



A Father's Testament To His Children

Sometimes God speaks to us, or causes us to take a long look at our families, and ourselves at a time of change. That time may be the beginning of a new year or an unexpected jolt, a coming up short.

My sixtieth birthday was such an occasion, when I had a warning of my mortality that a day was coming when my voice will be stilled and I will awaken in my Lord's awesome, joyous presence.

The warning was a tap on the shoulder, not hands around my neck or a shove to the ground. But it caused me to think deep thoughts, consider separations, and ponder my life and work.

I found, "the peace of God that surpasses understanding." Not anxiety, not fear, but the peace of those who know that no force, not even death, can come between us and the love of Christ.

One heavy thought that came to me was what final testament I would leave for our children and others of their generation. This was not a new thought; perhaps in anticipation of my birthday it had been recurrent. But now there was an edge of urgency to it: I could not avoid the evidence that my generation is in the process of turning the game over to a fresh team.

Here are some parts of that testament, slightly changed to speak to the Christian family rather than the individual.

- 1, Read the Bible. Start to read it together at the beginning of your marriage and continue to read it after you have children.
2. There is one "simple" idea in the Christian faith. That is salvation by faith alone in Jesus Christ. Never complicate God's provision.
3. Look for humility in the leaders you choose to follow, the voices you choose to hear. Pride is the most damnable sin: the creature's refusal to acknowledge that he/she is a creature responsible to the Creator. No person can foster the impression that he/she is great and then exalt a great God.



4. Your children are tender plants; they must be trained carefully., but they are also living souls, created in the same divine image as you, who must be increasingly permitted the freedom to make their own decisions.
5. You won't be able to stem the national tide that is running against the family. But determine that your marriage will be inviolable, that it will continue until death separates for a time. Make your home in an oasis of morality and love.
6. Train your children for persecution. I hope it won't come, but prepare them for it. Work toward building tough character that will stand in the evil day. Read the Bible to your children every day, pray with them every day, do other things with them; take walks, play games, read books aloud.
7. I hope that, as parents, you like to read. Guard your own literacy and that of your children. Thinking Christians, able to reason on the basis of God's Word, may become scarce in the future. We understand true doctrine with our minds, not with our feelings.
8. This one may surprise you, but I believe my generation's greatest loss-next to the inviolateness of marriage and the family-has been the sanctity of the Lord's Day.
9. For yourself and for any children God may give you, try to recapture the Lord's Day as a day of rest and deeds of mercy, of retreat from the world; try to turn it into the happiest day of the week.
10. Be tolerant of different styles among Christians, different emphases. Remember that Jesus said, "He who is not against me is for me." Be intolerant of heresy---not of the right to speak: defend that with all your strength---but of accepting it as a viable option. Seek pure doctrine and life in the church, always remembering, "the truth that comes from above is first pure, then peaceable."
11. If you see another person fall, help him up. And withhold judgment, at least that final kind reserved to the Judge of All, that I think Jesus was referring to when He said, "Judge not that ye be not judged."



12. Never forget that human beings are the most important thing in the world to God, and they should therefore be to you. Not just yourself, nor your family, nor other American Christians, but every other human being in the whole world.

Life is short and every treasure on this earth will ultimately fail to satisfy the possessor: even the corner on the silver market or a Nobel or Pulitzer Prize. So live your life, make our choices for God's glory and the good of others. The old Divine's prayer is still a good one, "Oh God, burn eternity into my eyeballs."

When I was young, a couplet was often quoted: "Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last."

It's still true.

Joe Bayly