

# Imago Dei: The Hearts of Fathers and Children – Malachi 4

## *The Image of God and the Battle for Humanity - #8*

**Introduction** – We have seen that being created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28) is connected to being created as covenantal persons, bound in relationships defined by the One in whose image we have been created. But we have rejected that One in profound ways in our day which led to the rejection of the First Person of the Trinity's name and nature. Our culture has rejected their heavenly Father and all of what it means to need a father. And so, we live in a time of cultural and actual fatherlessness. Fathers have no rights over their unborn children. Fathers are absent in the home in far too much of society. And when they are in the homes, there is a general schizophrenia regarding what they are supposed to do. At the very end of the Old Testament, God promised that He was going to do something to address this exact problem.

**The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord (Malachi 4)** – The prophet declared a day when the wicked would be consumed like stubble in a fire (v1), but that same burning Sun would arise with healing in His wings for those who fear His name (v2). The result would be that the godly would tread down the wicked (v3). Those who fear the Lord then are charged to remember the law of Moses (v4) and promised that Elijah would come before that great and dreadful day of the LORD (v5). This would be the basis of a horizontal repentance of fathers and children (v6).

**The Great and Dreadful Day of Jesus** (Matt 11:11-15) – We are not to push this prophecy out into our future. On the authority of Jesus we are taught that this passage is speaking of His ministry, and Elijah is identified by Jesus as the ministry of John the Baptist who came preaching a message of repentance (Matt 3:1-2). The ministry of Jesus Christ was a violent overthrow of the principalities and powers, of Satan himself, through the violent death and resurrection (the violent overthrow of death) of the Lord Jesus. When Israel rejected Jesus she came under the Day of Jesus and it was a dreadful day. But for those who feared the Lord and turned to Him in repentance and faith, it was a great day; it was healing in the wings. The kingdom had come in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Repentance is only a hard word to the hard-hearted. Repentance is a good gift to those who fear God and believe.

**Hearts that Turn** (Mal 1:6) - This verse points out that fathers repent first, turning their hearts to their children. It also points out the natural imitative nature of children who then imitate their fathers in this, turning their hearts to their fathers. We are built to imitate and we are called to imitate (Eph 5:1) and we especially see this in children. Estrangement of children from their parents is a battle of this natural inclination and when this is the case, the father must lead the way back. Prov 23:26 says “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways” and this shows the relationship between turning/giving one's heart and following/imitating. If a child will not give his heart to his father it may be that he is imitating his father at just that point.

**Fathers First** – Enough cannot be made of this: fathers turn their hearts to their children first. Fathers often are bewildered by their children's hardness of heart, their stubbornness or bitterness, their refusal to be tenderhearted and obedient. Righteous Job illustrates how a father must take full responsibility for his children's ongoing actions and heart attitude (Job 1:1, 5). Job illustrates also that a father's heart must be fully turned to the Lord and then to his children.

**The Need for Protection** – Man's basic marching orders are to provide and protect (Gen 2:15) which is the work of imitating God the Father. But what does God the Father provide first? He gives Himself. And if a father has not given his heart to the Lord, he can be the greatest threat to the family. “Remember that when St. George fails to fight the dragon, in that instance, St. George has become the dragon” – Douglas Wilson.

**The Hearts of the Children** – When God gives the gift of the Sun of Righteousness, healing is done on both sides and harsh, distant, abdicating fathers who are given a heart of repentance find their children imitating this as well. And they need to repent as well, laying that bitterness down, and finding themselves able to forgive (Col 3:12-14). This gift provides children the Way out of many self-destructive behaviors that are the fruit of bitterness and an unforgiving heart, which is the fruit of Father Hunger.

**Good News, not Good Advice** – The difference between the two is the difference between heaven and hell. Repentance is something we must do; it is something John the Baptist and Jesus preached. But we cannot repent because we are all, fathers and children alike, a piece of work. But the Good News is this: He brings healing in His wings. The call to repentance is the entryway into grace. And this gift of repentance is a fruitful gift (vv2b-3), not of traditional values and making your family look squeaky clean. It is the fruitful harvest of the Holy Spirit. He is not coming for those who are not estranged, ruined and all messed up. You have to be bankrupt in order to receive grace. Here is the gospel of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). If you are first reconciled to God (Rom 5:1) you will have peace; and that vertical reconciliation leads to the horizontal reconciliation as well (1 John 1:7).

Individual fathers need to repent. Our cultural fatherhood/fatherlessness must repent. And when this happens it will be because He will have risen with healing in His wings before our own great and dreadful day of the Lord.