

# Mother's Apron Strings

TEXT—II Timothy 1:5  
Broadcast May 13, 1962

It was the little boy's first day in school. With other children he was on his way home. His overly anxious mother, not yet ready to loose him to the hazards of a city's traffic, had gone to school to see him safely home. But he would have none of it. Instead, he ignored her presence as he walked ahead of his mother with the other children. But finally recognizing the obvious, he said to his companions, "That woman following us says that she is my mother, but she isn't."

This was his first effort to apply the scissors of independence to mother's apron strings. The story does not end there. For the apron strings resisted the scissors. Today that little boy is one of our most promising young preachers of the gospel. Happily married and with a little girl of his own, he knows that mother's apron strings are something not to be cut but coveted.

However, does not this story portray the attitude that is almost universal among us? Somehow the words "mother's apron strings" have fallen into ill repute. They are a synonym for domineering matriarchs, for unrelenting restraint, for a halter which shuts us off from liberty of action and a full realization of life. To say of a man that he is still tied to his mother's apron strings is to call him a weakling, a man lacking willpower, or one who has never dared the risks of life for himself.

The path of life is littered with the debris of lives wrecked by such an attitude. The immortal parable of the prodigal son is our Saviour's answer to this tragic outlook on life. And

this son's name might well be called Legion.

Therefore, on this Mother's Day I would seek to remove the tarnish from one of life's noblest treasures. I would seek to place again an aura of glory about a relationship which the world can lose only to its own hurt. In sermon, as another did in song, I would utter the plea that is dormant yet living in many hearts. "Tie me to your apron strings again." For this is one of the great hopes of your life, yea, even of civilization itself.

Never before have I tried to write poetry. I may never try again. May your charity outweigh your criticism as I tell you of "Mother's Song."

With blessings fraught across the  
years,  
There often comes to me  
A song of joy, a song of tears.  
A blessed memory.

For as I heard my mother sing,  
I scarce could e'er forget.  
She sang of Christ, His pow'er to  
save,  
And I can hear her yet.

Her greatest song was deed, not  
word;  
Her life long since hath flown.  
The song she sang no longer heard,  
The melody lives on.

—Herschel H. Hobbs

Something of this thought is involved in Paul's words, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in

thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." (II Tim. 1:5)

As we consider these words let us note, first, the fact; second, the fabric; third, the force.

### Consider the Fact

". . . in thy grandmother . . . and thy mother . . . and . . . in thee . . ." These words suggest the fact of the continuity of life. The life of the mother lives on in the child.

This is certainly true in the physical realm. It is also true in the spiritual realm. Now this is the case whether the life be good or bad. One of the saddest notes in the Bible concerns Ahaziah, the son of Ahab and Jezebel. "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother." (I Kings 22:52)

But one of the brightest words is found in Proverbs 31. ". . . a virtuous woman . . . her price is far above rubies . . . her children arise up, and call her blessed . . ." (vv.10,28)

This latter statement could well be applied to Eunice, the mother of Timothy. We know very little about his father other than he was a Greek. Whether he was a Christian or not the Bible does not say. The natural inference is that he was not. If this be true the influence of Eunice on her son is all the more significant. Where the father is not a Christian, it is all the more important that the mother shall be one.

An old axiom reads, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." This is true whether it be for good or evil. In terms of the good one has said, "Next to God we are indebted to woman, first, for life itself, and then for making it worth living."

Louis De Beaufort adds a second thought. "The future of society is in the hands of mothers; if the world was lost through woman, she alone

can save it."

And I would add that her *saving* will be as she passes on through her children those principles and practices which are rooted in the will and way of God.

When told that it is God who makes us good, a little boy replied, "Yes, I know it is God, but mothers help a lot." Perhaps his immediate thought referred to discipline, sometimes painful to the child, but more so to the mother. But it is a discipline administered in love. By the discipline of correction and training, with the ties of her apron strings she links her children to those things which result in high living and holy purpose.

Unfortunately some mothers have rotten apron strings. Thus their children find no anchor in the storms of life. The mother who constantly says, "Do this," and never does it; or who says, "Don't do this," but does it herself, can scarcely expect to do other than to compound her own failures in the life of her child.

Josh Billings was fond of saying, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and walk there yourself, once in a while." This is good common sense, good religion, and good parent-child psychology.

Doubtless Eunice never read a book on this subject. But she could well have written one. And its title page might well have borne the words ". . . in thy grandmother . . . and thy mother . . . and . . . in thee." Now

### Note the Fabric

". . . the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in . . . thy mother Eunice . . ." The apron strings which provided the tie between Eunice and her son was an "unfeigned faith." At first glance this may seem to be a rather pious, vaporous statement. But a proper appraisal of the part which faith plays in life gives to it the strength of steel.

Someone has noted that there are only seventy-five words in the New Testament which are used more than two hundred times, including such common words as "and" and "the." But the word "faith" appears four hundred and ninety times. This is but one example of the importance of faith in the game of life.

A mother undergoing great trial said to me, "I do not see how a woman can be a mother without faith in God." And she cannot in the truest sense of that word. Without it she may provide the physical necessities of life for her family. But she is incapable of giving them the true essence of life itself. Nor can she live a maximum life on a minimum faith.

Rolla Q. Swisher reminds us that "faith focuses life." It focuses life on the things which really matter. It gears us to the task at hand. Furthermore, it provides light when we cannot see. It gives buoyancy for life's burdens, and an anchor in life's storms. It enables us to realize that while there are problems beyond our resources, there are none beyond the resources of God. And when life drives us to our knees, faith reminds us that we are in the perfect position for prayer.

Such was the fabric of the apron strings of Eunice. Her faith was centered in God as Creator and Provider, both of life's necessities and of life's salvation, both now and forever. And it found expression in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Note that Paul says that hers was an "unfeigned faith." The word rendered "unfeigned" means that which is beyond question or which cannot be judged. It was not merely a creed to be recited, but a way of life to be lived. And she so lived it before her neighbors that it was above criticism. It was such that it was reproduced in the life of her son.

Note that Paul does not say any-

thing about the other Christian virtues of hope and love. Their presence is so evident that such mention was not required. Hers was a faith which naturally evolved into these attributes so universally involved in true motherhood.

Faith without hope is unworthy of the name. And faith bereft of love is hardly likely to reproduce itself in the life of another.

It was a faith which was transmitted both by vocal teaching and silent witness. Doubtless Timothy often heard it expressed in the language of prayer. But more often it was for Eunice the silent aroma of the witness of her life.

The name Eunice means "well conquering." And she did conquer well. She led no armies, conducted no crusades, or wrought in the public arenas of her time. But she reigned under God as the queen of her home. And the sceptre of her reign was the unfeigned faith which she received from her mother and passed on to her son. No monuments were raised to her honor by a grateful populace. No writer inscribed her name in an earthly hall of fame. But God's Holy Spirit in words which can never be erased has carved her name among those heroines "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, [and] obtained promises . . ." (Heb. 11:33)

But her apron strings reach across the centuries as "God [has] . . . provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect [complete]" (11:40).

### **Consider the Force**

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in . . . Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." (II Timothy 1:3) Eunice had her Timothy and Timothy had his Eunice. But there must be many Eunices and many Timothys. So the apron strings

must be unbroken. They must continue to be the force of faith which binds together the bundle of life. This calls for a response on the part of both mother and child.

There is the responsibility which God has placed on every mother. While your children are, as we say, "underfoot," by the discipline of word and deed, you may guide them in the ways of righteousness. But the time will come when they are on their own feet. What then? Only as you instill into their lives the fabric of a Christ-centered faith may the invisible ties of your apron strings reach across time and space to guide them in the ways of God. Of course, through your prayers you can and should bind them to God's altar. But a proper performance of the duties of motherhood now will make your prayers more effective later on.

The Word of God tells us to "train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6) There are times when you may question these words. But they are God's words. If they seem to fail at times, the failure is with us, not with God. You should do well to search every word in this promise. But the promise is based upon an exacting condition. Fulfill the condition, and God will keep His promise. Do your part, and leave the rest to Him.

This word from Proverbs enjoins a responsibility on every mother's child. How often we fail. How often we disappoint our mothers, to say nothing of God. But the responsibility is still there. You may rebel at the apron strings, but they remain. And by God's grace and power they would bind you to the highest and holiest in life.

An oft told story involves a statesman caught up in the busy affairs of his life. The ties of his childhood still held him in the ways of righteous-

ness. But it so happened that he was scheduled to make one of the most important speeches of his life.

Suddenly he felt helpless and alone. So the day before, he closed his desk and journeyed back to his boyhood home to visit his aged mother.

With true motherly joy and love she welcomed him and fed him sumptuously.

Bedtime arrived. At his request his mother tucked him in bed as though he were a little child. But before she blew out the light he said, "Mother, I want you to do one more thing for me. I want to kneel at your knee and pray as I used to do."

There in the shadows of the attic room, kneeling at his mother's knee, the great man prayed. "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, Thee, Lord, my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray, Thee, Lord, my soul to take."

The apron strings held. And the next day he made the greatest speech of his life.

Mother's Day is a day of happy memories to some and present joys to others. Whether for you it is the one or the other, it can be one blessed experience for all. In this moment let us each entwine about his heart the apron strings of his mother. They are the strings of love, of hope, but most of all of faith. My prayer is that the faith which they symbolize may bind your heart to the Saviour.

If your mother is still among us tell her that her apron strings still hold, that they have bound you to the true essence of life both here and hereafter. If she is in the realms above, in prayer tell the Lord that they hold.

We are coming near to graduation time for hosts of young people. Education is much in the air: So be with us next week at this same time as I shall speak on "Full Heads and Empty Hearts."