

THE EXEMPLARY FATHER, CORNELIUS

Rev. Lawrence Baldrige

June 15, 2008

ACTS 10

William Barclay, the great Scottish *New Testament* scholar, noted that the Roman centurion is always mentioned in the *Bible* in a positive light. These men who captained 100 soldiers of the Roman Army were considered the backbone of that mighty army. Because of these faithful soldiers Rome had conquered the world of that day, had replaced multi-cultural Greece with a military power unequalled previously. These centurions led Rome to a greatness that extended into the far reaches of Great Britain and Germany and beyond, giving the world of that day a peace and a safety that it had not known before, and roads that led from distant frontiers back to Rome. Moreover, Rome gave the world the gift of civilization based upon law.

Cornelius must have been proud to be a Roman Centurian. But like any good man with children, Cornelius would no doubt have said that being a father was far more important than being a centurion or a soldier.

I. CORNELIUS WAS A DISCIPLINED FATHER.

A. CORNELIUS WAS A CENTURION. Because of that we know that he was a disciplined Father.

FRANK STAGG, a great Baptist scholar writes: “Cornelius was a Roman centurion who was a devout student of Judaism, but not a proselyte; he was not circumcised (11:5) Centurions have a good name in the NT as well as in Roman history. He was in charge of 100 men in the Italian Cohort; a cohort numbered 600 at full strength.”

“Centurions are desired not to be over bold and reckless so much as good leaders, of steady and prudent mind, not prone to take the offensive to start fighting wantonly, but able when overwhelmed and hard pressed to stand fast and die at their posts.”

One of the problems of modern day America is the lack of discipline in the lives of the fathers. While I do not advocate beating children, I see nothing wrong with an occasional appropriate spanking. The social workers have pretty much taken away any discipline from the schools, but should not be allowed to do the same to homes. The parent is the natural one to correct their children. I know that many believe that no kinds of physical discipline should be administered to children, but the appropriate amount of physical discipline gives immediate address to anti-social behavior of the child. But such should be administered in love.

Normal is it that children will at times do things that demand some form of discipline. But the great tragedy for the family is when the Father is himself undisciplined. Some children grow up under the sounds of cursing and violence and drunkenness. Most adults who grow up under such a parent are never complete. They

usually have to control everything around them because they never had any control in the presence of their parents. They will sometimes become alcoholic themselves, or, they will become very controlling. When such damaged people get into leadership positions they inflict great wounds upon their colleagues, not to mention the damage they do to their children. My Father became a Christian before my oldest brother, Harold, was born. He told us once, "I wanted to make sure that my children never saw me drink or heard me curse." Until his death at 84 years of age, we never did.

PROV. 25:28 LIKE A CITY WHOSE WALLS ARE BROKEN DOWN IS A MAN WHO LACKS SELF-CONTROL.

B. CORNELIUS WAS A "GOD FEARER." The discipline of Cornelius was show in His religious commitment: He was a "God-fearer." A god-fearer was a Gentile who had accepted Judaism, but had not formerly become baptized into Judaism to become a proselyte and who had not been circumcised according to the Law of Moses. Frank Stagg tells us that there were 4 categories of converts: Jews and Proselytes, Samaritans, God Fearers, and pagans like the Ethiopian Jailer.

The "God-fearer" was one who believed that the Jews were right in believing in One Sovereign God, and that they were also right in believing that God was a Holy and a Righteous God. Like the Jews, the God-fearer was one who believed in what scholars of the *Bible* term "Ethical-Monotheism." In a society that had many religions and many different sects, Cornelius believed that there was only One God and that He was Holy and Righteous and demanded Holiness and Righteousness from the man that He created. That was quite different from the philosophic systems of Platonism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Cynicism given to them by the Greeks, or the many cults, such as the Elusian cult and the Mithriac cult that came to Rome from the East. Cornelius had a belief in the Great Righteous Creator, and that belief helped him to discipline himself. A man doesn't have to be a Christian to be self-disciplined for his family, but he must believe in God, and even if he is not saved now, that belief will save him from much sorrow. Abraham Lincoln once said that a man may look down and not believe in God, but no man can look up and not believe in God. Cornelius was a disciplined father: He looked up.

II. CORNELIUS WAS A DEVOTED FATHER.

John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester—Before I was married I had three theories about raising children. Now I have three children and no theories.
Charles Shedd—"A fathers first responsibility is to love his wife."

A. DEVOUT MAN. Vs. 2. Not only was Cornelius a disciplined man, he was also a Devout man. He was religious, devoted, righteous, pious, and reverent in his behavior. He believed in God and tried to live the best he could. As we say in the mountains, "He acted on the light that he had." That was a great thing for this man to do. I had much rather see a father do the right kinds of things in his life than to say he's a Christian and to do the wrong things in his life. The *Bible* says that we should be 'doers of the word' and not hearers only. I am not saying that doing good things will get one to

heaven, but I do believe it makes him a better father to his family on this earth, and a better citizen as well. I had much rather have this good man as my friend, though unsaved, than to have a thousand hypocrites who claimed to be saved and pretended to be my friends. The psalmist did not know this centurion, but Psalm 1 says a great deal about this good man. “He is like a tree planted by the water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season. His leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” This devout father, Cornelius, the *Bible* says, “Was a Devout man...” He was a devout father.

B. FEARED GOD WITH ALL HIS HOUSE. Not only did Cornelius believe in God, God was the center of his family. All his house feared, respected, and honored the Great I Am. He did not force them to believe the way he believed, but he did not tolerate any other God to be worshipped in his home. How unlike Solomon who built unholy temples for his godless wives in the very City of God, Jerusalem.

Cornelius’ home was not a castle enforcing his own power, but a Temple dedicated to the glory of God. Oh friends, go home from service today and dedicate your home to God. Let it be known to friend and foe alike that your very home is a temple of the living God, and that you will not tolerate anything unholy to enter your holy place.

One side of a school playground was bordered by a very busy highway. The children never played on that side of the yard. Then the authorities decided to put a large fence around that section near the highway. From that time on the children happily played on that once rarely used part of their playground.

Our homes are holy places. We must fence them out from the negative influences of the world and dedicate them to God. Fathers need to be devoted fathers like righteous Cornelius who was Devout and Feared God with all his house.

III. CORNELIUS WAS A DEDICATED FATHER.

A GIVING MAN. Vs. 2, 4. I consider it quite amazing that the Luke mentions Cornelius as a Giving Father before he mentions him as a praying father, although he does call him devout and one that feared God with all his house. Yet, giving is emphasized before prayer. Cornelius was a giver and not a taker. There’s a real difference in these two kinds of men in the Christian faith. The taker talks about giving, but takes; the giver gives, and then talks to God. The Giver knows that it is ‘better to give than to receive.’ He also knows that whatever he possesses has been given to him by his God. Do you realize that most of Jesus’ parables were directed at the covetous and the gluttonous. The giver is always more blessed, for in sharing the little he has gives him the joy of knowing that he has helped someone else, and in helping one of God’s creation, he is actually helping God. “Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these little ones, you have done it also unto me.”

Sharing, or giving is so important that one of the Treblinka death camp survivors said, “IN OUR GROUP WE SHARED EVERYTHING, AND THE MOMENT ONE OF THE GROUP ATE SOMETHING WITHOUT SHARING IT, WE KNEW IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR HIM.

The great Spurgeon said, “EARN ALL YOU CAN, SAVE ALL YOU CAN, AND THEN GIVE ALL YOU CAN. Never Try to save out of God’s cause; such money will canker and rust. Giving to God is no loss; it is putting your substance into the best bank. Giving is true having, as the old gravestone said of the dead man, “What I spent I had, what I saved I lost, what I gave I have.” A giving father is a dedicated father indeed. A Giving Father is also a praying father.

B. CORNELIUS WAS A PRAYING FATHER. Cornelius prayed. Perhaps in our own way we all pray. But those who give all they can are much more likely to have their prayers answered by the God of All Supply. He gives to us that we may give. When we try to meet need, we see need much more clearly and are able to pray much better. I believe that we also can come to God with much more faith, not asking God to help until we have helped.

He prayed and God saw his deeds and heard his prayer: vss. 3&4 – 3. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius,”

4. “And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.”

The world needs men like Cornelius, dedicated to giving, and dedicated to prayer. What a combination! The world cannot be saved without such men.

IV. CORNELIUS WAS A DECISIVE FATHER.

A. HE IMMEDIATELY SENT HIS SERVANTS TO FIND THE FISHERMAN PETER. Vss 7 & 8, VS 33. In verse 33, he tells Peter, “Immediately therefore I sent to thee:” He was trained to be decisive. As soon as he got Heaven’s orders he carried out Heaven’s command. He made a decision to obey God’s Word; He made a decision to listen to Heaven; He made a decision to know the Truth; He made a decision to hear Good News; He made a decision to become a Christian.

Vance Havner once said, “OUR LORD BADE US NOT MERELY TO TEACH THEM ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER I HAVE COMMANDED YOU, BUT TO TEACH THEM TO OBSERVE THESE THINGS.

We cannot be saved without decisive obedience to the commandments of God. In verse 44 “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word,” 45 “And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Fathers, you need to be decisive. You need to trust in God. You need to believe in Jesus as your own personal Savior. You need to repent and to believe. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.” That’s what happened here. The entire household of Cornelius, including spouse, children, and household servants were saved by the Grace of God because he was a decisive father who was totally obedient to the heavenly vision.

B. INVITED FRIENDS AND FAMILY TO HEAR THE WORD. VS. 24. Moreover he had more than just his household there. He was so decisive that he went out and invited others to enjoy the blessings too. "...And Cornelius waited for them and had called together his kinsmen and near friends." If you are a truly decisive father you want your neighbors and friends to enjoy the blessings you enjoy. One of the greatest ways you could serve our new church is to make sure that all you family and all your friends be invited into the house of God. It is true that we need to invite them in from the highways and hedges; it is true that we need to go into all the world and to preach the Gospel; but the ones most likely to be saved are our kinsmen and our friends. But above all, be decisive because of your family. No one in your immediate family should be lost; no one in your home should be without Jesus; no one in the family circle should be left out of God's salvation. The circle should not be broken.

The story is told of a Father who was dying and he had 4 sons. One of the sons came to his bedside, and the father said, "Goodbye my son, until we meet in Heaven." The 2nd And the 3rd child received the same message, "Goodbye my son, until we meet in Heaven." Then the 4th child came to him and he looked up at this last child, and said simply, "Goodbye!" The last son wept and asked his father why he had said just "Goodbye", and the father said, "My son, you are not a Christian, and if you don't trust in Jesus as your Savior I will never see you again." The son repented and gave his life to God before his father left the world, and the father said to him, as he was dying, "Goodbye my son, until we meet in Heaven."

Be a father like Cornelius. Believe on the Lords Jesus Christ, and you will be saved and your family. My prayer for your family this Father's Day 2008 is that when you are called to glory the circle will be unbroken. God bless you all. Ahmen.