

God's Design for the Family

In this evening's message we want to see what the Bible says about the duties of the various members of the family to each other and to the Lord.

The family is the foundational institution of society ordained by God. It is constituted by marriage and is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood or adoption. Marriage is not a custom that gradually came to be accepted during early human history. God originated the family as an institution at the time of the beginning of the human race. Marriage is a God-appointed relationship, and it is from this union of man with woman that the family derives.

Scripture defines family as follows:

"And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. And the man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.'" (Genesis 2:22-24)

Based on the above Scripture, our primary definition of a true family is "one male and one female joined in marriage, with or without kids." We believe that children are an extension of the family, and welcome members of it, but they do not make a family.

The nearest thing to Heaven on Earth is the Christian family and home, where husband and wife, parents and children, live together in love and peace, devoted to God and to each other. By way of contrast, the nearest thing to Hell on Earth is the ungodly home, broken by sin and iniquity, where parents quarrel and bicker and separate, and where children are given over to the forces of wickedness to be brought up with scarcely any training at all.

The first five books of the Bible present to us this early experience of Israel as they discovered their history of what God had done through their ancestors. And it describes this special relationship, a relationship we call a covenantal relationship, because there is an actual agreement between God and humanity, and that is talked about in the first five books of the Bible. And this relationship, this covenant, this agreement talks about how God makes certain commitments to us and how we make certain commitments back to God. There are many things we can learn from this early relationship, 3,500 years old, a relationship between God and His people. And this part of the covenant that we are going to read from Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 to 9, these verses talk specifically about our response as families to what God has offered to us. So let us give keen attention and hear the words of Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 to 9.

4. Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah: 5. and thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. 6. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; 7. and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. 8. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes. 9. And thou shalt write them upon the doorposts of thy house, and upon thy gates.

The word “home” likely takes your mind back across the years, and for some the mind goes across hundreds of miles of space – to the spot which will be forever hallowed in your memories among all places on Earth. You are reminded of the place where you grew up as a boy, or as a girl, playing around the yard with brothers and sisters and neighborhood children, and where you sat around the old range stove on a winter evening with your mom and dad and the rest of the family. There are several things about that old home-place which are not true about any other spot on Earth, as far as you are concerned.

Families, for good or for ill, have a phenomenal power over our lives. Some come from a good family and they have responded well to what God has done through their family. And then we have a certain resilience that no matter what life throws against us we can survive, and we can prosper, and we can even thrive, because of the things that were built into us through those years, through those experiences and those relationships we have in the family. And if a family is really bad, then we can spend the rest of our lives trying to heal from those wounds. So it is really important for us to be serious about what it means to be parents.

Forming a healthy family is important work. There are some things that God only does through the family and so I think it is important that we recognize that there are some things that God wants to do through parents that He is not going to accomplish by having someone else drag the children screaming and kicking to the assembly. Please do not misunderstand me! Attending the assembly is important, for us all to be gathered together, but we are here to support the family in what it is doing. You can see from the verses we just read that there is a central responsibility of the family for what God is doing in our lives. Families are incredibly important and God created it to be that way and that is good. That is part of the special thing that God is doing through you: Shaping your children, giving them skills, teaching them about relationships, and tempering who they are as people. That is all part of your role. And part of your role, too, is that every parent is an evangelist. The parents are the primary evangelists that God has given to the life of your children. Now the church can help. Great youth events can help. A good Sunday school can help, but you as parent are still God's primary spokesman to your child. This is an important part of life.

God is pro-family. Consider the following evidence:

It was God who established the family, as we have already touched upon. God created Adam and the universe. Once His creation was completed, He said, ***“It is not good for the man [Adam] to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him [Eve].”*** (Genesis 2:18 [NASB])

Please note three things:

- 1) This is the first time in the creation account that God says something was, ***“not good.”*** He used this phrase when referring to Adam's aloneness.
- 2) Adam had a perfect relationship with God, the Father. But God still said it was “not good” that Adam should be alone.
- 3) God created Adam by divine choice, not by divine error. And He created him to need a significant relationship with someone other than himself. It was part of God's pre-created order.
- 4) As a result God created Eve. Therefore, the family was God's idea, not man's.

God commanded Adam and Eve to multiply on the Earth. God said in Genesis, ***“...Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the Earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the Earth”*** (Genesis 2:28 NASB). God established marriage and now establishes the parenting mandate. He later gives more detail in Deuteronomy 6:7. Today we believe that God still wants us to multiply families throughout the Earth as evidenced by New Testament instructions regarding marriage and parenting.

God wants us to minister to the whole person, which includes all of their individual needs, especially starting with the family. The family is hurting, and Christ throughout Scripture actively sought to relieve the pain and suffering of others (John 2:1-3, John 11:34-44, and Mark 5:19, to name just a few).

Christ's disciples valued the family and ministered to it. Peter and Paul, two writers of the New Testament, admonished the church to reach the family (1 Peter 3, Ephesians 5:22-6:4).

God chose the church to reveal Himself to mankind. God chose the concept of family relationships to communicate His relationship to us. For example, ***“Father”*** in its purest form, is how God describes His relationship with us, and He calls us His children. Jesus is referred to as God's only begotten ***“Son.”*** The church is called the ***“Bride of Christ.”*** And believers in Scripture are regarded as “brothers and sisters in Christ.” The concept of family is well evidenced in the Bible, God's holy word.

The first responsibility in parenting is to model what it means to have a God-centered life; to model it even before we speak it. This is a reality check. You know, no amount of talking, no amount of bringing people to church, no amount of paying high tuition to send your kids to good school is going to make up for the fact that you do not model what it means to be a Christian family, if indeed you are not. Now, we can look at some obvious things, such as the parents who send their kids off to go to Sunday school and to church and then they go over to McDonald's for coffee. They are modeling something. They are modeling the fact that church and religious things are for kids and when they grow up this is what they will be doing. Now, I cannot preach to those people because they are at McDonald's right now.

But even those of us who are actually here at the assembly, we have got to think about what we are modeling, not right now, but what are we modeling on Tuesday at 7:30 in the evening, about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, to follow Him wholeheartedly. What do we do at 6:00 in the morning? What do they see of us when we encounter a difficulty, how do we handle that? What is our response? How do we approach God? How do we approach each other in those times of stress? We are modeling what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Do they see us pray? Do they hear us pray? Do we pray together? Do they see us study the word? Do they understand that we see ourselves and our story as disciples, as parents, as being inside of the big story of what God is doing in the world? What do we model to our kids?

The stability of the church, as well as society at large, is dependent upon the stability of the family. Look at 1 Timothy 3:4-5 and Ephesians 4:29-32. Whatever else may be said about the home, it is the bottom line of the life, the anvil upon which attitudes and convictions are hammered out. It is the place where life's bills come due, the single most influential force in our earthly existence. It is at home, among "family" members, that we come to terms with circumstances. It is here life makes up its mind. Even eldership qualifications are based, in part, on how the candidate manages his own home (1 Timothy 3:4-5).

The family today is in desperate need of help. Consider the following staggering statistics:

One out of every three children is born out of wedlock.

One out of every two marriages ends in divorce, including Christian marriages.

One out of every three pregnancies ends in abortion.

One million teenage girls became pregnant out of wedlock.

Five hundred thousand of those girls will abort their babies.

Of all the 14-years-old girls alive today, 40 percent will become pregnant by their 19th birthday.

60 percent of all church-involved teenagers are sexually active.

One out of every four students drop out of high school.

66 percent of American high school seniors have used illegal drugs.

We have 90 million functional illiterates in our society.

In spite of these negative statistics, there is still much hope for the family because of God's word and the church. God has answers if we search for them with a willing heart. The greatest place for families to be healed and brought to wholeness is in the church.

Charles Colson writes, "The family, the most basic unit of civilized society, is the institution that may well be under the greatest attack in society today. Unless we insist on counseling and training before marriage and then provide a full range of services to build and strengthen the family thereafter, the church cannot say it is making disciples and fulfilling the Great Commission" (Colson, 1992, page 289). The church can be the best place for families to find help.

Carey and I do not advocate some of the popular theories about child rearing. Many of these theories are based on modern psychology and do not use the word of God as their standard. Here are our guiding principles:

- 1) Good parenting does not require perfection, but it seeks perfection.
- 2) Good parenting power is limited. Parents are responsible for their young children's behavior, but their overall lifetime influence is limited.
- 3) Good parenting is good relating. A parent must provide a warm, caring atmosphere in the home. It is important for the parent to understand that love and discipline properly administered are one and the same thing. They are **NOT** mutually exclusive concepts, which, unfortunately, I have heard too many times, even by those who are members of the Lord's church. I do not expect any of you to take my word for that. However, I fully expect you to accept God's word on it: ***"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by Him. For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives."*** (Hebrews 12:5-6 [RSV])
- 4) Good parenting strives to produce a healthy self-concept without over-indulging the child. We need to teach children who they are before God: Yes,

indeed, they are valuable, but they are also deeply in need of Christ. Teaching children Who God is, what He has done for them, and who they are in Christ, will motivate them to live according to God's truth.

5) Good parenting strives to produce self-discipline. It is important to teach the children to exercise good wisdom of their own, and to see the consequences their actions may produce.

6) Good parenting instills a love for virtue.

7) Good parenting develops sensitivity to others.

8) Good parenting is not child-centered. Godly parenting involves helping children to understand that they are part of a family team, not the center of the universe. Families should strive towards activities that foster interdependence rather than independence.

9) Good parenting means the parents love each other, and the children know it. Studies have demonstrated that it is more important for the child's well-being to know his or her parents love each other, even more so than knowing the parents love the child. And this is exactly as God would have it: God first, spouse second, and then the children.

10) Good parenting includes parental authority. While growing up, a child is to be taught to obey his parents the first time. This parental authority is to be exercised within the loving constraints of the Bible, expressed through kindness.

11) Good parenting requires, when possible, both parents.

12) Good parenting considers the temperament and personality of the child.

13) Good parenting includes understanding man's sinfulness, and works to remove foolishness that is bound up in the sinful ways of the world.

14) Good parenting brings the child to the standard of God's word.

15) Good parenting requires character development.

16) Good parenting starts early, even before the birth of children.

17) Good parenting means not seeking to be your child's friend, but seeking to be his or her parent. Your child already has or will have friends. What he or she needs now from you is a parent. And by remembering this, when that child becomes older, you will be his or her friend.

18) Good parenting is always having both parents on the same page with their tolerance levels. Parents should **NEVER** play the “good cop, bad cop” routine with each other or the children, for this will cause **MAJOR** upheaval in the home as the child will instinctively learn to manipulate the parents against each other. If Dad says no, then Mom also says no, too, and vice versa