

## **FATHERHOOD - What it is and what it's for**

**Tony Payne:** Matthias Media, 2004

Tony Payne seeks to rescue the idea of fatherhood and the role of fathers from the considerable undermining and denigration it has suffered in a feminist era. He notes the way our culture serves to separate fathers from their children for most of their waking hours; and that “after the feminist revolution of the past 30 years, no-one’s exactly sure what a ‘father’ is, and what he should do. To suggest that he’s the head of the household, the breadwinner that brings home the bacon, is to invite a stiletto to the instep. But what is he then? Is he any different from a ‘mother’, apart from some variations in plumbing? Do modern families have two mums or two dads? Or have we evolved a new species, the ‘mad’ (or should that be the ‘dum’)?” (P. 11.)

He sets out a biblical view of fatherhood, founded in the Fatherhood of God, a view that could make fathers feel redundant no longer and give a new sense of pride and significance. The opposite danger, much emphasised in anti-man diatribes, and shamefully true in some family situations, is that he then thinks he has a right to dominate and lord it over wife and kids and bash them into submission. Payne, often with a nice touch of self-deprecatory irony and humour, seeks a true biblical understanding and a balanced role for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian dad, and some realistic ways things might work out in practice.

Chapter 7, Why Bother? Begins: “So far we’ve tried to answer the question: What is fatherhood? .. with a threefold answer: a) It is giving life to your children; b) It is lovingly sustaining and nurturing them and c) It is having authority to do b). (P. 93)

Authority is an issue to which Payne gives strong attention. With God as the real model of fatherhood – ‘the mighty life-giver, the loving ruler, the faithful provider’, he says men can avoid the ‘twin traps that have always bedevilled fathers – of self-centred oppressiveness on the one hand or sentimental ineffectiveness on the other.’” But he goes on in this chapter to look at the deeper issue ignored by secular books on fatherhood – and there are plenty these days as our society sees males especially in deep trouble – the question of what life is all about in the first place. And for this he turns to the ‘Preacher Man’, the author of that ancient but extremely up-to-date book Ecclesiastes, where the futility of life ‘under the sun’ is exposed if we fail to remember the Creator.

Payne looks at the challenge of ‘taking our kids with us’ in allegiance to Jesus – ways and means that are normally repaid, but are by no means a guarantee.

Your reviewer is a mother (and a grandmother), not a father. No problem – women in my experience often read books aimed at men – whereas the opposite is much less frequent. I intend now to give the book to my son, a father of a girl (6) and a boy not yet 2. I trust he’ll find it readable and enjoyable even as it challenges him to be a better all-round Christian father and husband.

If Matthias Media intend to reprint, and I expect there could well be sufficient demand to warrant that, I could point out a few minor errors needing remedy – of grammar, spelling and notably calling the author of *Pilgrim’s Progress* Paul instead of John Bunyan. And even though Tony Payne has five kids and the first three are daughters, somehow little came through to me that seemed to have a bearing on the fathering of daughters. I got more of an impression that this was not only a book for guys about a being a guy – fair enough – but that it was also about raising little guys!