

DIVINE FATHERHOOD IN DEUTERONOMY

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### Introduction

The significance of investigating divine fatherhood in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy lies within the nature and content of this final section of the Pentateuch. The relevance of the presence of the fatherhood of God in Deuteronomy provides the reader with a richer, more complete understanding of the covenant relationship between God and the church mediated by Jesus Christ as portrayed in the New Testament (1 Tim 2:5). The book of Deuteronomy is more than simply a restating of the Law which already has been presented in the rest of the Pentateuch. If approached in this manner, Deuteronomy will only appear as a redundant display of what has been previously set forth with extensive treatment. Instead, one must interpret this final part of the Pentateuch in light of Moses' purpose statement in Deut 1:5 which says that, "Moses undertook to explain this law . . ." <sup>1</sup> Therefore, perceiving that Deuteronomy provides the Jews with an explanation of or a commentary on the preceding content of the Pentateuch, the reader may better comprehend the theology behind the giving of the Law and the nature of the covenant relationship between God and his chosen people. <sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and discuss Deuteronomic Scripture

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup>John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 423.

passages concerning divine fatherhood in order to demonstrate that this imagery served as a covenant marker as well as set the tone for Israel's obedience and love towards God so that earthly fathers may be informed of how they ought to view and rule their families as they seek to imitate the relationship between their Heavenly Father and his elect children (Eph 5:1). This paper will accomplish this task by addressing four main texts in Deuteronomy which speak directly towards the fatherhood of God and Israel's sonship: Deut 1:31, 8:5, 14:1, and 32:6. Each section will develop key aspects of the familial relationship with respect to God's covenant with Israel in order to draw conclusions on how this connection carries over into the Christian home.

### **God's Firstborn Son**

The symbolism of divine fatherhood in Deuteronomy is worthy of attention due to the fact that the final installment of the Pentateuch functions as a recapitulation of the Law combined with an exposition of its meaning and a description of the nature of the Mosaic covenant. Since much of the same terminology carries over into the N. T. in reference to God's covenant with his church, a closer examination of the origins of this imagery would prove to be beneficial for a believer's home life.

The first explicit mentioning of God as Father in Deuteronomy is in Deut 1:31. Moses comments on the manner in which God dealt with the Jews during their wilderness journey stating, ". . . and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, *as a man carries his son*, all the way that you went until you came to this place."<sup>3</sup> Divine fatherhood in this statement does more than function in an analogous

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<sup>3</sup>Deut 1:31; Emphasis added.

form. The language evokes the true quality of the type of relationship that God operated under in relation to his covenant agreement with Israel. The Father-son relationship between Yahweh and his chosen people harkens back to the initial reference of the Hebrews as God's "firstborn son" at the time when Moses returned to Egypt from the land of Midian to be used as an instrument for the liberation of the Israelites from Pharaoh's bondage in Ex 4:22-23.<sup>4</sup> Moses recalled the foundational understanding of God's familial tie to the Jews as the basis of how they ought to interpret his dealings with them.<sup>5</sup>

This terminology had a double connotation for the Israelites. First, as already acknowledged, God carrying Israel "as a man carries his son" showed that Yahweh viewed himself as the male parent in a relative sense over his chosen people. Second, though it is not the overarching meaning of the phrase, this theme also reflected treaty and covenant aspects of the bond between God and Israel.<sup>6</sup> Though Deut 1:31 plays off the initial understanding of Israel as God's elect firstborn in heavy covenant overtones, the primary meaning of Moses' comment displayed the tenderness of God as their personal Father.

Here in this text, the author of Deuteronomy portrays God as the one who is

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<sup>4</sup>God commissions Moses to tell Pharaoh in Ex 4:22-23, "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.'"

<sup>5</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 79.

<sup>6</sup>Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 103.

caring for and guiding his beloved children through the desert.<sup>7</sup> God is loving and compassionate towards his people in the manner of a father. He cares for their welfare and desires for them to love and obey him. Thus, Moses cites this truth as he retells the disobedience of the Israelites despite God's provision, protection, and divine leadership after he had orchestrated their freedom from slavery in Egypt. God as Father communicates the theological foundation for Israel's obedience in light of their rebellious activity.<sup>8</sup>

In this particular passage, the narrative depicts Israel's resistance in trusting God's fatherly care as they feared the dismal report of the unbelieving spies (c.f. Num 13-14). Apparently, the Jewish nation completely ignored God's fatherly love and guidance which inevitably led to their distrust, disobedience, and unbelief in his ability to protect them and defeat their enemies so that they might inherit the Promised Land.<sup>9</sup> His provision for them in the wilderness was only a testimony of Yahweh's great power and love for Israel demonstrating what he was further capable of doing for them as they embarked upon conquering Canaan. Elsewhere in the O.T., Hos 11:1-4 recounts similar imagery in the same historical setting showing God's displeasure in his firstborn son's open rejection of his divine covenant love despite Yahweh's efforts in electing, leading, healing, freeing, and feeding them.

The Father-son relationship between God and Israel permeates Deuteronomy

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<sup>7</sup>Dennis J. McCarthy, "Notes on the love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-son relationship between Yahweh and Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, no. 27 (Apr 1965): 145.

<sup>8</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 475.

<sup>9</sup>Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. J. A. Motyer (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 41.

in various sections of the Law. The importance of divine fatherhood appears in passages as such as the need for procedures on designating a man's inheritance to his rightful firstborn son in Deut 21:15-17; or, the influence of the father-son aspect of the covenant may be seen immediately subsequent to the above mentioned passage where a rebellious son must be dealt with in a very specific and serious manner in Deut 21:18-21. In addition, the value of seeing the covenant through a familial lens illuminates the meaning for the in-depth manner in which the Israelite parents were to teach their children the Law.<sup>10</sup> This fact provides further evidence of how the covenant relationship between God and Israel impacted the home life of the Jewish nation which in turn reflected the manner in which God related to them as his elect children. Thus, the covenantal aspect of fathering in this case teaches fathers to tend to and take care of their children in an enduring and transcending fashion.

### **God's Fatherly Discipline**

The discipline of the Lord in Deuteronomy is reckoned with the love of God for Israel, his chosen people. The fact that Israel is the "firstborn son" of God requires obedience and compliance to his divine will. Moses taught in Deut 8:5, "Know then in your heart that, *as a man disciplines his son*, the LORD your God disciplines you."<sup>11</sup> Once again, in the surrounding context of Deut 8:5 Moses recounts the journey in the

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<sup>10</sup>Moses communicated the extreme necessity for the Jews to pass on the Law to their children in Deut 11:18-21 stating, "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth."

<sup>11</sup>Emphasis added.

wilderness using this event to display the character of God as well as the quality of the Sinaic covenant.

Journeying for forty years in the wilderness provided lessons by which God communicated his will and revealed his nature. Thus, Moses adds this commentary note on the Israelites desert experience as an explanation of how they should interpret his dealings with them. Furthermore, the Father-son imagery taught that God's love for his children and longing for them to grow in maturity impelled his disciplinary action.<sup>12</sup> However, God's paternal discipline in the sense of punishment or retribution does not do justice to the meaning of this text. Instead, "discipline" in this context ought to be understood more so as instruction. This interpretation points towards God using the Jews' time in the desert as a teaching experience giving them a comprehensive education.<sup>13</sup> Still, this point should not be taken as a total upheaval of the meaning of "discipline" in Deut 8:5 as a form of punishment and correction. Evidence of Israel's failure in the wilderness to love and obey God is not lacking.

Within the textual setting of Deut 8:5, Moses pleads for Israel not to be negligent in keeping the Sinaic covenant so that they might not forget the way the Lord "carried" them in the desert for forty years (Deut 1:31). In fact, nowhere before v. 5 in chapter eight is there an explicit reference pointing towards a particular sin which would have served as an antecedent for God's discipline. Therefore, the discipline of the Lord in this setting displays Yahweh's paternal concern for the Israelites to leave adolescence and

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<sup>12</sup>Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 6 (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 175.

<sup>13</sup>John Calvin, *Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 387.

enter into maturity by means of trials, hardships, correction, and education delivered through the desert experience.<sup>14</sup> In addition, this time period in the Hebrew nation's moral and spiritual growth included the giving of the Law at Sinai which was an encounter with God that conjured up fear and reverence in their hearts. By having in mind the administering of the Law as a vital part of the wilderness didactic, the true meaning of the Torah's intention is exposed. Yahweh gave the Law for the transformation of the heart, not simply as a moral code or standard by which he and the people were able to objectively judge right and wrong actions.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the Mosaic covenant inaugurated and imposed during the wilderness experience aimed at creating a positive education for the Israelites so that they might keep God's commandments, walk in his ways, fear him, obey his voice, and love him with all their heart, soul, and might (Deut 6:4-5, 8:6, 20).<sup>16</sup>

The discipline of the Lord was intended to assist Israel in keeping the covenant in order that they might become a blessing to all nations and enter into the Promised Land (Deut 4:6; 8:1, 7-10). God's renown in the world would be associated with the character of those who were called by his name and were his possession (Deut 28:10). Thus, sonship, as manifested through the divine fatherhood of God in the form of discipline, reflected the true nature of the biblical covenant existing between God and the Jews. This point presupposes that they would become a people bearing his image and embodying the

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<sup>14</sup>Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 186.

<sup>15</sup>Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 15 (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 119.

<sup>16</sup>Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 186.

presence of the invisible God.<sup>17</sup> Hence, fathers ought to view discipline as a means for teaching their children about the character of God and his covenant of salvation administered through Jesus Christ.

### **God's Holy Standard**

Divine fatherhood is implicitly acknowledged in Deut 14:1 when Moses proclaims, "You are the sons of the LORD your God." This text leads into a discussion on regulations needed to be maintained so that the Jewish nation may be "... a people holy to the LORD your God (Deut 14:21)."<sup>18</sup> The accumulation of these specific mandates and prohibitions revolve around these two themes, namely that the Jews are the sons of the Lord and that they are to be his holy people (Deut 14:1-2, 21).<sup>19</sup> Therefore, in order to be a child of God, one must understand that there are certain responsibilities and expectations concerning his or her own faith and daily conduct. This list of regulations demonstrates that God's children are distinguishable from those who are not his children.

God as Father requires the love and obedience from his Israelite children that is evidenced from their keeping of his commandments, rituals, and regulations. The deportment of the sons of Yahweh is to be distinct from those who worship pagan gods. The fatherhood of God prompts his desire for them to be unique and set apart from all

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<sup>17</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 119-20.

<sup>18</sup>Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 448.

<sup>19</sup>Thompson denotes a textual emphasis on these two themes found in the grammar of the Hebrew. He writes, "Israel is carefully defined as *sons of Yahweh*, and *a people holy to Yahweh your God*. The two expressions *sons* and *holy people* are strongly emphasized in the Hebrew text by being placed first in the respective sentences, *Sons you are, A holy people you are*. The recognition of this fact should prepare Israel for the prohibition that follows." J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman, vol. 5 (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 177.

other nations. The reference in Deut 14:1 not to cut themselves or make baldness on their foreheads corresponds to a type of burial rite. In some way, this practice was associated with how pagan religions mourned the dead.

Previously in the Pentateuch, two other instances of this prohibition are found in Lev 19:28 and 21:5. In Lev 21:5-6, the same proscription is given immediately followed by the theological mandate, “They shall be holy to their God . . .”<sup>20</sup> In order for the children of God to be holy, they must not partake in any pagan worship rituals that are not indicative of their Holy Father. Their lifestyles must be proportional to the holy expectation and responsibility of having God as their divine father. Furthermore, the two main issues in Deut 14 deal with how a child of God should treat his body and what he should allow to enter his body by way of eating. Both of these regulations center on the holiness of the body. Based upon the premise that they are “sons of the LORD your God,” the Israelite nation must see that man created in God’s image is still capable of honoring and glorifying God with his body.<sup>21</sup>

A second aspect of being a son of God revealed in the context of Deut 14:1 is found in v. 2. Amidst the dense covenantal theme, an additional concept heightens the meaning and value of counting God as their father. In Deut 14:2, Israel is described as “a people for his *treasured possession*.”<sup>22</sup> This verse is the second explicit reference of Israel in Deuteronomy as a divinely chosen nation.<sup>23</sup> Here, the concept of holiness as an

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<sup>20</sup>Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 448.

<sup>21</sup>Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy*, 158.

<sup>22</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup>See also Deut 7:6, 26:18, 28:9.

implication of the covenant seems to be the intention behind specifically intimating the divine election of the Jewish nation as God's firstborn son.<sup>24</sup> However, the holiness of God's children is inextricably linked to the fact that they are to him a "treasured possession."

Moses retrieves this phrase from Ex 19:5. As God and Moses prepare the Israelites for the impartation of the Ten Commandments, Yahweh begins spelling out the conditions of the Sinai covenant with the people in which he states that if they keep his Law they will become his very own treasured possession. This theological and familial status sets the Jews apart from the rest of the world's nations as seen in the final clause of v. 5 where God pronounces ". . . for all the earth is mine." The term "treasured possession" indicates personal property that to the owner has immense value.<sup>25</sup> The term "holy nation" or "a people holy to the LORD" points towards their spiritual holiness, worship, and service unto God. Three out of four times in the book of Deuteronomy when the term "treasured possession" is mentioned, so also is the connotation that Israel was to be a holy nation (Deut 7:6, 14:2, 26:18).<sup>26</sup> God as Father expresses his divine freedom to lavish Israel with his covenantal love by choosing them from among all other nations signifying his faithfulness in upholding the initial covenant he made with Abraham (Gen 14:1-6; Deut 4:37-39). Therefore, the need for God's children to be holy, in a physical and spiritual sense, was incumbent upon them due to the uniqueness of their

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<sup>24</sup>R. E. Clements, *God's Chosen People: A Theological Interpretation of the Book of Deuteronomy* (London: SCM Press, 1968), 45.

<sup>25</sup>Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 101.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

election and the incomparableness of their Father, who is God alone.<sup>27</sup>

### **God's Covenant Love**

The most direct reference to God as Father in Deuteronomy is in Deut 32:6. Moses rhetorically asks Israel, “Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? *Is not he your father* who created you, who made you and established you?”<sup>28</sup> This allusion to the fatherhood of God appears in the Song of Moses. The main theme of this prophetic poem conveys Israel’s disloyalty and God’s imminent judgment. The song begins with the affirmation of God’s divine election of the Jewish nation (vv. 1-7), but ends with the concept that all nations are his people due to his universal judgment over all sin and idolatry (v. 43).<sup>29</sup> Thus, all nations are summoned to praise the one, true God (Deut 32:43).<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, the divine fatherhood of God mentioned in Deut 32:6 displays the uniqueness of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Here, in this verse are all of the major themes of the Father-son relationship existing in the divine covenant which God made with Israel denoting that they are his “firstborn son” who received the discipline and instruction of the Lord so that they might become his “treasured possession” and “a holy nation (Ex 4:22-23, 19:5-6; Deut 1:31, 8:5, 14:1-2).” Now,

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<sup>27</sup>John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, rev. (Oregon: Multnomah Press, 2002), 127.

<sup>28</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup>Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 475-6.

<sup>30</sup>Sailhamer argues, “The Hebrew text reads, ‘Rejoice, O nations, his people,’ thus designating ‘the nations’ as ‘his people.’ The NIV and other English translations have amended the text to read, ‘Rejoice, O nations, *with* his people.’ There is no good textual reason to change the Hebrew text. The idea expressed that ‘the nations’ are God’s people is a theme also found in other parts of Scripture (c.f. Ps 47:9 and Isa 19:24-25).”*Ibid.*, 476.

Moses summarizes these truths into one statement as a form of interrogation seeking to discover the motivation behind Israel's acts of rebellion in light of the immense privilege of calling Yahweh their Father.

Moses characterizes the Jew's disobedience as pure foolishness. Essentially, Israel's failure in keeping the commandments of God was a total rejection of the covenant love of God. The Law along with its blessings and curses listed in Deut 28-30 were not to be seen merely as a grueling legal system, but instead as a reflection of the nature of God, namely his divine fatherhood.<sup>31</sup> According to Moses, the actions of the Israelites communicated that they were an irrational and ignorant nation. The very notion that any people group would reject their God alone placed them in the candidacy for insanity; however, even worse in this case, their God was also their Father which ought to have left their onlookers in absolute bewilderment.<sup>32</sup> Often when God is described as father, so also is Israel's failure as children exposed (Prov 3:11-12; Jer 31:9, 18, 20; Hos 11:1-4).<sup>33</sup> For example, in Jer 3:19, the Lord laments how Judah has rejected his covenant love, refusing to call him "Father" and thus departing from his will.

The ingratitude of the Jews towards their Heavenly Father is utterly disproportionate to the goodness of God in his freedom to elect them as his peculiar people. The magnitude of their shame lies within the wealth of their heavenly blessings. God as Father pours out his covenant love upon them through the creation and establishment of them as his "firstborn son." The initial covenant with Abraham and the

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<sup>31</sup>Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 379.

<sup>32</sup>Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 411.

<sup>33</sup>Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament*

subsequent deliverance from the bonds of Egypt display the delight of God in keeping his covenant with them and securing them as his own children leading them to a land of their own.<sup>34</sup> Moses' rhetorical question illuminates that the anticipation of Israel's definite rejection of their divine Father is not the proper response to the great privilege and benefit of their familial status. God's covenant calls for his children to obey and to love him. A right response to their Heavenly Father's will is a reciprocated covenant love. This love is characterized by reverence, fear, loyalty, and joyful obedience. Because of God's everlasting covenant and his divine fatherhood, this love can be commanded (Deut 6:1-6; Mk 12:29-31; 1 Jn 5:2-3).<sup>35</sup> Hence, Israel has the highest obligation in returning the covenant love offered to them through the care of their divine Father. Therefore, the root of all of the Jews' sin lies within their failure to love God as his beloved children.

However, God's covenant is eternal. Moses delivers God's promise to the Jews that, "He will not leave you or forsake you (Deut 31:6)." Covenant love goes beyond preferential love which is determined by the fickleness of affections and sentiment. The ground of this love finds its basis upon the Benefactor rather than the actions and response of the beneficiary. Therefore, the nature of the covenant love of God as Father is governed by the nature and character of God. In the new covenant, the N.T. carries over this truth as the author of Hebrews reaffirms this promise to the people of God in Heb 13:5 when he says, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" Therefore, earthly

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(Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 46.

<sup>34</sup>John Calvin, *Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 387.

fathers should seek to recover the covenantal aspect of the quality of the type of love with which they impart to their families, namely their children in this context. Likewise, earthly fathers ought to instill in their children their need to reciprocate the same obligations required of covenantal love as in the case of God and Israel.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of revisiting these four passages from Deuteronomy is to show the covenantal aspect of the father's relationship towards his family, namely his children. The significance of choosing Deuteronomy for this type of study is due to the nature of its composition. As a whole, Deuteronomy follows the literary structure of other Hebrew and ancient Near East covenant documents.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the final book of the Pentateuch is primarily concerned with the covenantal aspect of Israel's relationship with Yahweh. Thus, when the Father-son terminology appears in reference to the existing kinship between the Jews and God, this imagery becomes more than merely symbolism or analogy, but rather points toward the actual, true nature of a biblical covenant. This fact leads the interpreter to understand that a covenant established by Yahweh includes a familial character.

In the N. T. God as Father appears much more frequently and prominently. The fatherhood of God is primarily on display in the relationship between God and Jesus. The force of this expression is theologically substantiated by the Incarnation.<sup>37</sup> So, not only does the covenantal aspect in the O. T. disclose the character of God but also the

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<sup>35</sup>McCarthy, *CBQ* 27, 145.

<sup>36</sup>Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 17-8.

N. T. reveals the same relationship, that is, between the Godhead and between his people. Thus, to reduce the meaning of divine fatherhood to merely symbolism takes for granted the consistent biblical allusion to this aspect of the nature of God concerning his relationship with his creation, Israel, Christians, and Jesus, the Incarnate Son (Deut 32:6; Matt 3:17; Gal 4:6).

The Christian home ought to be the prime example to believers and non-believers alike of the type of relationship one should expect to have once he or she becomes a Christian and thus, a child of God. Therefore, from the verses discussed in Deuteronomy concerning divine fatherhood as a natural component of a biblical covenant, four main applications may be deduced.

First, in light of Deut 1:31, fathers should view their responsibilities to lead, guide, protect, and provide for their children as a mirror of how God tended to Israel in the wilderness, “as a man carries his son.” This aspect of the covenantal relationship between God and his people finds its rightful place in the home life as fathers maintain and preserve their families in terms of their physical and spiritual welfare. The immense importance of this dynamic exemplifying itself in a Christian father’s life is seen in Paul’s list of qualifications for elders who function as overseers of the church. He affirms that a man in 1 Tim 3:4-5, “. . . must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?”<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Paul restates this condition as a necessary characteristic for deacons in 1 Tim 3:12. Furthermore, Paul links the

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<sup>37</sup>Dorothy A. Lee, “The Symbol of Divine Fatherhood,” *Semeia*, no. 85 (1999):178-9.

<sup>38</sup>See also Titus 1:6.

responsibility of whether or not a person takes care of his or her family as a validation of that person's faith in 1 Tim 4:8 when he states, "But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Viewing their relationship with children through a covenantal lens would help to bind fathers to their responsibility to meet the needs of their offspring regardless of the children's behavior or spiritual condition. This in turn causes the actions of the father to be determined by the nature of his relationship with the children rather than their moral and spiritual character. For example, in cases where children become rebellious and destructive, a father who desires to imitate his Heavenly Father will not desert his sons or daughters, but rather will embody impeccable fidelity to his family. Another instance in support of this point may be seen in a situation where a father remains faithful and loyal in taking care of a newborn baby even when the child arrives at an unexpected and unplanned time in the lives of the parents. Fatherly care that is in line with the fatherhood of God would instinctively discourage the proneness of parents to consider abortion, divorce, separation, and offering children up for adoption as solutions to their uncertainty or lack of desire in providing for their children. Thus, fathers must shepherd their children through all aspects of their sons' and daughters' journey from adolescence to maturity.

Second, in relation to Deut 8:5, fathers should view discipline not only as an opportunity for correction, but also for instruction. Fatherly discipline is enacted whenever a father sees the need to teach a child a lesson which pertains to their spiritual and physical maturity. For example, when a child is running in the sanctuary of a church,

a father may discipline his son or daughter concerning the matter in order to instill in him or her the need to have reverential fear for God. In this instance, the disciplinary action becomes a scenario in which the child learns the proper demeanor one ought to have towards God rather than merely being reprimanded for moral disobedience. A perspective on father discipline in this manner is in agreement with Paul's admonition in Eph 6:4 when he intimates, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the *discipline* and *instruction* of the Lord."<sup>39</sup>

In addition, fathers ought to view their disciplinary action as a means by which God prepares children's hearts for salvation and sanctification. Paul spoke of this spiritual process in Rom 8:29 teaching that the people of God were predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Heb 1:1-3). Therefore, sanctification includes the discipline of the Lord which administers instruction and correction maturing believers to resemble the character and nature of their Heavenly Father. Likewise, the author of Hebrews asserts a similar end of the Lord's discipline in Heb 12:10 stating, "For [earthly fathers] disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but [God] disciplines us for our good, *that we may share his holiness.*"<sup>40</sup> So, through rightly understanding the role of the Lord's discipline in terms of its covenantal aspect, fathers ought to view their disciplinary responsibility in the upbringing of their children as a means for teaching moral and spiritual truths, accountability in the fight against sin, enforcing family rules and conduct, affirming their paternal identity, and

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<sup>39</sup>Emphasis added.

<sup>40</sup>Emphasis added.

confirming the child's identity in the home as well.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the book of Deuteronomy teaches that the home is the primary environment for the educational process of children in their pursuit of God and holiness.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, fathers ought to covenant with their children to discipline them out of a concern for their eternal security as well as for their moral accountability.

Third, in view of Deut 14:1, fathers should hold a holy standard of living in the Christian home in light of the covenant implications as seen in the Father-son relationship between Yahweh and Israel. God's character determined the spiritual climate of those whom he deemed his offspring. In much the same way, a Christian father ought to expect his children to act and behave in the likeness of their Holy Father. The Father-son relationship in a biblical covenant implies the fact that children are thus required to be holy. Peter revisits the same covenantal theme as found in Deut 14:1-2 in 1 Pet 2:9 as he proclaims, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Previously in his letter, Peter also demonstrates the supreme necessity for God's people to be holy as he quotes the Pentateuch in 1 Pet 1:16, "You shall be holy, for I am holy (Lev 19:2, 20:7)."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>VanGemeran submits, "In the spiritual sense the true sons of God are only those who respond to love with love, those who are circumcised in their hearts, those who are disciplined by Yahweh (Deut 6:5, 8:5, 11:13, 30:6, 20; Prov 3:11-12 [cited in Heb 12:5-6])." Willem A. VanGemeran, "Abba in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, no. 31 (Dec 1988): 395.

<sup>42</sup>John W. Miller, *Biblical Faith and Fathering: Why we call God "Father"* (NY: Paulist Press, 1989), 84.

<sup>43</sup>Peter supports the covenantal aspect of fathering as he relates the holiness of God's people to the evidence of their being obedient children thus implying that they have a Heavenly Father. He writes in 1 Pet 1:14-16, "As *obedient children*, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy (Emphasis added).'"

As mentioned earlier, the prohibition listed in Deut 14:1 presupposes that man is still capable of glorifying God in a physical sense despite the curse of sin. In the N. T., Paul upholds this concept in 1 Cor 6:17-19 when he declares, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. *So glorify God in your body.*”<sup>44</sup> Here in this instance, not only should fathers encourage children to bring glory to God through their inner being, but also through the submission of the bodies to the service of the Lord (Rom 12:1-2). Thus, fatherly care and concern must be perceived as an instrument by which children become holy unto God enabling them to glorify their Heavenly Father in all things through the submission and offering up of their whole being (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).

Finally, in light of Deut 32:6, fathers should love their children with a covenant love. This love transcends time. Covenant love is eternal because it can be commanded, and is founded upon the nature of God rather than the finiteness of man. Christian fathers must strive to love their children regardless of their response. For example, a father must always be ready to welcome back a prodigal son despite the fact that he has irresponsibly wasted away his inheritance and irreverently rebelled against his own home (Lk 15:11-32). However, fathers should view covenant love in their homes as something which ought to be reciprocated in terms of reverence, fear, obedience, and love. Moreover, if fathers covenanted to love their children unconditionally, then parent-child relationships would no longer be works-based. Fathers who withhold their love from children due to their failures and shortcomings do not rightly resemble the same tender, fatherly care

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<sup>44</sup>Emphasis added.

with which God himself evidenced for his people in creating, establishing, sustaining, and fathering them faithfully despite their constant revolt against his divine will.

Although a parent-child relationship should not be works-based, covenant love entails the production of works in the child's life. For instance, Jesus teaches in Jn 15:14, "You are my friends if you do what I command you." Later, John, the beloved disciple, plainly states in 1 Jn 5:2-3, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." Here, covenant love cannot be separated from obedience. One entails the other. Thus, fathers must, in the same fashion as in the case of Yahweh and Israel, love their sons and daughters unconditionally and everlastingly enduring every hardship and trial. Also, fathers must understand covenant love to imply the need for their children to be obedient and to return their fathers' love with great affection and reverential fear. The benefit of viewing fatherly love in the mode of covenant love creates a strong and healthy relationship between the parent and the child that is characterized by a balance between tenderness and firmness which demonstrates true love coupled with a holy expectation.

In conclusion, divine fatherhood in Deuteronomy shows how earthly fathers should view parenting through a covenantal mindset. Hence, fathers are not only obligated to fulfill their duties at home, but are also eternally bound. With these concepts in mind, this method of parenting in a rich theological and biblical manner exhorts the father to create a Christian home which functions as a clear reflection of the relationship that the Heavenly Father has with those of whom ". . . he gave the right to become children of God (Jn 1:12)."

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