

Genesis 30:25-34

A Father's Duty to Provide

When shall I provide for mine own house also? – v. 30

Our text reveals to us that Jacob had developed a very strong paternal instinct. He sensed the primary obligation that every father senses (or should sense) which is the obligation to provide for his household. His concern for his family shows a contrasting maturity to his earlier days when he cunningly tricked his brother out of his birthright and later robbed him of his blessing. The image that one gets of Jacob in the earlier chapters of the narrative from Genesis is that he was a cunning and carefree mama's boy.

He wasn't particularly masculine or aggressive especially when compared to his brother, Esau. He was undoubtedly the type of child that knew how to put forth the image to his parents that he was subject to them but who could nevertheless behave very subtly when he was out of their view. Children like this quite often get away with much more than their siblings. It's not hard to envision the home of Jacob's parents, Isaac and Rebecca, as being a home where Esau was constantly punished and Jacob was constantly praised. And only Jacob and Esau would know the inequity of the situation.

And when the time came that Jacob had to flee from his home for fear of his brother's wrath the narrative seems to at least imply that it wasn't until that time that Jacob developed any real spiritual interests. It's in chp. 28 that the Lord appears to him in a dream and conveys to him the covenant promises that had been conveyed to Abraham and Isaac. And in v. 20 of that chapter we read of Jacob *that he vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God.*

In the chapter we've read from this morning (chp. 30) we find the account of Jacob's household being multiplied greatly. It is certainly not an ideal picture that we're given in the narrative. It has never been God's design for man to have more than one wife, the way Jacob had. Nor do I take it to be God's design that maidservants were to be surrogate mothers. The narrative enables us to see the tension that existed in Jacob's household through the rivalry of his wives. It does not appear to be a very harmonious picture at all. When all is said and done, however – the once cunning and carefree mama's boy now finds himself being the head of a very large household.

And this in turn stirs within him a sense of responsibility toward his wives and his children. He shows a certain maturity in our text that he doesn't show earlier. Quite often it is the addition of children to a marriage that so compels the father to sense the seriousness and solemnity of the responsibility that becomes his portion. He certainly ought to sense that responsibility if he doesn't. The temporal as well as the spiritual care of immortal souls is given to him by God. From a human perspective one might argue that the degree to which he takes seriously his role as a father will have an impact on the eternal destiny of his children. Your children, you have heard it said, are lent to you by the Lord that you

may teach by precept and by example that God is very great and that our need of Christ for salvation is very real.

And so the question that is in our text raised by Jacob and put to his father 'n law, Laban, is also a question that can and should be put to every father:

When Shall I Provide for Mine Own House Also?

What I would like to do today is to analyze this text by noting from it: The nature of the duty that's called for by the text and The Challenge presented in meeting that duty.

I. The Nature of this Duty to Provide

When Jacob left his parents, he left with little or nothing. He didn't bring great wealth with him or large herds. He basically showed up on the doorstep of Laban, as it were, with nothing. The narrative further indicates that Laban didn't have all that much either. Look at what v. 30 says – this is Jacob speaking to his father 'n law – *For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude.*

Such had been the blessing of God upon Jacob's labors that he was able to make his father 'n law rich. The time was upon Jacob, however, to launch out on his own and to take care of his own family. I think the truth of Genesis 2:24 is stamped instinctively on the hearts of men where it says *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

Jacob had, of course, left his father and mother and now it was time for him to leave his father 'n law also. He was able and willing now to provide for his own and the thing I want you to see from the text is that the nature of a father's duty is to provide the material substance for his family. It's for that reason that he's known as the bread-winner of the family. He's the one who primarily provides the food, the clothing, the shelter etc. He's the one that keeps the lights turned on and the water running and the air conditioner or furnace – whatever the case may be. He keeps the cars in running order. He's responsible for making sure the bills are paid and that his family is secure.

All of these things, of course, require great time and effort. I dare say that most of a father's time is spent in order to provide the various things that I've just described. In many – even most cases – especially where the father is the exclusive breadwinner – he is out of the house early in the morning and will not return until late in the evening. I remember my days in the printing industry how dependent I was on overtime. Forty hours a week just wouldn't cut it – I needed at least 50 even more if I could get them.

We certainly don't suffer in this church the thing that was apparent in the church at Thessalonica where you could find those that for whatever reason were too lazy to work. And so we find the Apostle Paul writing in 2Thess. 3:10-12: *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are*

busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

I believe that one of the things that accompanies the changes that are wrought in the life of a saved sinner is a transformed work ethic. The Christian has come to know and appreciate that his work can be his service to his Savior. He demonstrates a good testimony through honesty, integrity, and effort. He isn't simply motivated by the desire to make money – he possesses a higher aim in his work. He aims to lead others to think highly of Christ and to come to Christ. He also aims, of course, to meet his responsibilities to his family and so he exerts himself with God's help and for God's glory.

When it comes to this part of the duty of dads I am glad to be able to thank God for industrious fathers. As a Pastor – I have no concerns that any in our congregation are lacking in this respect. I would not take this situation for granted, however. Among the things I pray for when I engage in my pastoral duty to pray for the heads of the homes of our congregation is that the Lord will continue to give strength and that He'll prosper our men in their labors and that He also may see fit to prosper the places where our men work for the sake of His servants who work in these various places – so that they may bring glory to Christ and be enabled to provide for their families.

So we have this aspect of the duty of fathers – the duty to provide the material things for their wives and children. And while I have no real concerns in this particular aspect of the duty of dads – let me add here that this is not the only thing that fathers are called on to provide for their families. They are called on to provide spiritually for their families also.

They bear a spiritual responsibility to their wives and children that is at least as important indeed arguably more important than their material responsibility. I'm struck by the text in Isa 38:19 which reads: *The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I [do] this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.*

- It is the fathers that are addressed by Paul in Eph. 6:4 where Paul writes: *And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*
- It is the example of Abraham that's given to us in Gen. 18:19 where we find God's testimony about Abraham: *For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD.*

And while I have no particular pastoral concerns about the way our dads provide for their families materially – I must confess that I am concerned and am quite sure that our fathers face the very real temptation of treating that particular aspect of their duty as if it was the entire substance of their duty. It is not. And to the degree dads treat it as if it was – to that same degree dads are being negligent in their duty to provide for their homes. It will not do, you see, to have your children fed and clothed and sheltered so that they may in the end be condemned to hell because they were either not adequately taught or because their teaching was accompanied by so much hypocrisy and love of the world that they learned to despise rather than embrace the religion of their parents.

It's important, therefore, that fathers recognize the entirety of their duty. They are called on to provide and not merely to provide materially but to provide materially and spiritually for the well being of their family. Let me press the issue even further by noting next:

II. The Challenge This Duty Poses

I'm sure this point could call for much more than the treatment I'm going to give it as just a point in a sermon. But let me at least highlight one thing in particular that I see as a challenge that fathers face when it comes to providing for their homes. I can state it in a single word – distraction. Father's face the challenge of distraction.

In the portion we've read from Gen. 30 it's plain to see that in Jacob's case there was the challenge of distraction – and this distraction was a major one. Basically all of Jacob's time and effort was going toward his father 'n law. He was the major contributor to making Laban rich. The narrative makes it plain that Jacob had entered into a kind of employee to employer relationship with Laban and he had been such a good employee that Laban did not want to let him go – so much so that he was willing to allow Jacob great leverage in negotiating if only Jacob would continue with him. *Appoint me thy wages* Laban says in v. 28 *and I will give it.*

It certainly makes for a good testimony when an employee becomes valuable to his employer. It makes for an even better testimony when the employer is able to see the hand of God behind his valued employee. Note what Laban says back in v. 27 – *And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favor in thine eyes, tarry; for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake.*

This ought to be the goal of every Christian employee – to be able to convey to his boss – whether it be the foreman, or the manager, or the owner of the company – ideally it should be the goal to convey to every one above him as well as every one beneath him not to mention every one around him that it is the Lord who blesses and who prospers. May our labors be backed by our lives and our words to such a degree that Laban's confession and experience becomes the confession and experience of those we work with.

That part is well and good – but the challenge comes in not allowing your energy and ambition, however highly it's thought of, to be a distraction to a father providing for his own home. I think many of you know how the rationale works. You work long – you work hard – you do all that's expected of you and more. But in the mean time things are going untended at home – especially spiritual things. Your spouse does the best she can – she's very busy too and she wishes that the head of the home would take the lead in spiritual things. He is supposed to. He knows that and she knows that. There's no dispute about what the scripture teaches in that regard. *The head of every man is Christ* Paul writes in 1Cor. 11:3 *and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.*

The very practice of headcovering in worship which we observe in this church is designed to be the symbolic way in which we acknowledge this divinely ordained structure. And if the wife, under the strain of her duties, meekly suggests to her husband

that he really needs to think about taking up this part of his duty to provide for the spiritual well being of his family – what would you say would be the common reply?

His reply is that he's the breadwinner. He's doing all in his power to provide for the material needs of his family. It takes money to put food on the table, he may remind his wife – and clothing is expensive and there are bills to be paid. And so he excuses himself from a vital aspect of his duty by appealing to the other aspect of his duty which is, to be sure, a legitimate aspect of his duty also.

The point I'm now trying to press, however, is that if he's not careful, one aspect of his duty can become a distraction to the other part of his duty – which, as I say, is equally if not more important than the other. This is the challenge of his duty to provide – the challenge of being sure that he doesn't skimp on his spiritual responsibilities. He must make sure that he doesn't flatter himself into thinking he's meeting his responsibility if in fact one part of his responsibility has become a distraction to the other part of his responsibility.

I remember from my days in the printing industry that the man who was the most brilliant when it came to electronic prepress work was also a man that was devoted to his family. The man wasn't even a Christian but he was a devoted family man, nevertheless. Indeed – I'm afraid, in some respects, he would put many Christian fathers to shame. Now if you know anything about the printing industry then you know that this industry operates in what may be called the emergency mode all the time. Every job is an emergency. Deadlines have to be met or the world stops turning – that's the mindset. And because this particular man was so brilliant in his knowledge of desktop publishing, he was called on constantly to come in early or to stay late and to come in Saturdays and even Sundays if they could get him.

The thing I found so impressive about this man is that he always held his ground when it came to the priorities of his family. He might come in on a Saturday but if his son had a ball game at 1:00 in the afternoon he would not miss it – world stopping emergencies notwithstanding. And you know something? His assigned priority to his family never cost him the respect of anyone. Oh it might irritate a foreman or a sales rep on occasion but not to the point that anyone really blamed him for being devoted to his family. He escaped the temptation that many Christian fathers are overtaken by – which is the temptation to make an idol out of their work. It's a wonderful thing if a father is so blessed of the Lord that he's able to devote himself in his work to something he enjoys. But when the blessing, contrary to his thinking, is actually leading to his failure to provide for his family – then his blessing has become the devil's leverage for stealing his children, threatening his marriage, and ultimately destroying his family.

What, then, does the challenge amount to? I think I can state it very simply by saying that the challenge amounts to fathers taking their spiritual duties seriously. Some men find it difficult to say no to anything that's asked of them by their employers. Some men find it difficult to postpone something that's work related in order to devote themselves to their families. In the short run there doesn't seem to be any immediate consequence to such

negligence. This is how the devil clouds the issue. He blinds fathers to the long term effects of their spiritual negligence by making them think there are no short term ill effects on wives and children. And the longer a father allows himself to fall prey to the devil's delusion – the more he fails to establish any kind of consistency to his spiritual endeavors. May God help you to wake up if I've been describing you. May God clear your head of the devil's fog before it costs you dearly. May the Lord empower us all to rise to the challenge of providing all that we need to provide for our families.

When shall I provide for my family also? – Jacob wanted to know. It's a question that God Himself may be putting to you this morning. *When will you provide for your family – when will you rise to the challenge of meeting your total obligation when it comes to providing?*

Now up to this point I've been describing one aspect of distraction that fathers especially can fall prey to. There's another point of distraction that both father and mothers can fall prey to if they're not careful. And I have to treat this matter very carefully and you need to listen to me very carefully because if you don't you'll come away thinking that I've committed the worse form of heresy that you could imagine.

I've just described the distraction of one aspect of a father's duty being substituted for his entire duty. I would go a step further and set it before you that the family itself can become the source of distraction to a father providing for his home. I know that sounds heretical on the surface of it but if you'll hear me out I think I can demonstrate to you that the challenge a father and a mother faces in this respect is the challenge of maintaining the right focus.

In the context of our narrative concerning Jacob and his family it becomes easy to zoom in on Jacob and to focus on the nature of his duty and the challenges that pertained to his duty as a father so that we forget the broader context of the narrative. What does the broader context of this narrative pertain to? It pertains to the covenant promise that God made with Abraham, that He renewed with Isaac and that He renewed again with Jacob when He appeared to him at Luz which Jacob would then call Bethel (28:19).

There was a purpose, you see, that went beyond Jacob's family and that purpose was for God's covenant of redemption to advance. The Messiah of the world must come. This is why Abraham was called away from his family. This is why Isaac was miraculously born. This is why Jacob was protected and his family multiplied. I think the Apostle Paul best expresses the broader context of our narrative when he writes in Eph. 2:7 *That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus*. Paul emphasizes in Eph. 1 that all things are to the praise of the glory of God's grace.

Now these things seem simple enough and I don't know that anyone would argue with what I've said so far. Where we fail as families, however – where we fail as parents and as fathers is when we make our families the grand end in God's purpose – as if to say that God's purpose is riveted on the family in such a way that everything is for the family.

I once heard a panel discussion on a popular family oriented radio program. I'm sure most of you would know this program. It's the program that focuses on the family. I don't recall what the specific topic was in this panel discussion taking place among a panel of preachers and family experts – but I never will forget the remark that was made by one of the members of that panel. He said words to this effect – that God's design throughout the ages was geared to the family to such a degree that everything was of the family and by the family and for the family.

Does that phrase bring anything to your mind? – of the family, by the family, and for the family. How about Romans 11:36? – *For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.*

The reference in that verse is to God – to God and his unsearchable judgments and ways which are past finding out – *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36).*

All things are for the glory of God. All things are to be to the praise of the glory of His grace. As well meaning as this panel member undoubtedly was – he illustrates the point that I'm trying to make that in our efforts to focus on our families and minister to our families and provide for our families – it becomes possible to subtly shift our focus in a way that when you think about it actually becomes dangerous to our families. In other words the potential is very real for making an idol out of the family.

I can't help but wonder if Christ Himself anticipated this very thing when He made the kind of statements that leave many Christians scratching their heads as to what He really meant. Have you ever read Mt 10:37 and wondered about it? *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

That statement may not be as puzzling as the one in Lu 14:26 *If any [man] come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*

Now obviously the Lord Jesus is not teaching us that we should hate our parents or our children. His focus is not so much geared to what our affection should be toward our family members so much as it's geared to the truth that our love for Christ must be supreme.

Mt 22:37-40 *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

What this passage teaches us is that our love for God and for Christ must be supreme and that if we would know the full potential of the blessing that we are to derive through our

family relationships it will only happen when our focus is fixed on that first and great commandment.

In other words – husbands – if you would love your wives the way you should – then you must first love Christ with all your hearts. Parents – if you would be true to your children – if you would do right by them – if you would love them as you ought – if you would minister to them and teach them as you should – then you must first love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength.

Your failure to maintain the right focus will in the end only harm your family. And I can't help but wonder how many families have suffered because their focus wasn't right. Some families have mistakenly thought that what they need is a church that offers more programs for their children. Other parents have swung completely the other way and have concluded that church programs are the very reason that their families suffer and that things aren't going right and their children's spiritual interests seem to be so slight if they're detectable at all. Some say they need more and bigger and better – others say they need to get away from church and especially from church programs completely.

I don't think in either case the problem has been properly analyzed and the solution reached. The problem you see is that our focus has shifted. I believe this is largely true right across this nation. The focus is on church – or the focus is on evangelism – or the focus is on the family – or the focus is on Christian duty. There's a place for each of these things but if any of these things becomes subordinate to what our primary focus must be then they all fail.

What's missing? I think Christians across America are asking that question – what's missing? And I know that in our own denomination one of the things we've had to face is the look of perplexity or astonishment or unbelief when we tell folks – the thing that's missing is Christ. That seems so simple that it couldn't possibly be right – especially when it's largely assumed by all that the focus has been on Christ when in fact the focus has been on so many legitimate but peripheral things that are outside of Christ.

And when the focus shifts from Christ then it isn't long before Christians become like automobiles that are running with no oil. They become sluggish – effort becomes forced and eventually they burn out. Christ, you see, provides the fire of devotion that drives the Christian. The love of Christ becomes the motivation. When that love becomes more than a mere dogma that we affirm because the Holy Spirit stamps the reality of it on our hearts then husbands become better husbands that love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Wives become more submissive wives because they quite naturally become more Christ-like when the love of Christ fills and thrills their hearts. And children become real Christians – they begin to demonstrate that the things that have been sown in their hearts have been internalized.

The challenge, then, is on establishing and maintaining the right focus. Now what does this mean in terms of fathers providing for their own homes? It means quite simply that fathers need to learn of Christ for themselves – and when I say *learn of Christ* I don't

mean merely that they indulge in more theological volumes. I love what Laban says in v. 27 *I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake. We must learn of Christ through the experience of Christ.*

And how does that happen? It happens when we utilize the means of grace that are designed to draw us to Christ. It happens when you spend time in the word and your focus is on Christ. It happens when you meet corporately with other believers in the worship of Christ. It doesn't happen automatically – but it does happen in answer to prayer – which is why we pray – *Lord make the means of grace effectual in our hearts and in the hearts of our children. Lord bless the preaching of your word and spare us from merely going through external motions of worship and living for Christ. Let us enter more fully in the experience of Christ – let us know in greater measure the length and breadth and depth and height of His love.*

Only when their focus is right will fathers truly be providing for their homes. Only when their own experience of Christ is rich will they be able to lead their families into the unsearchable riches of Christ. And when their experience of Christ is rich then their children will see what children need to see – that Christ is real and the gospel is true and God is very great.

And so, fathers, you have a great duty to perform. Don't deceive yourselves into thinking that you're performing your duty merely by being the breadwinner in your home. Your duty is much more far reaching than that. Don't allow yourselves to be distracted by the notion that a part of your duty can be substituted for your entire duty. And don't allow yourselves to be distracted from Christ. Things that may be innocent enough and even laudable become destructive if they lure our focus away from Christ.

May God Himself, then, stamp His word on our hearts and make us all what we should be to the honor of His name and the praise of the glory of His grace.