in the home, a distorted view of women, poor academic achievement, sexual inappropriateness, higher rates of substance abuse, depression and anxiety disorders. The candidate should undergo personality testing and particularly skilled interviewing if he did not have a father.

2. Did the candidate experience “father-wounds”? This unofficial term is used by many mental health professionals in identifying a common occurrence in children in our culture, where divorce is at epidemic proportions. Father-wounds frequently result when the father is verbally or physically abusive, emotionally detached or distant, selfish in the extreme, prone to rage or anger, or indifferent or antagonistic to the

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faith. These wounds often create difficulties in adulthood such as anger, weaknesses in confidence, anxiety, and mistrust of others.

3. How well did the candidate connect with his father? Sean Brotherson, David Dollahite and Alan Hawkins explored the concept of “generative fathering” in establishing the connection between children and their fathers. It is a term used: “to describe fathering that responds readily and consistently to a child’s developmental needs over time.” More than manifesting paternal love alone, this “connectedness” has to do with the degree to which the child perceives the love and acceptance of his father. This is analogous to our connectedness to God. It is one thing to know and believe that God loves me, but an entirely different thing for me to feel, experientially, that love, trust and closeness. The ideal pastoral candidate would have experienced deep “connectedness” with both God and his own father. There is a direct link between his paternal-child connectedness and his ability to trust others, be more “emotionally available,” and enjoy stable relationships with adults and children in the church.

4. What was the relationship between the candidate’s parents like? A man learns, to a great extent, how to relate to women and how to treat women by seeing how his father treats his mother. Obviously an absent father cannot model this. Although no marriage is without conflicts, did his father generally treat his mother with love and kindness; did his mother show genuine respect for his father?

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5. How is the candidate’s relationship with his wife characterized? This is a bit tricky but often overlooked in the assessment process. Specifically, how do they resolve conflict, manage finances, and discipline the children (if they have any)? What types of non-work activities do they enjoy alone and together? What type of role model did his wife have for a father? Does the couple have a healthy sex life (the candidate should be able to go into some degree of detail here without betraying private intimacies)?

There are many good personality profiles and inventories available on the market, and the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator is probably used more than others. There have been studies to determine which personality types, using the MBTI, are the most common ones found among pastors.²⁹ (It would be interesting to see a survey of the personality types of pastors who have had long and healthy tenures in ministry.)

It is wise to investigate in depth the degree to which a candidate is likely to be able to be a good spiritual father, or easily grow into that role in the case of a younger man going into vocational ministry. This is not to say that an excellent pastoral candidate might not come from a fatherless home, or have suffered father-wounds—only that those men have a much higher statistical probability of having had dysfunctional personal relationships and mental health issues, as cited previously, and deserve more careful vetting.

If the role of spiritual father is what the church highly values in pastors and elders, it is critical that the assessment of a man’s fitness and readiness for that role is done to excellence. I believe that one of the leading reasons why so many seminary graduates either

“burn out” after a short time in ministry, or decide not to go into pastoral ministry is because they have not been properly assessed, using the guidelines given above.

The Washington Post recently reported that only forty-one percent of graduates with the Master of Divinity degree expect to pursue full-time church ministry. This number is, “down from fifty-two percent in 2001 and from ninety-plus percent a few decades ago, according to the Association of Theological Schools, the country’s largest such group.”30 No doubt many of those leaving ministry did not realize that the job of being a spiritual father to a congregation is a such a demanding and difficult one. Over fifty percent of pastors are so discouraged that they would leave the ministry if they could, but have no other way of providing for their families.31 Helping a prospective pastor realize what it takes to father a church, in addition to fathering his own family, is key to discerning his fitness to the calling of pastor.

What a Well-Fathered Church Should Look Like

There are several hallmarks of a well-fathered church. Pastors and church elders need to educate their congregation as to the spiritual father’s role that they (and particularly the vocational pastor) have committed themselves to serve in. Churches that have never had a pastor whose desire was to serve as its spiritual father have not experienced the benefits which that relationship provides. Any student can recall those teachers, coaches, and other adults who were not only proficient in their coursework and preparation but took a personal


31 David & Dian Noble, Winning the Real Battle at Church (Kansas City, Mo.: BHC Publishing, 2009), 171.
interest in the student as a person, in addition to his/her interest in their academic progress. So it is when one has had a relationship with a spiritual father; it is hard to describe but you know it when you experience it.

An excellent model of a well-fathered church in the Bible was the church at Philippi. Paul brought this group of Gentile converts the gospel and was instrumental in “birthing” them into the faith. In his greeting (Phil. 1:1), Paul referred to himself (and Timothy) as servants of Christ. As an apostle and father to this church, he was a servant to them also. Like a good father, Paul ministered to this church family with a heart of service and love. Verses 7-8 describe Paul’s great affection for this church: “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Similarly, this church reciprocated Paul’s fatherly love by ministering to him when he was under house arrest in Rome. A great lesson is learned here about the relationship between spiritual fathers and their flocks. Paul planted several churches over many years, but of all of those churches, the one which returned his love with the greatest affection was the church at Philippi. Church members, like children, are often rebellious, ungrateful, and unkind to their fathers. Accepting that aspect of being a pastor is an important part of thriving in the job.

Using the familiar role of fathering as a model, the following conditions should prevail in a well-fathered church:

1. **Identification.** Each member of the congregation, including the children, should be able to identify the church fathers. In order to seek fathers out, they need good
name and face recognition. This may be self-evident, but there are too many churches where a significant number of the congregants do not personally know their elders much less understand their roles as spiritual fathers.

2. **Accessibility.** The fathers of the flock must be accessible to their members. Their contact information should be readily available and they should be as accessible as possible after-hours. Some type of an on-call system for pastors and elders would be preferable. Spiritual fathers are needed at the strangest times!

3. **Time.** Pastors and elders need to spend as much personal time with their flock as feasible. They should keep records of each meeting with a member or family and make sure that they do not spend excessive time with the “easy” ones at the expense of the difficult ones. Often the most difficult members need the most fathering. It is important that the members get to know their spiritual fathers in a variety of settings, as they would with any good father. Participation at retreats and church get-togethers offers the members opportunities for this. Similarly, their presence during both times of joy and celebration and especially the difficult times is important. Hospital visitation and spending time with those with both acute and chronic illnesses is what good fathers do.

4. **Role Modeling.** Pastors and elders should be role models for their flock as husbands and parents (if they have wives and children). Particularly for those in the congregation who grew up either with absent fathers or suffered father-wounds, pastors and elders can be models of what healthy husband-wife relationships should be like. By treating his wife with respect, love, affection and consideration, the spiritual father sets a good example for the entire
congregation. The same traits should be evidenced between the fathers of the church and their children. A congregation that witnesses healthy and respectful relationships within the pastor’s or elder’s own family develops more trust and empathy in accepting the fatherly exhortation and encouragement of their leaders.

5. **Discipline.** One of the hardest things any parent or pastor has to do is exercise corrective discipline. It is also a defining quality of a good father. Proverbs 3:11-12 is instructive: “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” And in Prov.15:5, “A fool despises his father’s instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is prudent.” Disciplining a church member can be difficult and bitter. Often there is no good or clear resolution to a proper and well-intentioned disciplinary rebuke or correction. The spiritual father must keep in mind that discipline is not optional and that he is doing it for the sake of the individual and the edification of the church. From Thom Rainier’s survey of the ten things that pastors like least about their jobs, number eight is “confronting people who are sinning.” While pastors and elders know that it is the biblical thing to do, all too often these potential conflict flashpoints do not end well. Fatherly church discipline is a *sine qua non* of a well-fathered church.

6. **Enduring Hardship.** A good spiritual father must take his fair share of criticism if he is to do his job well. This is problematic because so many of those who go

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into ministry in the first place are nurturing types and people pleasers. No wonder that number one on the least favorite list mentioned above is “conflict and complaining church members.”\footnote{Ibid.} The shepherds of God’s flock should learn to take criticism gracefully while maintaining their fatherly demeanor. Spiritual fathers must be strong and able to field complaints and complainers with humor, tact, and kindness. The presence of “healthy conflicts” and their speedy resolution distinguishes well-fathered churches. Paul, again, is a good example, both negatively and positively. His conflict with Barnabas over Mark’s readiness for the mission field was not resolved in the healthiest way. His approach in exhorting Peter for being hypocritical (Gal. 2:11-14) regarding the Jewish customs being forced on the Gentile converts showed a more fatherly approach.

7. **Mentoring.** This is an imperative part of the work of spiritual fathers. Everyone in the church should be able to receive mentoring from the pastor or one of the elders. This is a one-on-one longitudinal relationship that is essential for the development of future leaders. One important sign of a well-fathered church is that church fathers are constantly being multiplied. The story of Paul’s mentorship of Timothy would be an excellent example of this.

8. **Loving Encouragement.** In an environment where the church members are frequently and regularly being encouraged by the pastor and elders, there will be much less discouragement in the church. Discouragement is contagious. Similarly, encouraging one another, especially encouragement from an
acknowledged leader in the church pays rich dividends. A well-fathered church is an encouraging church.

9. **Sound Doctrine.** As discussed previously, the role of a spiritual father is both to ensure that sound doctrine is preached and taught, but also to protect against the near constant efforts by some to introduce false doctrine. There is an ongoing protection of and watchfulness for the truth that pervades a well-fathered church.

10. **Protection.** The weakest and most vulnerable people in the church must be protected and given extra attention. In this sense a healthy church practices good spiritual triage and makes sure that the “walking wounded” are quickly directed to a church father for evaluation.

11. **Gentleness.** Just as Jesus was gentle, church fathers are to be gentle and approachable. A well-fathered church is one where a spirit of gentleness is in evidence, and the congregation is filled with a sense of peace, joy and love.
Beginning with Genesis, it is evident that the role of the father as head of the family is the divinely instituted model, and part of God’s plan for the way that families are intended to function. The Trinity is our first and eternal example of fatherhood in its perfect form. From there, the first human family was given instructions regarding the headship of the father, Adam. In the Old Testament, the patriarchs and priests served as corporate examples of fatherhood. Finally, the institution of the church, Christ’s bride, was established to function within that fatherhood structure. Both families and churches have God-given role relationships in which to operate, and as each member of those families understands and fulfills his or her roles, God honors and blesses them individually, institutionally, and in their surrounding culture.

As the role of fathers in society at large has been diminished and devalued, so has the place and role of the pastor and elders as fathers of the flock. This is a relatively modern phenomenon. Historically, beginning with the New Testament churches, and through nearly two millennia of the church’s history, the pastor’s role as spiritual father was understood and conveyed in practice, if not formalized.

Some of the blame for our current condition, where pastors can “opt out” of their roles as spiritual fathers and serve mainly as “teachers in residence” or paid ministry leaders, must be laid at the foot of our modern seminary curriculum. Too often, pastors have
been taught how to be effective and functional administrators of the institution we call church, but not as the spiritual fathers of the church. This lack of emphasis on the role of spiritual fathers in the ministry has paved the way for women to enter the pastorate in a large number of denominations.

God intended for the pastors and elders to serve not only as the heads of a religious organization but as a flesh and blood representatives of him to his congregation. The church is clearly “the household of God,” as described by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:15. This is the family model of church that Scripture portrays, and every family needs a father. In the same way that the church is a body of believers, the body has a head. Bacchiochi illustrates:

“This understanding of the church as an extended family of believers, led by elders who functioned as spiritual fathers and shepherds explains why women were not appointed as elders/pastors, namely because their role was seen as being that of mothers and not fathers.”¹

Understood properly, the role of the pastor as father is one that helps Christians understand God’s imperative for the functioning of the church. The churches whose pastors and elders are servant-leaders both serving and leading God’s people as a good father would his family, will create a positive transformation in the modern church. The ecclesiastical “ship of state,” so to speak, needs to be righted, and our instructions on how the church is to be led by “fathers in residence” are clear.

¹ Bacchiochi, et al, 168.
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