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HEIRS APPARENT IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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I have heard it said that God does not have any grandchildren. I do not know where that aphorism came from, but there are many examples corroborating the statement in the scriptures. Nevertheless, in the Bible the eldest natural son by law or tradition received the bulk of his father's estate as well as his position in the community. This was called his birthright. The Bible also clearly says that because of man's unique relationship with God, sons cannot inherit the position of their fathers in the Kingdom unless God awards it to them. They do not have a birthright. All leaders in the Kingdom are chosen by God.

In the modern world, it is sad that some fathers want their sons to follow in their kingdom footsteps. Because I have seen so many children of authentic ministers of the Gospel who rebelled, I thought I would see what the Bible had to say about the sons of godly leaders. When I searched the scriptures, I found two things to be true. First, rarely did a son follow in his anointed father's footsteps. Second, God sovereignly chose certain men whom he anointed to lead his people, but he

rarely chose their children. In most instances, their offspring went in the opposite direction, and chased after other gods.

To cite a few, I remind you that Jacobs's sons sold their brother Joseph into slavery. Eli's sons were supposed to inherit their father's mantle. They, instead, went the other way disobeying God's commandments, and eventually they were killed in battle as punishment. After Eli, Samuel's sons did not follow in their father's footsteps. David's sons were cursed as punishment for David's sin with Bathsheba. They were guilty of rape, murder, and rebellion. Absalom tried to take over the throne of his father, Amnon raped his half-sister, Adonijah also tried to take over the throne that was going to be awarded to Solomon. God used Solomon in a different way than his Father David, but he too went astray worshiping other gods. Solomon was guilty of idolatry, and Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was an idolater like his father, but he was far worse. He led Judah into idolatry, so God separated Israel from Judah, and the Egyptians devastated Judah. Ungodly Rehoboam's son, Asa, was a godly man, and his son Jehoshaphat was godly too. Hezekiah's sons, Manasseh and Amon, did not follow in their father's footsteps. Then one last example is that of godly Josiah who had two sons who did not follow the Lord. These are just a sampling of the careers of sons who followed their fathers as leaders or kings of Israel and Judah, but they illustrate my point.

Today we see the same thing happening in our society. The children of successful men of God are often rebellious, and do not follow in the ways of their fathers. There are many reasons why this happens. First, God does not choose them. Another is that they do not have the talent. Another is that their father neglects his relationship with them because of the demands of his ministry or vocation. My mentor used to say that if a child cannot get attention by being obedient, he would get it by being disobedient. Since many ministers are much more interested in their image in the church and their work than they are in their children's lives, they fail to love their children unconditionally. The child then rebels to get attention.

Another reason is that a parent tries to completely control the child. Dominating and controlling parents will cause rebellion because as the child separates and individuates they increasingly do not want the parents will imposed upon them. The human will does not tolerate the imposition of another will above their own. They respond to an appeal to their will, but not to the imposition of another's will. Children start desiring freedom when they reach nine or more years and will exercise their will increasingly as they grow older.

A common reason children stray is that they are not taught a set of moral beliefs. As a result, they will then adopt the moral beliefs of their peers. These beliefs are not God's, so they misbehave believing that they will not suffer untoward consequences. The world's moral beliefs do not make a favorable difference in

their lives, so both they and their parents suffer. God told the Hebrews to consistently teach their children his commandments from early in life (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Today we rarely teach them either in our homes or in the church.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was not available to any who sought him – only to those who God anointed. Without Him, they lacked power to obey God’s law; therefore, they were unable to resist temptation. It is not surprising, then, that the children of Old Testament kings and prophets went the way of the world.

This is not true in our world today. One can, by a simple confession of faith, gain the power God has for all who choose to believe. Unfortunately, some of today’s believing parents are overzealous in their desire for their children to become Christians. They pressure their children to accept Christ at an early age and the child dutifully recites the “sinner’s prayer.” Sadly, there is no real salvation from their dutiful recitation. When a parent tells me that their child accepted Christ at age 3 to 5 years, I immediately recognize that the child probably accepted their parents’ Jesus, and did not accept their own. I have seen only one person who accepted Christ at age five who lived an anointed life thereafter. All the others accepted Him after nine or ten years of age.

The statement about God not having grandchildren holds true in these instances. In most families where the child is pressured to receive Christ, they also adhere

to fundamentalist strictures of avoiding sin. Children are not allowed to go where there might be temptation. They are warned against sin, and parents try to keep their children away from smoking, drinking, fornicating, dating, card playing, video games, TV, and all kinds of popular music. They are against worldly “fun.” Still, when their children see what is going on in the world, and people seem to be having fun doing it, they will try it themselves as soon as they can escape the domination of their parents.

This is true of many Amish children. They do not want to be dominated by their community for the rest of their lives¹. It is no wonder the children of some Godly parents rebel. It all boils down to their wanting to control their own lives.

There is no doubt many godly parents want their children to follow in their footsteps. This was manifest by three leaders in the Charismatic and Pentecostal world who got together and in a formal ceremony “bestowed their mantles” on their sons. There is evidence that two of their sons were able to some extent faithfully wear their fathers mantles, but they only took over their fathers established ministries. None of them has gained the acclaim their fathers had. One of the sons has failed miserably. I have seen this failure of sons in medicine, too. Many physicians want their sons to follow in their footsteps. When they try, they frequently are not able to achieve at their father’s level, and have rather pedestrian careers. Their father was “too tough an act to follow.”

In the kingdom of God the Lord chooses who he wants to lead and minister to his people. Many of those he chooses are very unlikely candidates. They, like Gideon, do not think they are the person to do it, but God shows them they can lead, and they do very effectively. God knows what is on their hearts, and he chooses them on the basis of what he sees in them and not their external appearance or the world's evaluation. On the other hand, when they are chosen by the world they fail miserably.

It always bothers me when I hear someone has received his or her call from someone other than God. If you challenge their call, though, they will respond by saying that God was using the person as his mouthpiece. They then follow the advice of the person without confirmation by God, and end up failing to glorify God in their ministry. This is one of the reasons why 80% of pastors leave the ministry within five years after graduation from seminary. In many instances, their call was spurious or nonexistent.

I knew a young man whose father was a very successful minister. At first, he decided not to follow in his father's footsteps, and he began to successfully train in another vocation. He did not continue in it, but quit for unspoken reasons; he then went to a very good seminary. His ministry after seminary never got off the ground. He has floundered around trying one Christian vocation after another, never finding satisfaction. I often wondered whether he was trying to get affirmation from his father by going to seminary, responding to a spurious call, or

whether he really had a call from God. If call was from God, he should have had God's anointing and would have been successful.

God has shown how a son can follow in his father's footsteps. Franklin Graham, the son of one of the greatest evangelists of all time, rebelled egregiouslyⁱⁱ. He did however, in time, develop a right relationship with the Lord and established his own ministry. It is enormously successful because God blesses it. He proved he has God's anointing and has been able to take over the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and successfully direct it. He is not doing exactly what his father did. He is doing his **own** thing, and is quite successful in his evangelistic ministry, as well as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving water to the thirsty, and comforting those who mourn. He is obviously doing what God called him to do. God called him – not his father, mother, or the BGEA.

So what conclusions can we draw from the observations above? The first is we should teach God's commandments to our children. Next, God does not have any grandchildren – only children. Third, parents can foster rebellion in their children by trying to completely dominate and control them. Children must find their own God. They do not want their parents' God and cannot have him anyway. Children should not go into their parents' (Christian) vocation in an effort to get their parents' approval and love, and expect to be successful. They should only go if they have a definitive call from God.

If God had wanted my sons to do what I did he would have guided them into medicine, and then into his ministry. None of my three sons chose medicine as a career. I did not encourage them to take it up because I would have been a tough act to follow. Then in addition, they might have resented the fact that I was trying to tell them what they should do. I have a tendency to be dominating and controlling so it would have been likely that they would have rebelled.

I do not remember ever encouraging my children to take up any specific professional pursuit, but I did support them in their choices. I have to say to all parents who read this, what you must do with your children is to love them unconditionally and train them to be responsible. As they grow up, give them as much responsibility as they can handle at their stage of development. When they successfully handle responsibility, give them increasingly more until you can release them into their own care. When this is done, they will usually adopt our faith and the values we adhere to, since they can see they make a favorable difference in our lives and will in theirs too. All five of our children have done this. Then they will also respond to God's call into the vocation he knows they can succeed in.

i. <http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/32095>

ii. <http://www.infoplease.com/biography/var/franklingraham.html>