

Many years ago I heard an expression that I did not understand at first. We were at my parent's home, where I grew up. Our Son David was just a little guy, maybe 2 and a half, or three. Well, he was a busy little guy, and one time he just walked over to what we always called the "junk drawer" in the house, full of amazing stuff, and started going through it! My Dad smiled and looked at him and said "the fruit doesn't fall far from the tree." I had never heard that before, so I asked him to repeat it. He did, and then I got it. Yep. It does work that way.

As David was finding great treasures in the junk drawer, my Dad reminded me of how I would do the same thing when I was little. Actually, I was a 3-year old mad scientist who would do chemistry experiments in the bathroom, specifically in the potty. I would find whatever stuff was under the sink or strategically hidden away, and it would go into the potty, mixed together to see if it would bring a cool reaction of some kind! Actually, my Dad reminded me that once I had gone into the bathroom and squirted some Ben Gay into what I didn't realize was my grampa's shaving bowl, which then ended up on his face when he was shaving. That did not go well! He loved me anyway. My Dad told me not long before he died that I had my grampa's eyes, something which I cherish. At any rate, the fruit does not fall far from the tree. Sons often have the mannerisms of their fathers, or they learn how to do what they do by watching their dads. I know that I did. I would like to hope that my Son and Daughter have learned something good by watching me.

But here we have this passage of Scripture this morning, which comes from the Ten Commandments. This is in the section that was originally Commandment #2. BTW, how many of you were squirming or wincing a little when you heard me read these words a few minutes ago? Be honest. I hope you were squirming, because these words have made people squirm for a long time. In fact other writers of the Bible squirmed because of these words. I hoped that you would be bothered by these words. You should be. Does this sound fair? "...For I the LORD your God am a zealous God, punishing the children for the iniquity of parents..." Does anyone think this sounds like a good deal? I hope not. BTW this is from the NRSV of the Bible, which usually does a good job in translation. But it does pretty horribly here.

We will deal with the actual words in a minute, but I would hope that we would agree that children should not be punished for the sins of their parents or grandparents. That just doesn't sound right at all! Please know that other writers in the Bible were familiar with this idea, and 2 major Prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel both directly reject this. Both Prophets proclaim boldly that no one is punished by God for what someone else does. So this piece of the 10 Commandments was in fact bothering other people. But there is actually a better translation of these words, and it does help.

As is usually the case, there is a weird verb here (always blame it on the verb!). PoQeyD is a strange word that means the following: to attend to, to visit, to muster, to appoint. It

basically means to deal with something. BTW what are we dealing with here? We are dealing with what goes wrong with people when they let something that is not the Living God be their false god. That is what an idol does. Also BTW, idolatry is the #1 sin of the Hebrew Bible. When people allow something that is not the Living God to sit in the center of their lives, things are going to go in the ditch! People are looking for life in the all the wrong places! Idolatry is beyond serious. It is the most dangerous sin people could have. So if we are told God is impassioned about people making the ultimate mistake of worshipping a false god, no wonder God is zealous or even jealous. Should people be zealous or jealous if their spouse is being unfaithful? YES! God is no different. But we need to know that in no way does God actually look at grandchildren and say “Yep, that one is going to get punished for the sins of his grandfather!” Sometimes grandchildren need to be punished when they put Ben Gay in their Grampa’s shaving cup (or at least block him from the bathroom laboratory!).

Other translations, which happen to be Jewish ones actually lay this out much better. One puts it this way: “For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children...” Another version which I prefer says “...For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, calling-to-account the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons...”

As I look back at my 59 years so far, I have observed this: of my friends who had alcoholic troubled fathers, those friends grew up in lots of pain and had very troubled lives themselves.

Many of them still have troubled lives today. Does that mean that God is actively punishing them? No. God doesn't have to punish us. Life will do that, by the way it has been designed. If a father is a violent abuser, his sons often follow this in their adult lives. God doesn't have to punish anyone. Life seems to do it all by itself. And if people wrap their lives around something that is not the Living God, and that thing cannot give life and purpose to life, then those people will suffer, not because God does anything, but because it just works that way. God cannot help but notice, and God is "...calling-to-account the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons..."

On this, another Father's Day (which has been celebrated for 110 years after beginning in West Virginia, just like Mother's Day) on this Father's Day we might feel special feelings for our fathers. Sometimes this is not the case. Sometimes things did not go as had been hoped. Maybe the best gift that can be given on Father's Day is the gift of fathers and grandfathers connecting properly with the Living God, not being idolaters (which is a very real thing). Maybe the best gift that can be given is not a mug or a tie or a t-shirt, or a shaving cup without Ben Gay! Maybe the best gift that can be given is what goes out from fathers and grandfathers to their families, as they are properly connected with the Living God. These fathers and grandfathers can set the example in life, by their faithfulness to the Church of Jesus Christ, by the example of their lives. The best gift fathers can give their sons is to go to church and set that

example. Because if the boys see that Dad doesn't go and doesn't care, it is likely that they will not care or go either.

On Father's Day we should be very serious about the lasting effect that Fathers and Grand-Fathers can have on their families, especially their sons. Let us pray for as many fathers as possible to set examples of faithfulness and devotion to God, and to love their families properly. May all those fathers who are not doing this properly, let's do our best to try to show them the way that should be followed. Let's also remember other words from the same Book of Exodus, that tells us that the LORD God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and rich in steadfast love. Let this always be in our hearts. AMEN.