

Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,  
on Sunday, June 18, 1995, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

### **PHILIPPIANS 2:12-17**

(An Exposition of this passage of Scripture)

#### **A SNAPSHOT OF A GODLY FATHER**

A Sunday School teacher asked her first-grade class one day: ‘Draw me a picture of God.’ And she walked around and observed. One boy had drawn a beautiful rainbow. Another had drawn something that looked like clouds with a Face that was shining through. Another had drawn a picture of “Superman”! (Isn’t it ironic and tragic that “Superman” lies today in a Charlottesville hospital unable even to breathe without the aid of a respirator.) One little girl was a bit frustrated, and then she said, ‘Teacher, I don’t really know what God looks like. Would it be all right if I just draw a picture of my Daddy because he reminds me of God?’

You know, the best picture of God ought to be a godly father. Perhaps some of you didn’t grow up in that kind of a home. Perhaps some of you suffered abuse and were unfairly treated, and my heart goes out to those of my friends who grew up in that kind of environment.

But what I’d like to do this morning is to look at godly fathers, because wherever your past led you, I hope that God can take your life and make you entirely different from those who should have been your role models. And I believe that when revival comes to America it will come when a generation of godly mothers and fathers is raised up.

A former chaplain at Oral Roberts University, and now pastor of a large congregation here in Arlington, Virginia, the Reverend Robert Stamps is a very likeable and outgoing man. He is short, pudgy, and as bald as a billiard ball. I tell you this to prepare you for ‘The rest of the story’ which he loves to tell. Apparently, some time ago he and his wife went out for dinner one evening, and they had a baby sitter come in to look after their two children. When they returned home, the baby sitter had become so engrossed in a television program that she forgot about the two little ones. And when they opened the front door, their little boy, Peter Andrew, who was four years old, ran to meet them, and he stood there with his father’s electric shaver in his hand and three strips down his own head where he had harvested hair with the razor! His Dad looked at him and said, “Peter, haven’t I told you never to touch that electric razor?” And he picked Peter up and was about to spank him when the little boy said, “But Daddy, wait till you see little sister!” And they went back and found the two-year-old daughter sitting on the floor with a big smile on her face and not a hair on her head! Then the father got really angry and he said, “Son, I’ll teach you a lesson you’ll never forget.” As he started to spank him, Peter started crying and said, “But Daddy, all we were trying to do was to look like *you!*!” (Bald *is* beautiful, isn’t it?)

You know, the greatest compliment that can be paid to any mother or father is to have a child say, “I want to look like you.” And that is an awesome responsibility for any parent. I often wonder if we men ever truly realize how important it is to be a godly father. A recent secular study conducted by a major university about four-year-old children revealed something very

significant. They took a group of four-year olds and gave them seven or eight things to eat or to play with. And they put them in a room and observed them. They discovered that those who were the most selfish and obnoxious, and could not get along with others, were also the ones who had the poorest relationship with their fathers. But the children who were willing to share with others, and could interact and relate well with others, were those who had the best relationship with their fathers. This secular study showed that there is an almost immeasurable influence that a father has on a child at an early age. Dr. Armand Nicholi, a famous psychiatrist who is a member of the faculty of Harvard Medical School, said recently that he has never counseled a homosexual who had had a good relationship with his father. Men, these facts make it all the more important that we raise up godly fathers in our generation.

Let me give you another striking statistic. If both husband and wife go to church together and take their children with them, 85% of those children will continue to go to church when they come of age. If only the mother brings the children to church, only 15% will remain faithful. But if only the *father* brings the children to church, 55% will remain active when they reach maturity. The awesome influence that a man can have on his children! Now don't misunderstand me — godly mothers who pray for their children and bring them to the Lord's house will be honored by the Lord. What would we do without mothers who are faithful to the Lord even when their husbands are not? We have only to think of Monica, St. Augustine's mother, of whom we spoke on Mothers' Day.

Let me take you now to Philippians 2:12-17 to show you a snapshot of a godly father or a godly mother. There are five characteristics that Paul enumerates in these verses to which we all ought to give our undivided attention. You see, I believe that in America today one of our greatest problems is that men have not taken seriously God's ordained purpose for us to give spiritual direction to our own families. And I believe that when God brings men to recognize and accept their awesome responsibilities in this area of life, we're going to see a revival of momentous proportions in our national life. Most of the problems of the world could be solved if men would act as God created us to be — godly fathers.

Now here is Paul's snapshot of such a person.

### **1. In verse 12 we discover that he is a man of CONSISTENCY.**

Paul says, "Therefore, my dear friends..." He has just been writing about Christ and the example of a godly life that Christ has shown us, and now Paul comes to this transitional sentence, and he says, "Therefore. . . — this is the application — "Therefore, just as you were always so careful to follow my instructions when I was there with you, now that I am away you must be even *more* careful to do the good things that result from being saved, obeying God with deep reverence, shrinking back from all that might displease Him." "In other words," says the apostle, "I want you to obey consistently. You are to be obedient to Christ not only when I am present with you but also when I'm not around. It's then that your obedience to God's standard of conduct is all important." So, a godly man is a Christian who is consistent in his obedience at all times.

It's easy to be consistent when we are in the presence of fellow believers, but what do we do, how do we behave, when no one is watching? I had a third-grade teacher by the name of Miss Reynolds. She was a super teacher, and I learned more from her than from almost any other teacher I ever had. And she was tough! She carried a thin bamboo cane with a curled handle, and she would go up and down the aisles as she taught; and if you were slouching in your seat or not paying proper attention, she would give you a crack over the knuckles with that cane that would straighten you up as if you had been shot out of a cannon. Everybody was scared to death of her. And she had no discipline problems in her class. But as soon as she would leave the room, pandemonium would break loose! But we always posted someone at the door to keep watch, and when you heard the words "Here she comes," that meant you had better sit down, shut up, and straighten up!

Let me tell you about a godly man. He's not a person who straightens up *only* when other people are around. But when no one is looking he is the same consistent person. The father of a friend of mine was a Methodist minister in a small town in Alabama. High School football was the town's major sport, and this pastor was often called upon to be the timekeeper at the Friday evening games. On one occasion, when he was just six years old, my friend was on the sidelines with his Dad who held in his hand the stopwatch. The home team was playing its biggest rival. In the last few seconds of the game the home team was behind by three points and had the ball on their opponents' one-yard line. They were out of time outs, and quickly the ball was snapped and handed off to the halfback who dove into the end zone with the winning touchdown. But the referee came over to the timekeeper and said, "Did they snap the ball before time ran out?" It was a matter of only a second or two, and no one would ever have known. And when you're the pastor in a small town, you don't want to court universal unpopularity because of a football game! But that pastor looked at the referee and said, "Sir, the game was over before the ball was snapped." And my friend says that he saw something of integrity and courage in his Dad that night that went far beyond anything he could ever have said from the pulpit.

Fathers, it's what our children see us do when we don't know that they're watching that communicates the most to them concerning what we really are. The first snapshot of a godly father is of a man whose life demonstrates consistency.

## **2. Verse 13 gives us the godly man's CONFESSION of his personal inadequacy to live the life that pleases God.**

Listen to what Paul says: "For it is *God* Who is at work within you, helping you *want* to obey Him, and then helping you *do* what He wants." Let me tell you something, men: I don't care how many good books you read, or how many self-improvement courses you attend; there's not a man in this congregation, including the preacher, who is capable, in his own strength, of being a godly father.

Let me tell you the secret. It's not when *we* do it, but it's when we allow Christ to take control of us, so that He can do His work through us. That's when we experience victorious Christian living. It means putting Christ in the driver's seat and turning over our lives in complete surrender to Him. He can only use us when He has absolute control over us. That's

when He can make us the kind of person He wants us to be. In a word, to be a godly person you must not only accept Christ as your Savior from sin; you must also obey Him as Lord of your life.

Tell me, is there anything in your life that you're holding on to, and that thing is hindering you from making Christ Lord of every part of your life? Is there some habit, some unhallowed friendship, something that's occupying time you should be devoting to the work of the Lord?

In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Have you allowed yourself to be crucified — to die to self and every selfish desire, so that Christ may live in you? There's no other way to become a godly person.

Again in 2 Corinthians 12:10 the apostle says, "When I am weak, then I am strong." He is saying, "It's when I know I can't do it on my own; it's then that I confess that I need Christ's power in my life to make me strong to do what He wants me to do."

Men, without this complete surrender of yourself to Christ, you're not going to be good enough to be the kind of husband and father you need to be. But the greatest desire of God is for you to confess the fact that you can't do it on your own, but that you want Him to occupy the driver's seat. In a word, let go, and let *God*.

### **3. In verse 14 we see the COUNTENANCE of a godly man.**

Now watch this carefully: Paul says, "In everything you do, stay away from complaining and arguing." Do you know the *one* thing that negates the witness of so many of us men? It's that we get up grouchy in the morning. When we're with our families we have a negative attitude, and we grumble about the economy and about taxes and about the kids and about the weather. You name it. If there's anything that will raise up negative children it is to have a negative father.

Think about it, men. Be honest. How do you and I get up in the morning? How do you greet your family? How do you greet the folk you work with every day? I heard about a lady who went to work one morning, and someone said to her, "Did you wake up grouchy this morning?" And she said, "No, I just let him sleep!" You know, it's so easy to develop a grumbling, grouchy attitude. Let me give you two good old sayings:

- a. If you growl all day, it's no wonder you're dog tired at night; and
- b. Some people cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go!

Think about the folk you work with. Do they like to be around you? Think about your children. What do we project to them by our countenance? I dare every man here to sit down with your wife and children this afternoon and say, "How do you look at me? Are you glad when I'm around? Do I build you up and encourage you? What's my countenance like?"

### **4. Verse 15 speaks of our CONDUCT.**

Paul says, “You are to live clean, innocent lives as children of God in a dark world full of people who are crooked and stubborn. Shine out among them like beacon lights, holding out to them the Word of Life.”

You remember the chorus we love to sing with the children —

“This little light of mine,  
I’m goin’ a let it shine...

Homes in America today need godly fathers who will let a light shine for what is right and decent and good, and what is positive about the Christian faith.

You go down to the ocean and look out over the water. You don’t see a noise-house; you see a lighthouse. When ships come along at night, they look for the light. You know what’s wrong with America? We have too much noise and not enough light. And most young people are not interested in the words that we’re saying as much as they are the light that we let shine. It’s a powerful thing to simply let our light shine for Christ!

How about our conduct? I heard just this past week about a Little League umpire who went over to talk to one of the 12-year-old players and said to him, “Son, there’s something you’ve got to understand about our league. One thing we’re not going to tolerate is temper tantrums. We’re not going to tolerate hollering at the umpires, and we’re certainly not going to tolerate profanity. Do you understand that?” He said, “Yes, Sir.” And the umpire said to him, “Do you think you could explain that to your Dad?”

What do our children see in our conduct? What do they perceive us to be by the way we act? “Let your light shine.

## **5. Verse 17 speaks about CONVICTION.**

Paul says, “Even if my lifeblood is to be poured out — if I am to die for you — even then I will be glad and will share my joy with each of you.” Paul’s conviction was that he had been put on this earth so that his life might be given sacrificially in service for others.

Young people today need to see mothers and fathers who are investing their lives in service. When was the last time your girl or boy went with you some place on an errand of mercy? — to a nursing home to visit some lonely old person and to see *you* serve some of God’s hurting people?

Jesus said, “Even I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give My life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Do you know what the conviction of a godly father is? It is this: “I came into the world, not to win accolades, or even to make a pot of gold. I came to give my utmost in service for others, including my family and my church.” How often do our children see us doing that?

A snapshot of a godly father: one who serves; one who is consistent; one who confesses that he cannot live the Christian life in his own strength; one whose countenance is positive, whose conduct is pure, and whose commitment and convictions are fashioned and molded by the example of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Rufus Jones, the famous Quaker scholar and preacher, had a little boy who fell ill. In the hospital one day he had some of his buddies gathered around his bed. He was eleven years old, and while they were with him, his father was standing in the corridor outside the room, and he heard their conversation. They were asking each other: “Who do you want to be like when you grow up?” And they came to Dr. Jones’ son who was lying in the bed. This little boy said without any hesitation: “When I grow up, I want to be just like my Dad.” The rest of them didn’t know it, but he had a terminal illness, and he died just a short time later. Rufus Jones said years later that the most powerful incentive in his life every day when he had to make a decision was to think: “That little boy wanted to be just like me.”

Let me ask you, Dad — what if your children are just like you? Will they grow up to be godly fathers and godly mothers? Will you provide for them the kind of light by which they can become the light of others?

So, we’ve seen a snapshot of a godly father, and it’s the kind of Dad I know God wants to raise up in our generation.

**AMEN.**