

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FATHER FIGURE IN THE LIFE OF CHILDREN

## GOLDEN TEXT

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”. (Ephesians 6:4)

## USEFUL PRACTICE

When the divine pattern for parenting is neglected, the consequences are terrible for the Christian family.

## SCRIPTURE READING

**1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22; 8:1-3**

### **1 Samuel 2**

**12** Eli's sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD.

**13** Now it was the practice of the priests that, whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled

**14** and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot. Whatever the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh.

**15** But even before the fat was burned, the priest's servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, “Give the priest some meat to roast; he won't accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.”

**16** If the person said to him, “Let the fat be burned first, and then take whatever you want,” the servant would answer, “No, hand it over now; if you don’t, I’ll take it by force.”

**17** This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD’s sight, for they were treating the LORD’s offering with contempt.

**22** Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

## **1 Samuel 8**

**1** When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel’s leaders.

**2** The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba.

**3** But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

## **LESSON OBJECTIVES**

**I) To present** the concept of fatherhood according to the Bible;

**II) To point out** the types of fatherhood that are harmful to the family;

**III) To emphasize** the importance and value of responsible fatherhood in the spiritual and moral education of children.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In this lesson, we will focus on two families who had trouble raising their children. In Eli's family, his sons Hophni and Phinehas, under their father's negligent conduct, became unholy in the exercise of priesthood. In Samuel's family, his sons Joel and Abijah became avaricious and greedy, having no respect for what they meant to Israel. The lesson will show that fathers are responsible for the good moral and spiritual education of their children, before the local church and educational institutions.

## **I – THE FATHER FIGURE WITHIN THE FAMILY**

**1. The first family.** After the Fall, the first created couple, Adam and Eve, initially had two children, thus forming the first family (Gen 4:1, 2). In the beginning of humanity, the father figure was defined as the leader of the household, responsible for providing food and taking care of the safety of his family. The woman's role was to take care of the children, the house and be her husband's helper. For some priests, the exercise of the priesthood became more important than raising children. Eli and Samuel, despite their unblemished life before God and the people, were careless about their own family, especially about their children.

**2. Lack of authority at home.** The priests Eli and Samuel were men who exercised authority in priestly service, but were careless about authority at home. In the current context, history repeats itself. Many church workers take good care of spiritual things and provide for their families, but fail their responsibilities regarding child rearing. This negative performance has caused children inconsolable disappointments towards their parents. Can you imagine two Israelite priests, who ministered in the Tabernacle, letting their sons become profane and deceitful before the whole congregation of Israel? (1 Sam 2:12; 8:13). Unfortunately, only their fathers did not realize that their children had moral and spiritual problems. The old priests exercised authority throughout Israel, but they did not exercise it at home, because their children deceived them.

**3. The problem with an absent father figure.** In family life, fathers are responsible for the moral and spiritual education of their children. The way children are brought up is revealed in their behavior patterns when they become adults. Experts attest that the presence of the father figure is very important for the development of individuals. It offers a kind of emotional support. In this sense, the absence of the father figure is a serious problem for the family. There are studies that show the impact of father absence on the upbringing of children. The Christian father is a reference of security for them, balance, control of emotions and establishment of priorities for life (1 Tim 3:4). In addition, in general, fathers transmit to their children values regarding kindness, gentleness, correct manner of speaking, among many others. Unfortunately, when this is neglected, the result can be disastrous. In the case of the priests in question, they made no time for their sons who had become rebellious and profane.

## **II - KINDS OF EXTREME FATHERS**

There is no double standard for moral rules within the family. There is only one ethical standard, and Christian ethics guides fathers as to the care they should take in raising their children. There are at least two kinds of fathers that must be avoided and rebuked.

**1. Authoritarian fathers.** An authoritarian father treats his children as if they were neutral elements, without feelings, without memory and without will. Generally, an authoritarian father is the one that only gives orders to their children. This type of imposing authority only knows how to manipulate children and demand forced behavior from them. Children obey out of fear, guilt, remorse, and resentment. The extreme zeal of certain fathers has made them lose their children, who fall away and, unfortunately, some never return to church and, consequently, they walk away from the presence of the Lord. These fathers need to hear and practice the Word of God that says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

**2. Permissive fathers.** When a father does not care about biblical principles and leaves his children free to decide what they want, the outcome will be disastrous. Such parenting is a kind of unbridled tolerance, which induces the child to even imagine that their parents do not love them or care about their emotional and physical needs. Well, a permissive father is the one who understands that the children should have them as a role model, but does not rebuke them when they make mistakes and does not advise them when they are disappointed with more complex situations in life. The wise Solomon warns us: "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, people's hearts are filled with schemes to do wrong" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Both kinds of fathers are negative and harmful to the well-being of the family. The lack of secure, present and responsible parenting produces an unhappy family.

**3. Eli raised sons who became unholy.** The biblical text says: "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial" (1 Samuel 2:12/KJV). The word "Belial" is a bit of an obscure term, but the Hebrew has it in the word *beliya-al*, whose prefix *bel* and its suffix *ya'al* can mean "unprofitable, worthless, useless". It can also mean "perversion or being perverted", and the sons of Eli were perverted and irreverent men, who did not respect the sacred things of the Tabernacle (1 Sam 2:13-17). It is regrettable that a father, who had a special position of God's representation before Israel, became a father negligent about his family.

### III – TWO FAITHFUL FATHERS WHO FAILED THEIR CHILDREN

**1. Neglectful of his sons.** The text of 1 Samuel 2:12/KJV/ says: "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord". Just imagine a man devoted to priestly ministry for more than 40 years, who had a family consisting of at least two sons, who, living with their father in his priestly

work, “knew not the Lord”. In Samuel's case, it was no different; his sons did not have any discipline, they became greedy and profane. When he was confronted with the bad behavior of his sons, who were rejected by the elders of the people, and even though he was highly respected by all, Samuel also felt rejected (1 Sam 8:5, 7). The philosophy of some Christian leaders that the order of things begins with ministry and then comes the family is misguided. The priority of Christian church workers, before ministry, begins with their own home. The apostle Paul emphasized that whoever “desires to be an overseer” must, among other principles, “manage his own family well and see that his children obey him” (1 Tim 3:4). You need to teach discipline to your children, but to do that you need to be present in their lives. There is no family discipline without the presence of fathers.

## **2. The lack of responsibility of Eli and Samuel towards their sons.**

Without these priests exercising authority in their homes, their sons became vulnerable, frail, and prone to the weaknesses of the flesh. God expects church leaders to exercise their leadership at home today. Eli and Samuel absolved themselves of responsibility for their sons. In the same way, in ministry, the worker must mainly be a father who takes care of his own family (1 Tim 5:8). Children of leaders are not supposed to be expected to get punished or benefited because of their family relationship. However, first and foremost, their children are children like any other children.”

## **3. Improper treatment.**

This lesson, inevitably, cannot escape the subject that involves the public relationship of church leaders with their children in the church environment. Children of leaders are not to be expected to get punished or benefited because of their family relationship. There is a natural pressure on pastors' families because of the public nature of their role. However, their children are, first of all, children like other children. They are children, adolescents, young people, and adults, who need pastoral and spiritual care. Unfortunately, when there is no wise treatment towards the workers' children, some problems may arise, because many of them rebel; become disobedient; do not submit to leadership as a way of rejecting such a treatment. The biblical model of proper treatment involves respect and admonition (Eph. 6:1-4).

## **CONCLUSION**

Fathers are exhorted to teach their children by talking to them and guiding them through life. A leader who is aware that his ministry begins at home

will be blessed and reap the fruits of having a family that serves the Lord. Extremes need to be avoided, and children must be rebuked in a loving and careful way. God expects fathers to be present in the upbringing of their children.