

# 2014

## SYNOD THEME: FATHERHOOD, Eph.6:4

Fatherhood has its root from the word father. Father is a male parent. The sentence 'The child is father to the man', means one's childhood decides the way in which one will develop in later years. Father is used as plural i.e. ancestor(s). It connotes the sense of a founder or first leader, i.e. Fathers of the church, Christian writers of the first century. It connotes the idea of priest, especially one belonging to a religious order; head of a monastic house.

The title is used in personifications i.e. Father Christmas. Hence, fatherhood is a state of being a father, fatherland, one's native country. Father also connotes the sense of being originator of an idea or plan, e.t.c. It is admitting oneself to be the father or author of a child, book, e.t.c. It is fixing the paternity of (a child), the authorship of or responsibility for something – (Reference: The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English by A.S. Hornby, E.V. Gatenby and H. Wakefield second Edition, London, Oxford University Press 1963).

**God's Fatherhood:** We may first deal with the development in the conception of God's fatherhood. As contrasted with the Old Testament, the New Testament emphasizes the universal fatherhood and love of God. The previous ages had scarcely risen above a conception of God as Father of Israel, and in a special sense of Messiah (Ps.2:7): they had thought of God only as ruling the Gentiles and bringing them into subjection. Our Lord, taught, on the other hand, that God is Father of all and loving to all: He is kind even 'toward the unthankful and evil' (Luke 6:35, cf. Matt.5:45). Jesus therefore used the name 'Father' more frequently than any other. Yet he Himself bears to the Father a unique relationship; the Voice at the Baptism and at the Transfiguration would otherwise have no meaning (Mark 1:11, 9:7 '*...and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased". And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him"*', and Mt. Lk.). Jesus never speaks to His disciples of the Father as 'our Father': He calls Him absolutely 'the Father' (seldom in Synoptics, Mt. 11:27, 24:36 (RV) 28:19 [see 8], Mk.13:32, Lk.10:22, passim in Jn.), or 'my Father' (very frequently in all the Gospels, also in Rev. 2:27 – 35), or else 'my Father and your Father' (Jn.20:17). The use of 'his Father' in Mk.8:38 and Mt. Lk., is similar. This unique relationship is the point of the saying that God sent His only begotten Son to save the world (Jn.3:16f, 1 Jn.4:9) – a saying which shows also the universal fatherhood of God, for salvation is offered to all men (so Jn.12:22). The passage Mt.11:27 (- Lk. 10:22) '*All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him*', is important as being 'among the earliest materials made use of by the Evangelists,' and as containing 'the whole of the Christology of the Fourth Gospel'. It marks the unique relation in which Jesus stands to the Father, - We have, then, in the New Testament three senses in which God is Father. (a) He is the father of Jesus Christ. (b) he is the father of all His creatures (cf. Ac 17:28, Ja 1:17t., He 12:9), and of Gentiles as well as of Jews; Mk.7:27 '*And he said to her, "Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs"*' implies that, though, the Jews were to be fed first, the Gentiles were also to be fed. He is the Father of all the Jews, as well as of the disciples of Jesus; the words 'One is your Father' were spoken to the multitudes also (Mt.23:1,9). (c) But in a very special sense He is Father of the disciples, who are taught to pray

'Our Father' (Mt.6:9; in the shorter version of Lk.11:2 RV, 'Father'), and who call on Him as Father (1 P 1:17 RV). The meaning of the doctrine of the universal fatherhood is that God is love (1 Jn 4:8), and that He manifests his love by sending His Son into the world to save it.

**The Fatherhood of God:** Christianity inherited this doctrine from the Old Testament. Yet, it was fully revealed to us only by our Lord, for the Jews had hardly got beyond the truth that God was the Father of Israel. The Apostle develops this truth. God is the Father of Jesus (2 Cor.1:3, Eph.1:3 e.t.c.), who is 'the Son of God' (Gal.2:20, Rom.1:4, 2 Cor.1:19, Eph.4:13; cf. 1 Thes.1:10) – His 'own Son' (i.e. partaker of His nature), whom He did not spare (Rom.8:3, 32, passages which recall both Mk.1:11 and Jn.3:16). – In a special sense, He is the father of all Christians, who are His sons by adoption (Rom.8:15ff, Gal.3:25, 4:5f, Eph.1:5 e.t.c.). St. Paul never confuses the relation of the father to the Son with that of the Father to mankind, but keeps the distinction of Jn.20:17 ('my Father and your Father').

The Lord's prayer which Jesus taught his disciples (Matt.6:9-13, Luke 11:2-4) is affirmation that God is our Father. Jesus further said that as father, God cares for us and for our daily needs. In Jesus' words to His disciples while teaching them to be wary of worries, He said, "*Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them*".

We Christians claim that God is good, all the time. It points to the fact that our belief about God's fatherhood is that God is good, he cares and provides all our needs. Christians believed that Abraham is the father of faith, simply because he obeyed God in all things. In the first instance, he obeyed when God told him to leave his country, his people and his father's household and go to the land which God will show him (Gen.12:1). God promised to make him great and also to make him father of many nations. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote expressly about the faith of Abraham thus:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Abraham's life was filled with faith. At God's commands he left home and went to another land – obeying without question (Gen.12:1ff). He believed the covenant that God made with him (Gen.12:2, 3; 13:14-16; 15:1-6). In obedience to God, Abraham was even willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. The first characteristic of fatherhood discovered in Abraham is absolute faith in God. He trust God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. In the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 6, God directed that parents particularly fathers must teach their children God's commandments. Here in chapter 6:4-11, we have a set pattern that helps us relate the word of God to our daily lives. We are to love

God, think constantly about his commandments, teach his commandments to our children, and live each day by the guidelines in His Word. Here God emphasized the importance of parents' teaching the Bible to their children. The Church and Christian schools cannot be used to escape from this responsibility. The Bible provides so many opportunities for object lessons and practical teaching that it would be a shame to study it one day in a week. Eternal truths are most effectively learned in the loving environment of a God-fearing home.

## **Training / Teaching:**

The Hebrews were extremely successful at making religion an integral part of life. The reason for their success was that religious education was life-oriented not information-oriented. They used the context of daily life to teach about God. The key to teaching your children to love God is stated simply and clearly in these verses. If we want our children to follow God, we must make God part of our everyday experience. We must teach our children diligently to see God in all aspects of life, not just those that are church related. For our nation to survive all the challenges that stare us at face, all fathers must see that religious education is as a MUST in every home.

In Proverbs 22:6, we read "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not turn from it". Training of children is the great responsibility which God has given to fathers. One of the 3 reasons why marriage was constituted as we have it in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of Nigeria on page 210 which reads:

'Marriage is given primarily that husband and wife may comfort and help each other, living faithfully together in need and in plenty, in sorrow and in joy. It is also given, that with delight and tenderness, they may know each other in love, and through the joy of their bodily union, may strengthen the union of their hearts and lives. Lastly, it is given that they may have children and be blessed in caring for them and bringing them up in accordance with God's will, to His praise and glory'.

The 1662 Prayer Book puts it thus: "*First, marriage is ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord and to the praise of his holy name*".

The above shows us the importance of training. Children are heritage of the Lord and the fruits of the womb his reward.(Ps.127:3) It is mandatory for parents, especially fathers to train their children. Paul said to Titus thus:

But as for you, teach what befits sound doctrine. Bid the older men to be temperate, serious, sensible, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited. Likewise urge the younger men to control themselves. Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us. Bid slaves to be submissive to their

masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to be refractory, nor to pilfer, but to show entire and true fidelity, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. (*Titus chapter 2*).

## **Discipline:**

The second aspect of father's responsibility to children is DISCIPLINE. Psalm 94:12 says, "Blessed is the man you discipline, O Lord, and the man you teach from your Law". In the letter to the Hebrews chapter 12:4 – 11, we have these:

In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?— "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives". It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

It is never pleasant to be corrected and disciplined by God, but his discipline is a sign of his deep love for us. When God corrects us we should see it as proof of his love and ask Him what he is trying to teach us. Our God is not only a disciplining parent but also a demanding coach, who pushes us to our limits and requires our lives to be disciplined.

The importance of discipline cannot be overemphasized as indiscipline is the basis of all problems, corruption and crisis in our society, the country and the world today. In Proverbs 23:13 & 14, we read:

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die.  
Punish him with rod and save his soul from death.

In Proverbs 29:17, we read also "Discipline your son, and he will give you peace, he will bring delight to your soul".

Our theme, which is taking from Ephesians 6:4, reads: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord".

This text comes immediately after Paul's admonition to children in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 1 – 3 which reads;

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right, "honour your father and mother" – which is the first commandment with a promise – that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

It is interesting that at verse 4, the Bible singled out the training and instructing of children to fathers alone. This is not unconnected with the custom of the Jews which put the responsibility of training children on the fathers.

## **Christ and His Church:**

When Paul was teaching and giving instruction earlier on marriage he said in Ephesians 5:22-23:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour.

Paul's counsel to the Ephesians and to all Christians is more the Biblical ideal marriage. Marriage, for Paul, is a holy union, a living symbol, a precious relationship that needs tender, self sacrificing care. In verses 25-30, we have these:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one".

Paul denotes twice as many words to telling husbands to love their wives as to telling wives to submit to their husbands.

How should a man love his wife?

- (a) He should be willing to sacrifice everything for her
- (b) He should make her well-being of primary importance
- (c) He should care for her as he cares for his own body.

**The 1662 Prayer Book directs thus:**

*At the day and time appointed for solemnization of Matrimony, the persons to be married shall come into the body of the Church with their friends and neighbours: and there standing together, the Man on the right hand, and the Woman on the left, the Priest shall say:*

DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.

*For the purpose of emphasis, it says:*

'It signifies to us the mystical union that is between Christ and His Church. In the union, Christ is the husband and the head of the family. The church is the wife and the body. In this union, there is:

- (a) No separation
- (b) No argument
- (c) No disagreement
- (d) No quarrel.

The submission of the Church to Christ is natural and automatic. The submission of the Church to Christ is based on the sacrificial, unconditional, and eternal love which Christ has for the Church.

The headship of Christ is recognized by the church because Jesus earned it by purchasing the Church with the effusion of His blood. The following passages testify to the above claim (1 Peter 1:17-19; 1 Cor.6:20; cf Acts 20:28):

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood. cf Acts 20:28.

You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.  
1 Cor. 6:20.

And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 1 Peter 1:17 – 19.

## **Love of Christ as Solution:**

The church does not claim equality with Christ because of CHRIST sacrificial love.

Hence, husbands and fathers ought to love their wife and children sacrificially. It is this sacrificial love which fathers and husbands refuse to give. The refusal is the genesis of all acts of wickedness and brutality experienced in many families in our world. The lack of sacrificial love is the brain behind women and children abuses in our generation.

In creation, God created man and woman in his own image. Gen.1:26-28. In Genesis 2:18, "The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him". In the subsequent verses we note that God created the woman from the ribs He had taken out of the man. So, woman is bone of man's bones and flesh of man's flesh. Gen.2:21 – 23. As such, man is not supposed to terrorize, abuse, oppress or be wicked to his bone of bones as no man hates his own body... The woman was not created to be slave or inferior to the man. The world view of the ancient world of the Greeks, Romans, Jews and Africans which saw women as men's properties is a pollution and corruption of God's own creation. This view is the root cause of problems that pervade the world today.

In the light of the above, all fathers and husbands must love their wives and children sacrificially. It is this kind of love alone that command automatic submission and respect.

It is our submission that all fathers must repent of the ill-treatment of wives and children. In our world today, fathers need repentance. If all fathers and husbands would love sacrificially as Christ did. If all fathers and husbands will demonstrate the love as Christ did on the Cross. If all fathers and husbands believe in what John wrote in 1 John 3:16, which reads:

'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers'.

Then, the most desired peace that has eluded the world for a long time shall be restored. Sanity will be restored to homes, societies, communities and countries and to all the world. The most desired peace in the world rests in the readiness of fathers and husbands to love sacrificially. If husbands and fathers love sacrificially then mothers and wives would submit and respect naturally. The submission and respect shall be automatic and natural. The wickedness and hatred shall never be heard. All vices like corruption, killing for rituals, Boko Haram insurgence, killing of school children, abduction of school girls, kidnapping and armed robbery reports shall depart from pages of our daily newspapers. Hence, I say that the restoration of peace to our world rests on the readiness of fathers to love sacrificially. 'Charity begins at home'.

You will agree with me that no wife needs to fear submitting to a man who treats her in this way. Why did Paul tell wives to submit and husbands to love? Perhaps Christian women who newly accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour and who tasted freedom in Christian life, which is recorded in the Bible e.g. "...if the Son has made you free, you are free indeed" (John 8:36). "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Cor.3:17), found submission difficult. Perhaps Christian men, used to the Roman custom of giving unlimited power to the head of the family were not used to treating their wives with respect and love. Here, Paul gave the head of the family the responsibility to love, love that will command respect of the wives and children.

The love of Christ which has three characteristics namely: (a) Sacrificial love (b) Unconditional love and (c) Eternal love is what Jesus expects from all fathers.

The above is to the effect that all fathers must love like Jesus. The love for wife from the father will naturally flow to children. Col.3:21 says, "Fathers do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged".

## **Parenting:**

The purpose of parental discipline is to help children grow, not to exasperate and provoke them to anger or discouragement. Parenting is not easy – it takes lots of patience to raise children in a loving, Christ-honouring manner. But frustration and anger should not be causes of discipline. Instead, fathers and of course mothers should act in love, treating their children as Jesus treats the people he loves. This is vital to children's development and to their understanding of who Christ is like.

Many fathers today have neglected their God giving roles of training and disciplining of their children. Today we have single parents in large numbers. Some caused by broken homes, some by untimely death of fathers and many because they enter into sexual relationship with teenage partner or irresponsible adults (who are not ready to take responsibility). Research has revealed that a child that lacks paternal care will suffer delinquency. You can now see reasons why our country and the whole world are full of crisis, violence, corruption and wickedness. The result of these acts are the killing of innocent souls caused by insurgence of Boko Haram, killing of innocent souls for rituals, Armed robbery, the recent discovery of forests of horror in Ibadan and other parts of the country are example of these wickedness, all because of the love of money. We read and hear of brutality and wickedness of men to women. In the recent times our ears are filled with what was abomination in the past, for example, fathers preginating daughters. Adults raping young children. Men using young women for rituals to make money.

The reasons behind all these are not far fetched. It is discovered in women and child abuses. Women abuse gave rise to women liberation movements in the 70s. it is the agitation for women's rights. In the West, the women had seized power from men. Marriage vows have been violated. Divorce is in the increase. The home is no longer home. This is one of the causes of same sex marriage and the increase in homosexual and lesbians practices. Hence, the whole world is in confusion.

## **Fathers Responsibilities:**

All fathers must provide unique relationship with children. Fathers must take responsibility of providing home training, discipline and former education for children.

Fathers need to return to God's giving responsibility in order to restore our world to its glory. The responsibility to love as Christ did must be given highest attention. Fathers must first accept the discipline of the Lord by walking the talk of Christian ethics, in order to set example to children. The training and nurture of children in the way of the Lord will become our norms. We must remember that fathers are supposed to be priests in their homes. We have a responsibility to lead our wives and children in the way of the Lord. The adage, "Charity begins at home" remains true to eternity. Therefore, if we want sanity to return to our world, fathers must rise up to the responsibilities of loving, training and disciplining in every home.



Like the Hebrews who become extremely successful at making religion an integral part of life, Christian fathers must make our religion an integral part of our life. This indeed is our way to success.

We, fathers have a good example to emulate in Abraham, who not only took care of the son Isaac, but also ensure that Isaac took a wife from a good family. (Gen.26). At that time it was common practice that a son's wife was chosen by parents.

It is the responsibility of fathers to ensure that children take husbands or wives from good families. It is time for this country to include parenting into the secondary schools curriculum. Our education program should be in tune with the reality of life. In addition, more attention must be focused on entrepreneurship. Fathers and government must ensure that our children are educated in a way that they would be self reliant. We shall then avoid more than a million people applying for a job of 300 people and avoid lost of lives as it happened in the recent immigration employment exercise. Our curriculum must be programmed toward a responsible parenting and towards being self reliant.

A father becomes so recognized because he is married and was blessed with the gifts of children. In order to realize what God meant for marriage, fathers must be loving, caring, responsible and above all, to be rooted and grounded in the word of God.

## **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, I charge all fathers to rise up with high sense of responsibility (under God) to love like God, our Father, to emulate the love of Christ to his Church, which he purchased with the effusion of his precious blood. In love, let us take it as a responsibility to train, teach and discipline our children. We are also to demonstrate to the world that we appreciate discipline and that we live as disciplined fathers and good example for our children to emulate.

The Greeks, the Romans, Jews and African's view of seeing women or wives as properties which gave rise to domineering spirit on fathers must received our condemnation because it was never the intention of God at creation. My charge to all fathers and husbands is summed up in the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians chapter 3 from verse 1 – 25:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, Impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scyth'ian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

**Your Bishop & Friend.**

+ *Olubayo Ilesa.*