LIKE FATHER; SO SON
By Mrs. Paul E. King

Norman Pratt tried to concentrate on what he was reading and shut out the voices of his wife and their teenage son, Chap. "You must go to Sunday school," Caroline was saying. "The sabbath was made for man to rest and to worship. You can't ignore God and His commands and expect to get by with it!"
"I'm not a kid anymore," Chap retorted. "Sunday school's for kids."

"Not so, Chap. Sunday school is for adults, young marrieds, teens, youth, and down to the toddlers. It's much like school, only one studies and learns all about the Bible. But, of course, those were unnecessary words; you know all about that. I've taken you from infancy."

"I'm not going today, Mom. I'll honor the sabbath by staying home and resting, like Dad. Besides, I have a dozen things or more that I can do."

"Get dressed," Caroline ordered sweetly.

Norman frowned. He remembered himself at sixteen seeking independence too. He'd been rebellious and resentful for a while, but he learned, eventually, that everybody at some time or other in his life has to obey rules.

"Go on to church, Caroline," he called from the comfortable reclining chair in the cozy, sunshine-filled family room. "Chap can stay home with me if he wants to. He's sixteen . . ." His statement trailed meaningfully.

He began reading again, but it was hard for him to concentrate.

Caroline came into the room a little while later. There was the faintest hint of dried tears showing in her eyes. "Dinner's in the oven," she said sweetly, softly. "Won't you come with me today, dear?"

Norman shook his head without looking up from the book he held in his hands. "I'm tired. I'll stay here and relax. It is a day of rest. Remember?"

"And a day for worship ping the Lord," she said gently. "We are not to forsake assembling ourselves together with the believers."

"I'll take the resting part. Go on to church. Enjoy yourself." He settled back against the soft, plush cushions and shut his eyes. He enjoyed the quiet of the early Sunday mornings. If only Caroline didn't remind him so much of his mother and father when she talked the way she did this morning.

Memory took him back to when he was a boy. Church was an every Sunday thing. A regular habit -- like brushing his teeth and washing his face
and ears was daily. Not only Sunday morning and night, but Wednesday night, as well. That was when the mid-week prayer and praise service was held. They all went. Everyone of the family. And to every revival service, too. There was never any arguing about going or not going either. It was a natural thing; a deeply-ingrained spiritual habit and happening. His parents always went, taking their entire family with them, no matter what.

He remembered once when he had rebelled against going. Only once! Never after that. His father had set him straight as to who was the head of the home and who was to take the lead in guiding the family into spiritual things.

Norman recalled how he had seethed (inwardly) for days. He felt deprived, wounded and hurt, knowing full well that he'd never be popular with the "in" crowd. And a few weeks later, when the same bunch of "in" fellows was caught stealing hub caps and car batteries, he had secretly thanked his dad for saving him from the sin and the wickedness of that crowd.

How many years ago that had been, Norman thought. Why, if his folks knew that he rarely ever attended church anymore, they'd nearly, if not altogether, die of heartache and grief. They had taught their children so carefully, so conscientiously, by word, precept and example, Norman had to admit. And now he was going contrary to everything good and noble that he had learned and been taught as a child. What's more, he was going a step beyond . . . or was it miles beyond? . . . and telling his son he need not go to church if he didn't want to go. How far he had drifted. How very, very far, he thought, shuddering at the facts. Cold, hard facts.

Chap came in with a transistor radio and slumped . . . slouched . . . on the sofa.

Norman looked up from his book. Chap's hair was longer than he remembered having seen it before. He looked . . . well, sort of tacky: faded blue jeans, shirt hanging out over his jeans, the buttons open almost halfway down, dirty, unlaced tennis shoes.

Norman sat suddenly straight up in his chair. It was as though he was seeing his son for the first time in many months. And he was shocked at what he was seeing. "Why don't you want to go to church anymore, Chap?" he asked, frowning. "I used to enjoy some of my Sunday school classes and the
young people's meetings. I even walked your mother home from church when we began courting. That's where we met, at church."

"You'd never know it now, Dad," Chap remarked, tuning around till he found a rock station. "And hardly anyone shows up for Young People's meetings anymore. In fact, I heard some of the fellows say they're talking about closing out the Sunday night services, too."

"They what?" Norman said loudly. "Why, that's ridiculous. Who ever heard of not having church on Sunday night! Why would they do such a thing?"

"So few people attend anymore."

"That's ridiculous!"

"Well, Dad, you never go, so I don't see why it should be of any great concern to you. We're in a changing world. The values today aren't like those when you were growing up."

"You can say that again! And now, I want you to turn that rock station off. None of that in our home."

"But, Dad, you listen to ball games and . . ."

"Chap, I said turn that off. No back talk. And I want you to get into some decent clothes. This is Sunday."

"So, what's the difference? We're not in church. These look all right for just you and me being here."

"Maybe for you, but not for me. When did you start looking so tacky, Chap?"

"Tacky! You call these clothes tacky! You should see the real ones!"

"I don't care to see them. Never. And so long as you live in this house and beneath this roof, you will never again look like I am seeing you now. Tomorrow, first thing, you get your hair cut. And I mean cut!"
"Aw, Dad, what are you trying to do -- make me some kind of speckled bird? You don't go to church; so why should you care how I look? So long as I'm not dirty I . . ."

"No more, Chap. You heard me," and Norman left the room. If he'd ever talked back to his dad the way Chap did to him, he'd have been sore for a week, he knew.

Norman felt restless. He walked outside to think. His neighbor to the west of him was washing his car. The son was mowing the lawn. Two doors farther was a repeat performance, with the addition of clothes fluttering from a clothesline, drying in the warm sunshine. Still farther down, to the west of him, he heard the hum of other lawn mowers in action. To the east as well. And across the street, either mowing and/or working in the lawns, washing, waxing and polishing cars and hanging clothes out to dry. One neighbor was even painting his house!

"Heathens!" Norman muttered the word aloud as a church bell pealed joyous notes from its tower-belfry. The sound touched something deep within -- like a lost chord, suddenly found and very precious and priceless. Freedom! Yes, he was blest and privileged to live in a land where he could still worship God, if he chose to do so, without being spied upon and possibly killed for his faith. Freedom! What a priceless gift. And he had been abusing it. Trampling it underfoot, actually. And he was encouraging his son to do the same thing.

It shook Norman from head to foot. What would it be like to live in a country where there were no churches? No places to worship? No religious freedom?

Tears stung his eyes. No night church services? Was he dreaming, or had Chap said it? Why, that would be sinful. He couldn't imagine such a thing. Had Russia's irreligious ignominy begun like that, with people being totally unconcerned to the point where the Sunday night services were the first to be dropped? Then, later, the Sunday morning services?

The bells stopped ringing. Norman's heart smote him. He had no right to complain, he knew. He was one of the many who were guilty. If every Sunday's service . . . or mid-week's . . . had depended upon him and his faithfulness, there would long ago have been no church even. There wouldn't
have been money to buy one, in the first place . . . his absence would have cast a vote in the negative direction. Neither would there have been money to call a pastor and pay his salary. On and on the list went. With each new revelation, the man felt a dagger of conviction flood his soul. He was "voting" to close down the churches, not by casting a ballot, perhaps, but by his absence.

Who was it that was fighting the holy war against sin, pornography, immorality, crime, violence, et cetera? And who was it that was making their voice heard in the schools for decent text books and in the community for moral standards? The Christians. The Church. That's who. They were the "salt of the earth."

Quite suddenly, he remembered scripture verses which he had memorized from Sunday school boyhood days, and he knew now that it was because of the Bible and its frankly-plain teaching that he had never gotten into any serious trouble during all his growing-up years.

Norman was trembling. He had strayed far away from his one wonderful, God-given experience of full salvation, without a doubt. But a man didn't need to stay that way. No indeed. There was a way back. And he knew which path to take -- just what to do. The road of repentance led onto the highway of peace and joy, not only for him, but for Chap as well. He had failed his son, let him down where spiritual strength and courage were vital and necessary. And now Chap thought he could do as he pleased, when he pleased, and how he pleased.

He saw where their son needed special guidance now. No way could he give Chap the reins and allow him to make his own choices and important decisions. Chap needed guidance -- from a godly father. Today . . . this morning even . . . Norman would see that Chap had a truly born-again father to look up to, to emulate and follow. Only this time, it would be the Heaven Road.

He hurried back into the house. "Get dressed, Chap," he ordered. "We're going to church."

"I don't want to go, Dad!"
"I didn't ask what you wanted to do, Son. Get dressed. We've missed a great part of the Sunday school already."

A short while later, they entered the church. Norman spotted Caroline up near the front. He walked down the aisle and he and Chap slipped into the pew beside her. She smiled warmly, dabbed at tears forming in her eyes, then reached over and squeezed Norman's hand.

"I'm going to the altar, Caroline," he said brokenly.

"Now, honey?"

"Yes, now," he said, weeping and getting to his feet and walking toward the altar.

Caroline followed her husband. Then Chap got out of his seat. In one great rush, he fell over the altar, beside his father.