

Sermon for Sunday, May 11, 1975 by Andrew A. Jumper, D. D., Pastor
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri

"CUTTING OFF THE END OF THE HAM"

I Timothy 5:3-8

Text: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

I Timothy 5:8

Our generation today does not seem to be characterized by thoughtfulness or gratitude.

For that reason, Mother's Day seems especially appropriate because it is a reminder that we all need. We need to be reminded of tender memories that Mother's Day brings, memories of home, of childhood days forever gone, of experiences we remember with joy tinged with sadness that they are over and done. For many, it is a day that especially brings God closer. Many have been blessed with godly mothers and many of us first learned about God at our mother's knee or saw him in her life.

This morning I want to deal with two areas. First, I want to raise some questions about our relationship to our mothers and the training they gave us. Second, I want to raise some questions for mothers, especially for those with children still at home...or even for those of you who will one day be mothers.

In terms of our relationship to our mothers, let me raise this question: is your life a tribute or a travesty to your mother? Many of us came to church this morning with roses on our lapels or on our dresses. Some of us wore white roses indicating our mothers are dead. Others of you were fortunate enough to wear a red rose, symbolizing that she is still alive. Yet, in either case, what did that rose really mean? Did it mean that your life was a tribute to her and to what she taught and what she stood for? Or was it a travesty, a mere sentimental gesture, an emotion that exhausts itself with a card, a phone call, some flowers, or a box of candy? Yes, what did it really mean?

Over in Proverbs (1:8), the Bible says, "My son...reject not your mother's teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck." As you think about your own mother, have you forsaken her teaching? You know, mothers are funny creatures. They don't want our praise or our sentimental affection so much as they want our lives to be good lives. They never worked to gain our admiration or expressions of our devotion. No, what they really worked for was to bring us up as good boys and girls who would grow into fine, mature, responsible, men and women. The greatest tribute we can give to our mothers is to incarnate in our own lives the truths that she lived by and taught us. When our lives reflect her cherished ideals, a mother has found her highest joy. Once the crowd surrounding Jesus got sentimental about him. They tried to praise him and eulogize him and flatter him. But Jesus wouldn't have it. No, instead he said, "Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do the things that I say?" On this mother's day, I suspect there are many mothers who feel the same way. They would say to us, "Why do you call me mother, mother and send me flowers and cards and candy and do not live the life I taught you to live?"

Well, that is a sobering thought for Mother's Day. Is your life a tribute to your mother? Would she be proud of who and what you are, of the things you do or don't do, of how you are using your life? Would she really be proud? And let me ask you young people--does your life bring joy to mother? Will her years be crowned with

joy because her prayers and dreams and hopes are being realized in your life? Samuel Wesley once wrote to his son John, "Endeavor to repay her prayers for you by doubling yours for her, and...above all things, live such a virtuous and religious life that she may find that her care and love have not been lost upon you." Yes, is your life a tribute to your mother or a travesty to what she stands for?

Up until this point I have been assuming that all of us had the right kind of mother --mothers who possess ideals and standards that are good and worthwhile. Yet, all of us know that many mothers are not worthy of following. There are many mothers who are shallow, unspiritual, materialistic. Too many mothers today have substituted secular things for spiritual values. Some of our young people today who live lives devoted to Jesus do so in spite of parents and not because of them. For that reason, I would like to raise some questions for you mothers and for those of you who will one day be parents.

When young couples come in to make arrangements for their wedding, I do some psychological testing on them. The purpose of this testing is to discover some of the unconscious areas of their lives that affect how they act and react. You see, much of who and what we are is the direct result of the environmental conditioning we experienced when we were young. As adults, we may not be consciously aware of why we act or think in a certain way. Yet, for good or bad, we have been conditioned by our past; we have been unconsciously trained by our parents and other parent figures in our past. See how it works: A neighbor was visiting a new bride who was a friend of the family. The new bride was busily preparing one of her first meals and was preparing to bake a ham. She began to saw away at the end of the ham and the neighbor asked with some interest, "Why are you cutting off the end of that ham?" "Well," replied the bride, "that's what my mother always did." Motivated now by some curiosity, the neighbor called up the bride's mother. "Your daughter tells me you always saw off the end of a ham before you bake it," she said, "and I called you up to ask why?" "Well," replied the mother, "frankly, the reason I do it is because my mother always did." By now the neighbor was really curious. Since she knew the lady's mother and she lived in town, she called her up. The question was asked, "Why do you cut off the end of the ham?" And the grandmother gave the secret, "Because," she said, "I never owned a pan large enough to hold a whole ham. Why do you ask?"

Well, the point is this: without realizing it, we are training and conditioning and developing our children. By the lives we live in the home, by the things we do and say, we are shaping and molding who and what our children will become. We are cutting off the end of the ham. Leslie Flynn writes, "A mother who laughs at the Bible may have started her child on the way to becoming a champion agnostic. A mother who ridicules the moral standards of the Scriptures may have given her son a good start on the road to debauchery. On the other hand, the mother who suggests that her daughter give a dime to a lame girl or take flowers to a shut-in may have launched the career of an orphanage supervisor. The mother who illustrates by life the importance of truth, the wrong of a lie, the loveliness of compassion, and the rewards of self-denial, will be sowing the seeds of a life of value."

So, perhaps you never thought of it this way before, but who you are in the home and what you do with your life and how you live your life before your children is how you are cutting off the end of the ham. It will be reproduced in the lives of your children and they will reflect your image.

These days we are hearing a lot about juvenile delinquency. The rise of juvenile drug addiction, the rise of juvenile crime in our country is both unbelievable and frightening. And these things are not happening in just the poverty centers and the slum areas. No, they are occurring in the very best communities and the finest homes. Now, I do not excuse the youth for their share of the guilt because sometimes in spite of the best homes, some young people chose to do what is wrong. But at the same time, the problems among youth today will not be solved in juvenile courts or correctional institutions or psychiatric clinics. Ultimately, the problem will be solved in the home where the character of the younger generation is being shaped.

The greatest possible contribution any woman can make to our world today is to create the right kind of home--a home where children are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. There simply is no substitute for strong Christian homes. Juvenile problems will be solved when fathers and mothers are creating the kinds of homes where God is worshipped, where nation is honored, and where the rights of others are respected. The mother who fails to put such a home first on her agenda is forsaking God, dishonoring her country, and failing her children. How are you cutting the ham at your house?

Napoleon once said, "Let France have good mothers and she will have good sons." That was true then for France and it is true today for America. Today I have a deep concern for our nation. At the highest level we have seen the deterioration of moral standards and winking at crime. At the present crisis of our world, how desperately we need godly mothers. Shortly before his death, J. Edgar Hoover spoke before the Senate committee investigating crime in interstate commerce. He said, "The home is the first great training school in behavior or misbehavior, and parents serve as the first teachers for the inspirational education of youth. In the home, the child learns that others have rights which he must respect." How are you cutting off the end of the ham? Dr. Hoover went on to say, "Here the spadework is laid for instilling in the child those values which will cause him to develop into an upright, lawabiding citizen...He must be taught to understand the necessity of obeying the laws of God." Yes, how are you cutting off the end of the ham at your house?

Dr. Charles R. Brown, a professor for many years at Yale, once described his mother this way: "The strongest, the sweetest, the holiest earthly influence which ever made itself felt upon my own life was that of my dear mother. When we were asleep, she would come in and kneel at our bedsides, praying for each child by name and by need. She wrapped her petitions around our defects and held them up before the God of all grace. She lived it seven days of the week, maintaining in our home an atmosphere, which was like a southern exposure for the ripening of the fruits of the Spirit." Are you mothers cutting off the end of the ham that way at your house?

Dr. Payson once said, "What if God should place a diamond in your hand and tell you to inscribe on it a sentence which should be read at the Last Day and shown there as an index of your thoughts and feelings. What care, what caution would you exercise in the selection!" Yes, we would indeed exercise caution in what sentence we selected to inscribe forever on such a diamond. Well, God has given many of us

such diamonds. He has placed in our hands the immortal souls of our children. Every day we are inscribing by our instructions, by our example, by what we say and what we do, by how we live our lives, an indelible record. What we write on the hearts and minds and lives of our children will remain forever. On the judgment day, what we have written there will be exhibited to judge us for good or bad. How are you cutting off the end of the ham at your house?

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