

# *Christian's* **Expositor** Journal

## **GOD'S WILL FOR THE FAMILY**

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## **GOD'S WILL FOR THE FAMILY—PROBLEMS WE FACE**

*Mike Criswell*

Nothing paints scenes on the canvas of the mind as vividly as the word “home.” Nothing tickles the ivories producing a melody of smiles more than “home.” Like a child who pulls at his mother’s apron, nothing tugs at the heartstrings more than sweet memories of “home.” Home is where the heart is. Home is where the mind is at ease. Home is where the body is at rest. Truer words were never spoken than those by the poet George Moore: “A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it.” The nineteenth century bard John Howard Payne put it this way, “Amid pleasures and palaces though we may roam, Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” How lovely the thought that though the environs be modest and the fare meager, the soul is nourished to richness within the walls of home.

The Bible says much about the home. It tells of wonderful homes like those of Zacharias and Elisabeth who “were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Lk. 1:6). But it also tells of woeful homes like those of Ahaziah, the son of Ahab who provoked the Lord to anger by walking in “the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.” In characteristic honesty, Scripture portrays the faith and follies of its characters and leaves the reader to learn well its lessons. Jesus also speaks of home. On one occasion He wistfully notes that He has no earthly dwelling. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Lk. 9:58). On another occasion He underscores the blessedness of salvation as He tells the story of a prodigal who, after wallowing in the slough of despond, came to himself and returned home to a father’s loving embrace (Lk. 15:20). And on

yet another poignant occasion He tells His bewildered disciples of His own departure to prepare them an eternal home (Jn. 14:1-3).

We all want strong homes, but so often the place that should rightfully boast of stalwart strength is in reality the place where foundations are crumbling. It may be that families have always struggled. Even in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had their problems as Adam abdicated his leadership role and followed Eve in eating of the forbidden fruit. Likewise it was within the first family that jealousy reared its ugly head and Cain slew Abel. But in spite of our forefather's failures there yet resides a spark of hope within every husband and wife that somehow their home will be different. Somehow, in spite of reality, the young bride and groom idealistically dream that their marriage will beat the odds. Somehow they believe they will find total fulfillment in each other. Somehow, the young bride believes, her prince's armor will never tarnish. Somehow, the young groom believes, his princess bride will never outgrow her wedding dress.

As we look at the topic of marriage, however, there is one overarching fact that must be understood: although our spouse may be superb, though he may be a physical paradigm of perfection, though she may be the epitome of exquisiteness, we married a sinner! Marriage is not God's institution because humans are perfect, but because they are imperfect. God did not give marriage to Adam because he was complete, but because he was incomplete. It was in Adam's state of "aloneness" that God gave him a helper (Gen. 2:18). And so as we approach this study of the family we must remember that we are all failures. Husbands must learn to dwell with their imperfect wives with understanding (1 Pet. 3:7). Wives must work to develop love and respect for their flawed husbands (Tit. 2:4). These requisites do not come naturally or else families would have no struggles. Love, respect, and understanding must be developed. This happens as men and women, husbands and wives, align themselves with the manual of God's Word.

### **God's Definition of Family**

It is interesting and yet shocking when one looks at American culture today. We live in a time of great change and social upheaval. And although in the present decade it has taken on a much quieter revolution than that of the 1960's, it is no less radical. In the 60's America faced a culture of drugs and free love. Today we face a culture of abortion and sexual perversion. Having

sown the wind we now reap the whirlwind that Paul warned of in Romans 1:27: “Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due” (NKJV).

Paul’s warning, however, brings up an interesting question: What is God’s definition of the family? In popular culture today the term “family” can mean just about anything one wants it to mean. Heather can have two mommies, as Leslea Newman’s pro-lesbian children’s book suggests. Or, as Linda De Haan’s illustrated schoolbook explains, a king can spurn all the lovely maidens of his realm choosing rather to enter into gay nuptials with another king.

God’s Word is clear about what constitutes a family. God’s definition succinctly put is “one man, one woman for life, and, if God so blesses, children.” This is the only scriptural and socially workable definition of “family.” To accept any other definition eventually destroys the foundations of human society. We may discuss and debate exceptions to God’s marriage law (Mt. 5:32; 19:9; 1 Cor. 7), but His general law never changes. The institution of marriage is based on the essence of our biological and gender differentiated composition. It should be obvious that two men or two women are unsuitable for marriage. Thus Jesus quotes Moses and says, “He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ “and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’ ” (Mt. 19:4-5, NKJV).

### **The Problems that Modern Marriages Face**

It does not take a trained psychologist to see that the family in twenty-first century America is in trouble. As a society we no longer protect the very institution that has served to under gird this country for over two centuries. Statisticians tell us that marriages are failing at an alarming rate of somewhere near fifty percent—up from 10 percent in 1910. The United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy of any industrialized nation on the face of the earth. Twenty percent of teens aged twelve to fourteen are sexually active. America has nearly a million births out of wedlock each year, costing taxpayers over seven billion dollars annually. Court cases to force America to legitimize homosexuality and make same-sex unions lawful rage. And physical abuse and domestic violence bring uncivil war to the nuclear family.

Because society as a whole is godless, the above picture may not startle us. The sad truth, however, is that “Christian families” are not above the fray. Even those of us in the church sometimes feel the exact same tremors that quake secular relationships. Obviously a return to God is the only answer for Christian families. If we base our marriages on strong Christian principles, the church of tomorrow will be better equipped to accomplish its mission of evangelism. In fact, perhaps it is time to evangelize ourselves by “training up our children in the way they should go” (Prov. 22:6). If by strengthening our families for one generation we could keep each of our kids in the church, we might need to build bigger buildings. Evangelism spreads the gospel far and wide but it begins at home.

Even though godly families often struggle with the same problems as their ungodly counterparts in the world, Christians have the tools to overcome these problems. Christian families have divinely-provided resources to not only survive but to blossom among the thorns of life. Hopefully a Christian family will never face problems that stem from immorality such as those noted above. However, every family will face problems no matter how dedicated they are to God. Reality demands that we identify and address some of these problems.

### **The Five-Eyed Monster**

There lurks within most families a potential menace known as the “Five Eyed Monster.” Actually this demarcation is a bit of a tongue-in-cheek word play on homonyms. What we are really talking about are marriage difficulties that begin with the letter “I.” The five items that will be identified are potential hazards for most couples. The good news, however, is that these five areas can actually be areas of tremendous spiritual growth when properly tamed and maintained.

### **The “I” of Intimacy**

Whether we like to admit it or not, many problems between married couples arise over sexual intimacy. Even the unmarried Apostle Paul realized this when he wrote to the Corinthians that husbands and wives were not to withhold sexual gratification from each other except by mutual consent (1 Cor. 7:5). As we will see later on in this study, human sexuality is a gift from God. Within

the confines of marriage it is not only lawful but sanctioned by the Heavenly Father (Heb. 13:4). We are sexual creatures. We need sex not only to procreate but to consummate that relationship which, though made on earth, is bound in heaven (Mt. 19:6). It is part of who we are. For most people, abstinence from sex is paramount to denying oneself one of the most basic biological needs. Jesus realizes this when He identifies only a select group of humans who could live their lives as eunuchs (Mt. 19:12).

It is not within the scope of this article to specifically deal with various sexual difficulties that arise in most marriages. We simply raise the issue to alert the reader to the potential problems that often come from a lack of understanding of sex. Sometimes husbands and wives unintentionally “defraud” each other of sexual gratification because they have unequal sex drives. In young newlyweds, often the man finds that his needs are much greater than the woman’s. As time passes, this imbalance may switch, leaving the woman unfulfilled. In any event, when both partners love the Lord and when both work together with high respect and patience for each other, sexual difficulties can be tempered and both partners can grow together in the Lord both spiritually and sexually. Yes, sexual growth is part of our spiritual journey. The key to success is found in Paul’s admonition that the husband’s body belongs to the wife and the wife’s body belongs to the husband (1 Cor. 7:4). We are not our own (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

The most serious problems that arise in intimacy, however, are those which arise from deliberate and intentional acts of sexual misconduct. If, for example a husband is involved in pornography he not only commits a sin (Mt. 5:28), but also he destroys the legitimate sexual desire he should be sharing with his wife. Furthermore, when his wife discovers his sin, it often irrevocably damages future intimacy. God assures forgiveness but He also assures consequences. With that in mind, each husband and wife must realize that their sexual purity outside the bedroom is just as important as the sanctity of sex in the marriage bed. Sexual purity begins long before the marriage vows have been said. Young men and women who date or court each other must keep themselves pure for their future mate. Sex is not a toy. It is not a plaything that can be trifled with. Human sexuality is as deeply a part of us as our soul. When we engage our sexuality we put into motion emotions that naturally circumvent other rational processes. When a young man lights the fires of sexuality before marriage he will find himself burned by its flame.

Promiscuity before marriage clips the wings of a marriage that otherwise would soar to heights of ecstasy.

### **The "I" of Income**

Statistics demonstrate that most marital difficulties are in some way connected to money problems. Perhaps too little money leads to unbearable stress in a relationship. Perhaps overspending by one spouse or both spouses tosses the marriage on the rocks of financial ruin. Perhaps delinquency on the husband's part in providing a living destroys the relationship. Or perhaps, among the endless other money difficulties, a simple lack of maturity results in poor management and lack of budgeting. Every family needs a budget!

When it comes to marriage it is time we teach our children that they cannot live on love alone. Obviously it takes a modicum of money. Many times our kids marry at the most financially vulnerable time in their lives. Perhaps they have education costs or perhaps their careers are struggling to take off. Or maybe neither partner even knows what they want to do when they grow up! These are not insurmountable problems, but they do indeed pose financial stress that can destroy a marriage. It is somewhat ironic that a young woman typically leaves her father's home when he is at the height of his earning potential only to marry a man who is at his lowest career earnings. Naturally this can be the breeding ground for conflict. If a woman has grown accustomed to having daddy provide all the fineries of life, she may become disenchanted with her poor struggling husband who has trouble making ends meet.

Marriage is more than falling in love and living happily ever after. It is a business partnership. It is a joint venture in the economics of love. We must teach our young married couples to work hard and to learn to live on what they make. Keeping up with the Jones by "whipping out the plastic" is a tempting proposition, but in the end it is a recipe for disaster. In general the Bible does not approve of Christians declaring bankruptcy.

### **The "I" of In-laws**

There is an old adage that if you want to know what your wife will look like when she gets old then take a look at her mother. Obviously this was not true for Adam, and perhaps this is an overstatement since the genes of both parents flow in our veins. The real issue, however, is not what we become because



of our genes but what we become because of our God. By “kissing the Son” all of us have the potential of changing our toad-ugly natures into those of the Prince of Peace (Ps. 2:12).

In-laws, however, are indeed a major factor in every marriage. The adage cannot be overlooked which states, “When a man marries a wife, he marries her family.” When in-laws perform their proper role of “distant support group” they are a blessing. However, when a mother or mother-in-law gets too involved in their children’s marriage it can be an apocalyptic nightmare. God knew what He was doing when He said that a man would leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife (Gen. 2:24). Within that divine plan we find the essence of all that humans need to live a fulfilled life: freedom and stability. By leaving his father and mother, a man spreads his wings and finds the freedom to grow. By cleaving (literally, “gluing”) to his spouse, a man finds the roots and stability necessary to withstand the lonely storms of life.

The practical difficulty with in-laws presents itself in subtle ways. Perhaps, for example, the husband’s family has always spent Thanksgiving or Christmas together—but so too have the wife’s family. Now that the marriage has taken place a decision must be negotiated. Will the couple take turns each year about at which in-laws to visit? Will they begin their own new tradition and risk angering both sets of parents? The problem can be a thorny one. Emotions often run high, and many holidays are forever tainted by compromise. Perhaps the best advice could be directed to the in-laws themselves. In-laws need to respect the decision of their newlyweds and refrain from acting younger than the new bride and groom!

### **The “I” of Infants**

“Lo children are a heritage of the Lord,” said the Psalmist in 127:3. But these little bundles of joy can also turn parents into basket cases. With the blessings of heaven comes the necessity to endure those blessings. Children can swell our souls, but they can also deflate our dreams. Children often put unanticipated stress on a marriage. Perhaps a young couple has grown accustomed to living on two incomes and now they suddenly realize that the wife will need to stay home and raise the kids. Or perhaps the husband has grown accustomed to basking in the warmth of his wife’s unmitigated affection only to find the one in the “high chair” has knocked him off his pedestal. In fact, as

well it should be, the infant in the “car seat” sometimes ends up in the “driver’s seat!”

With God’s help and by working together, a husband and wife can overcome any challenge that children present. However, it will take sacrifice and diligence on the part of the husband and wife as they learn to pacify the needs of the child as well as each other.

### **The “I” of Ego**

Too many of us enter marriage with the expectation that our needs and wants will be totally met. We believe it should all go “My way.” Unfortunately “My Way” only resonates with crooners. Spouses are not typically impressed with such a mentality. The only way to really make a marriage successful is to divorce ourselves from our wants and reconcile ourselves to the needs of our spouse. In every relationship there is naturally a giver and a taker. The goal of a healthy relationship is to outgive the other. When a husband, for example, becomes a “servant head” he is well on his way to leading his family in paths of righteousness. Biblical submission is in reality the crucifixion of self and as such applies to both husband and wife (1 Pet. 5:5; Eph. 5:21).

### **Conclusion**

In this first article we have noticed at least five “problems” that families often face as they strive to grow in Christ. In part 2 we will look at four “purposes” for marriage. God’s design for marriage is intricately woven into the framework of who we are as human beings. He created us, and He knows what we need. When we use God’s Book as our guide, the problems of marriage are minimized and God’s divine purpose for marriage shines through.

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## **GOD'S WILL FOR THE FAMILY—THE PURPOSES OF MARRIAGE**

*Mike Criswell*

In part 1 of this article we looked at some of the problems the Christian family faces. In part 2 we want to look at some of the reasons God instituted the family. As we shall see, God's divine plan provides for mankind's every need.

### **Partnership**

Within moments of creating Adam, or at least on the very same day, God determined that Adam needed a companion. In Genesis 2:8 God says, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (NKJV). While there is little doubt that humanly speaking Adam was more perfect than anyone who ever walked the face of the earth, he still was incomplete. It is a paradox that Adam can be described with the terms "incomplete perfection." And yet this is exactly the case. God obviously created Adam without blemish in soul and body, for as yet sin had not entered the garden; nevertheless, when God looked at His own creation He saw it lacking. It was incomplete, perfectly incomplete. It needed a crowning touch. Adam needed a partner.

As we noted in part 1 of our study, God created Adam and Eve to be compatible partners in every way. Spiritually they were both pure and compatible. Mentally they were each other's equal. Though stronger as a male, Adam found completeness in Eve as a helper. Even sexually God graced the first couple with compatible bodies so that they might multiply and replenish the earth. Their unique compatibility is seen in Adam's statement, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23). In a most literal way Adam and Eve

were one in substance, from the same flesh, and yet in a very real way they would soon become one again as they sexually joined themselves together as husband and wife.

There are some astounding conclusions that can be drawn from the creation account, not the least of which is that although a husband and wife are partners, they are different. Although they are alike, they are dissimilar. Too often these differences do the very reverse of what God intended. God intended our differences as husband and wife, male and female, to be that which brings us together and causes us to depend on each other. Instead, they often drive a wedge between us that destroys the family.

If men and women were exactly alike one of us would not be needed. But therein is the beauty. We are both needed. We both need to learn to respect and accept each other for what we are. We have different roles to play as men and women. Neither of those roles is more important or of greater value. They are equal—equal but different. Society with its male chauvinism on one hand and its radical feminism on the other hand has missed the point. Because of sin men overlook the fact that God made Adam and Eve to be “co-regents” in the Garden (Gen. 1:28). God told “them” to reign over His creation. In their arrogance, men often usurp the bounds of “headship.” In return, women are tempted to respond like Eve when she wrested the leadership from her husband and led in the Fall. God addressed this phenomenon in what theologians call “the curse” as found in Genesis 3:14-19. After the Fall, Eve’s desire would be to dominate her husband. He in turn would respond oppressively and rule over her (Gen. 3:16). Thankfully the “curse” is reversed in Christ. The Apostle Paul shows in Ephesians 5 that through loving headship and submissive helpership a man and woman (husband and wife) can once again find paradise in Christ.

The distinctions between husband and wife, male and female, often perplex newlyweds. Young men marry and expect their new brides to want the exact same things they want. If he is a bookworm, he may expect her to relish trips to the library as much after marriage as she seemed to before marriage. If he is an outdoorsman, he may assume that she will be happy with a camping trip honeymoon complete with 5 a.m. fishing trips, sleeping bags, and no running water. When he finds out that she had in mind a Marriott in Tahiti, he may be flabbergasted. During their engagement he thought she

liked the day trips into the mountains. He thought that her squeals at seeing a worm on her fishing line were part of the act to make him feel manly.

While the above scenario might seem humorous, such is not far from what some couples experience. Often the husband just assumes his wife agrees completely with his wishes so he never bothers to consult her. Such a view not only demonstrates a low respect for her as a partner, but also it shows the height of communication problems. Husbands and wives need to talk to each other, make decisions together, and co-rule over the family together. They are partners, and they need each other not only sexually but mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Before leaving the point of “partnership” we should briefly notice some ways men and women are different. Besides understanding the obvious physical differences, men need to realize that women are typically much more “relational” than they are. Women are much more in tune to what others are feeling. Men see the face but women have a unique ability of seeing the soul. Men tend to be content with keeping conversation on a casual level. Women may want to dig a little deeper. These different qualities in men and women should not necessarily be seen as weaknesses; rather, they complement each other. They are what make men well suited to fight life’s battles and what make women loving mothers, able to see the hearts of their children.

Finally, generally speaking, men are much more linear in their thinking than their wives. The husband may see the family vacation, for example, as a mission to be accomplished. Arriving at the destination takes precedent over enjoying the trip. Covering 700 road miles in one day may be more preferable to the man than making bathroom stops and enjoying the scenery. This stands in contrast to women who typically are more process oriented. Wives are much more content to stop at a quaint gift shop or to let the kids and dog out to romp for an hour before stuffing themselves back into the car.

These differences do not just affect family vacations. They impact the way men and women respond to every aspect of their marriage. Even a couple’s sexual intimacy may fall prey to the complexities of their unique makeup. The wife, for example, may need conversation and time to relax after a hard day before she warms up to her husband intimately. This is especially true if they have had a fight earlier in the day. A husband, however, may see no inconsistency in dismissing his hard day at work as he heads toward the bedroom. He

may be oblivious as to why his wife is unwilling to follow and why she ends up feeling used.

When men and women understand going into the marriage that they are “wired” differently and that they must work together to find compatibility, they will have a happier marriage. If, however, a man or a woman thinks his partner is the mirror image of himself, their marriage will never reflect the glory of God.

### **Procreation**

It is obvious from at least 6,000 years of human history that procreation is part of the marriage experience. While procreation is not the only reason for marriage, it has been from the beginning one of the primary reasons. To Adam and Eve God said, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Later we find that “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain . . . And she again bare his brother Abel” (Gen. 4:1, KJV). At this point the species was well on its way to fulfilling God’s command.

Although I did not fully develop this idea in the previous article, procreation can indeed be a blessing and a trial in marriage. Each couple must determine what they believe to be God’s will when it comes to bearing children, how many children they will have, and even if they will or will not use birth control methods. As may be readily seen from the stance of the Catholic Church and the stance of certain conservative evangelical groups, some interpret God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” as prohibiting birth control of any kind. Other groups see this positive injunction as having its initial application to Adam and Eve and believe that each Christian couple has the right and responsibility to control this part of their relationship just as they would control any other part of their relationship.

With that said, however, it is the opinion of this writer that couples should seek pre-marital counseling on this and other important marriage issues that ultimately arise after “I do” has been said. At the very least, couples should speak to one another about how many children they want, what plans they have in raising their children, and perhaps what parenting styles they want to implement along the way. Furthermore, the issue of “birth control” needs to be discussed in a mature and rational way. Medical science provides a host of contraceptive methods that may or may not be options for Christian couples. Certainly abortion as a convenient out is not an option for Christians under

any conditions. However, what many young couples do not realize is that some “birth control pills” are abortive in nature and work by destroying the female egg after fertilization. Since this writer believes that life begins at conception, any method of birth control is sinful that results in a fertilized egg being intentionally aborted. If a couple seeks to use birth control they should consult not only with Scripture but should speak to their physician who should be able to recommend appropriate non-abortive options.

I realize that the above paragraph is controversial and sensitive in nature. Through prayer and contemplation of God’s Word, however, each couple can arrive at sincere, rational decisions based on good judgment and godly principles.

### **Pleasure**

While marriage is certainly designed for procreation, it is also intended for pleasure. Like most of God’s blessings, however, Satan has taken sex and twisted it from one extreme to the other. From the hedonist promiscuity of the immoral to the equally radical view that sex is only for procreation, Satan has tainted the beauty and balance of sex. At various junctures of human history, even sex between a husband and wife has been viewed as incompatible with true spirituality. Augustine, the fourth century Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, took the position that sex was a necessary evil. He reluctantly agreed that sex could be performed within marriage but that it should not be enjoyed. Of Adam and Eve he says, “Perish the thought, that there should have been any unregulated excitement, or any [excitement so great that they would ever] need to resist desire!” (Augustine, **c. duas epist, Pelag. I 34, 17**). It has been rightfully stated that no religious thinker since Paul has influenced Christendom more than Augustine. No doubt Augustine’s radical view that sex was evil stemmed from his cultic Manichean background which held that “flesh” was evil and thus activities associated with the flesh were also evil. Unfortunately, in spite of his impressive influence on Christianity, Augustine was wrong. Unfortunately his position became the springboard for even more radical views. Tertullian was so repulsed by sex that he publicly renounced his own sexual relationship with his wife and taught that sexual intercourse drives out the Holy Spirit. Women, he declared, are “the devil’s door: through them Satan creeps into men’s hearts and minds and works his wiles for their spiritual destruction. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century showed little improvement in attitude, saying, “Woman is defective and accidental...a male

gone awry...the result of some weakness in the father's generative power." A teaching common during that time taught that women and the lower half of men were created by the Devil.

When God created male and female, which obviously included their sexuality and what it was to be used for, He said it was very good (Gen. 1:31). Furthermore while Scripture does not belabor the point and is not a sex manual, it extols the virtue of sexual pleasure within marriage. Proverbs 5:15-19 says, "Let thy fountain be blessed; And rejoice in the wife of thy youth. As a loving hind and a pleasant doe, Let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; And be thou ravished always with her love" (ASV). One cannot get much more erotic than this, and yet this admonition is biblical, godly, and sanctioned by the Father.

As parents and grandparents we need to be teaching our children that sex is a beautiful gift from God. It is to be reserved for marriage, but it is to be enjoyed fully within that holy institution. At times young couples approach preachers and ask how far they can go within the confines of their own bedroom. Naturally, such a sensitive issue is beyond the scope of this article. However, in short we can unreservedly say that as long as a husband and wife are both in agreement, as long as it promotes respect for each partner, as long as it does not in any way involve other people via fantasy or reality, and as long as it is done out of genuine love and respect for He who ordained marriage...then a husband and wife are free to enjoy each as they see fit.

### **Purity**

Finally, God gave marriage to vouchsafe mankind's purity. We live in such an impure world. Those things that God sets apart as pure and joyful man so often mingles with the stench of immorality and debauchery. Sex, for example, has been commercialized, glamorized, and a-moralized until the general view is "if it feels good, do it." Marriage, however, is one of God's ways of keeping us pure and free from sexual temptation. To the Corinthians Paul notes, "Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (1 Cor. 7:2). As noted above, sex within marriage is pure and holy. Thus Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."



The concept of purity in marriage, however, goes beyond sexuality. Purity is a broad concept that includes actions, attitudes, and even words. Husbands and wives must both be careful to guard their families against impurity of all kinds. Today via the internet, television, and a whole host of other technologies, impurity stealthily creeps into our homes under the guise of entertainment. Fathers, do you know the rating of the movies your children are watching? Moms, do you know whom your daughter hangs out with? Parents, have you looked at the clothing your daughters are wearing and the words they are using? Today girls both in and out of the church seem to use as much impure language and as many inappropriate innuendos as the boys. Fathers, have you listened to your own jokes lately? Do they drip with sexual humor? Mom, have you really paid attention to the novels you read? Are they pure? Too often there is a whiff of “impurity” in Christian homes. Except for the fact that the family attends church, an outsider would never know that many of us are Christians. Too often our interests, our reading material, our words, and our attitudes are as impure as the world.

Purity is not a state of being as much as it is a state of becoming. Christians will always be faced with temptations. We will need to grow continually toward ultimate purity. The home, however, should be a haven in the storm. When there is purity in the home it will be easier to fight impurity when we venture into out into the world.

### **Conclusion**

The four areas we have listed above do not exhaust the reasons God gave marriage to mankind. The blessings of marriage are too numerous and beautiful to count. Marriage is God’s gift. It is His very special gift. It is as close to the intimacy of heaven that we will experience here on earth. Marriage is difficult because we are sinners. At times we will be challenged by each other to our breaking point. We must remember, however, that in spite of marriage’s problems, God uses it to give us a tiny glimpse into the relationship Christ has with the church (Eph. 5). In spite of the fact that Adam and Eve corrupted the first marriage with sin, with Christ marital paradise can be regained. It will take work. Weeds and thorns will spring up between us, but in the end, with Christ at the center, a husband and wife can carve from this barren world of broken relationships their own little piece of heaven.

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## **GOD'S WILL FOR THE HUSBAND**

*Mike Criswell*

**“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.” (Eph. 5:25)**

These words by the apostle Paul are some of the most beautiful yet some of the most humiliating in the entire Bible. If Paul had simply said, “Husbands love your wives” his command would have been daunting enough. But when he adds, “As Christ loved the church,” the apostle takes the husband’s responsibility to an entirely different level. No longer could husbands be at liberty to treat their wives in the way that they see fit. No longer could husbands look to societal norms as the standard for love. With one stroke of the quill, Paul wings marriage to the heavenlies as he plumbs the depths of the mystical relationship between Christ and His bride, the church.

It is rather doubtful that any of us will ever fully understand the love that Christ has for the church. It is through the church that God revealed his manifold wisdom to heaven (Eph. 3:10). Not only is the church part of Christ, it is Christ. It is his body (Eph. 1:23). In a very real sense Christ and His church are inseparable by space and time. It was the church for which Christ died (Eph. 5:25), but it was also for the church that Christ rose again and now sits enthroned at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20). The church is nothing without Christ because from Him and in Him she receives the total of her fulfillment and nourishment. In essence, when Christ loves the church He loves Himself.

Will husbands ever be able to live up to the sublime paradigm of Christ and His church? Undoubtedly the answer is “No.” Marriage consists of

humans, and just as the church on earth often disappoints Christ, so husbands and wives will disappoint each other. In fact, from a spiritual perspective, perhaps the most useful piece of information husbands and wives can remember is that their partner is a sinner. Being imperfect humans, we will often disappoint each other. While Christ is perfect, husbands are not. Christ never mistreats His bride, yet husbands often do and allow sin to stain the purity of their love.

Nevertheless, Paul sets forth an example for husbands to follow. As unachievable as the example may seem, it is yet the standard of heaven and the level of perfection for which we long. It is the Father's design for the godly husband, and Father knows best.

### **Biblical Submission and the Husband**

Paul actually begins establishing the design for the godly husband in Ephesians 5:21 as he commands that everyone in Christ "mutually submit" to one another. While submission in Scripture works itself out in various ways and through various biblical avenues, it is nonetheless enjoined on us all. This may seem a novel concept for many men who labor under the assumption that only wives are commanded to submit to their husbands. But a careful analysis of biblical submission in general reveals that "submission" is something that is all inclusive (1 Pet. 5:5). In fact Ephesians 5:21-6:9 is a microcosm of submission as demonstrated in the family unit. Careful analysis of these verses show that husbands submit to their wives when they love them as Christ loved the church, wives submit to their husbands just as they would to the Lord, children submit to their parents via obedience, parents submit to their children by not provoking them to anger, servants submit to their masters by honest service, and masters respond in kind by not threatening their servants. Thus in Paul's paradigm no one is left out. Each submits to the other as all submit to Christ. Christ is the ultimate master of us all.

Perhaps the real difficulty that most Christian husbands face is that they do not understand the biblical definition of submission. Because of cultural trends many men labor under a definition of submission that to their mind is equated with or even justifies ridicule, tyranny, and emotional, verbal, or even physical abuse. Nothing could be farther from God's definition of the word. Given the attitude of some men it is little wonder that some women in society have recoiled by advocating hyper-feminism and militant rebellion against

male leadership. When a man leads as Christ lovingly leads the church, his godly wife will be quite willing to follow.

The real heart of the submission issue is the “will.” Whether we are talking about every believer’s submission to Christ or whether we are talking about a husband and wife relationship, it is ultimately the will that puts us into conflict or compliance with one another. If we do not want to submit to another it will be impossible for genuine submission to take place. Another person might control our actions, but only we can control our own heart. Genuine biblical submission is a product of the heart. In reality this truth is seen in the very word Paul uses in Ephesians 5:21-22. The Greek word Paul uses here for “submit” (**hupotasso**— “rank under”) is in the middle voice and denotes an action that one does to himself. It is not something that someone forces upon another. In other words, biblical submission is voluntary. Christ does not force the church to comply with His law, and husbands have no right to coerce emotionally or physically their wives to comply with their dictates. A wife complies of her own free will and actually gifts the husband with leadership as she submits to him. In reality a wife is never more in control of her spiritual self than when she voluntarily places herself under the godly headship of her husband.

### **Headship and the Husband**

God’s design for the husband certainly includes headship. We must not get the impression that because all submit to each other that men are not to lead. It is the specific and God-ordained role of the man to be the “head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23). The biblical concept of “mutual submission” must never be twisted to erase the role distinctions and hierarchy God has ordained (1 Cor. 11:1-3). The question, however, is what does it mean to be “the head?” Ultimately, leadership means “service.” The biblical concept does not carry the idea of “master” nearly as much as it carries the idea of “servant.” Just as the Master washed the disciples’ feet (Jn. 13) so a husband provides refreshing servant-leadership for his wife and family. The crown of a godly husband is not his authority, it is his loving service.

Headship is manifest in at least three ways. First, the husband is the head of the wife in that he physically provides for his wife and family. From the beginning it was God’s plan that men shoulder the primary role of breadwinning. After the fall, God told Adam that by the sweat of his brow he would

till the soil and provide bread for his family (Gen. 3:17-19). In the New Testament Paul warned the Thessalonians that if one did not work he should not eat (2 Thes. 3:10). Likewise to Timothy the apostle gave the broad axiom that if one does not take care of his family then he has denied the faith (1 Tim. 5:8). While the Bible does not strictly prohibit the wife from helping her husband meet the family's needs, the man fails as a husband and a Christian if he refuses to do his best. He has denied the faith.

Second, the godly husband is head of his wife in that he emotionally provides for his wife and family. While culture lauds men who are tough and perhaps at times even rude and crude, God calls on husbands to be sensitive to the emotional needs of those in their homes. The husband who criticizes his wife, belittles his children, and throws tantrums like a child is no child of God. Again the type of emotional support that a husband must provide is modeled by Christ in His relationship with His church. Paul notes in Ephesians 5:29 that Christ "nourishes" and "cherishes" the church. In like manner, the husband does the same for the wife.

Third, the godly husband is head of his wife in that he spiritually provides for his wife and family. It is the husband's role to defend the family spiritually from the evils of the world and to carve out a spiritual haven at home. It is the husband's roles to light the fire beneath the family altar. Unfortunately many men, even Christian men, are passive when it comes to spiritual leadership. Thinking their job is done when the whistle blows at five o'clock, they never bother to punch the spiritual time clock at home. It is a shame that in many westernized cultures the woman is often the one who better understands the family spiritually. Even across our brotherhood on any given Sunday you will invariably find more women in the pews than men. The one thing that made the "Patriarchal Age" so significant was that men led their households both physically and spiritually. When viewed chronologically, Genesis 2 suggests that God gave Adam the command about the "forbidden fruit" before Eve was even created (compare Gen. 2:16-17 with 2:21ff). Nevertheless, both Adam and Eve were held accountable when they sinned. In fact, as Eve dialogued with the serpent, she was able to quote fully God's prohibition. But how did she know God's law if it was given before she was created? Obviously it was Adam's responsibility from the very beginning to know God's law and to pass it on to his family. In reality this was what the Patriarchal Age was all about. Over and over we see the Patriarchs as spiritu-

al heads of their homes. Abraham's journeys can be traced by the lingering smoke of his family altars. In the same manner, Job patiently watched over his children and offered sacrifices on their behalf (Job 1:5).

The bottom line is that each man is responsible for being the head of his wife in all of the areas listed above. To ignore one category of leadership makes us unsuccessful as head of our families. God wants a husband to provide a well-balanced environment for his wife and children where their physical and emotional needs are met and where they can grow spiritually. While obviously the wife also helps in all of these areas, it is the husband's job to take the leadership. When by disinterest we force our wives to assume the spiritual leadership, we have failed no matter how much money we bring home. If we have time for fishing trips, ballgames, and cars, we have time for prayer with our kids.

### **Agape Love and the Husband**

The major theme of Ephesians 5:25-33 is a husband's love for his wife. The type of love Paul describes is what we commonly call "agape" love. Agape love is not merely an emotion but is a decision of the will. It is a kindness of action one chooses to bestow upon another even when that person is unworthy and unlovable. It is the kind of love that Christ had for the world when He sacrificed Himself on the cross (Jn. 3:16, see Rom. 5:6-8).

Today, we use the English word "love" so glibly and in so many contexts that it loses its meaning. We love our country, we love our kids, we love to fish, we love apple pie, we fall in love, and we fall out of love. In reality "love" means everything and nothing at all.

Biblical love is deep and meaningful. We do not "fall into" biblical love. We do not "fall out" of love. Agape love is not an emotionally driven love. It is not a fleeting infatuation. It is a decision to commit to someone even when that person is unlovable and unattractive and even when that person fails us. It is not based on what we can get but on what we can give. When a young man and woman meet they may be drawn to each other because of physical appearance or other external qualities. But as every seasoned veteran of marriage knows, physical beauty quickly fades. Over the years what really ends up being attractive are the battle scars they have suffered together, the character lines in each other's faces, and the depth of commitment each has for the other.

Just as Christ's love for the church is multifaceted so too is a husband's love for his wife. In Ephesians 5:21-33 Paul gives four ways that biblical love will demonstrate itself.

### **Sacrificing Love**

The first aspect of agape love that Paul describes is that of sacrifice. We have already noted that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. To some degree we have also noted that husbands are to be sacrificial lovers of their wives. Headship demands that the husband puts the needs of his family above his own needs and desires. Headship requires the willingness to die for those we love just as Christ died for the church.

For most husbands, however, the real difficulty is not that we are called upon to "die" for our wife. The real sacrifice is made as we "live" for her. Nothing can be harder and yet nothing can be more rewarding. When a wife suspects that her husband is putting her first and that he is more concerned about her needs than his own, she will generally respond in the same way. This in turn leads to a happy and healthy marital relationship both spiritually and physically.

We have noticed that it is the husband's job to provide for his family in a very physical way. He is to make sure that there is bread on the table and that he is doing everything possible to pay the bills. With that said, however, husbands are often workaholics. Either because they think it is what society demands or because they are trying to escape problems at home, men often cocoon themselves in their corporate cubicle. Even under the best of circumstances most men in general define themselves by the work that they do. Work is admirable and natural, but it can also be a detriment to a healthy husband/wife relationship. When a man's work dominates his time to the point that he neglects his wife and kids, he is not a success no matter how big his office or what title his company bestows on him. While the business world gives lip service to finding the right balance between home and work, the truth is often different. Corporate America lauds the employee that volunteers for overtime, takes a pile of work home every night, lets it be known that he is on call 24/7, hones his multitasking skills, and puts the boss above wife and family. Many corporations are willing to sacrifice their employee's home life and marriages for the bottom line. However, husbands need to understand that as far as the Lord is concerned, the bottom line is a successful relation-



ship at home. It is the husband/wife relationship that represents Christ and the church, not the employer/employee relationship. While the husband needs to work hard and provide for his family's needs, self is always more important than stuff. In redeeming his church, Christ gave Himself, not stuff. Peter put it this way, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

### **Sanctifying Love**

After telling the Ephesians that a husband is to be a sacrificial lover, Paul says that husbands are to be sanctifying lovers as well. Paul says, "That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:26-27, NKJV).

Purity in any relationship is important. Even the purity of the church is based first and foremost on the purity of Christ. Had Christ not been the sinless Lamb of God He could not have taken away the sins of the world. Notice that Paul says that Christ sanctified and cleansed the church. It is through the Word of God and in the flow of baptism that Christ purges the church from sin. She is His espoused bride. He is her jealous husband in waiting who someday will return to gather those who have kept themselves unspotted from the world. Only those who are pure will enjoy an eternal relationship with Him.

Notice, however, that in Paul's analogy it is Christ who is doing the sanctifying. This certainly does not mean that the individual believer has no responsibility, but in this setting the emphasis is on what Christ does. Likewise the emphasis by comparison is on what the husband does for his wife and family. The husband sets the tone for purity. He sets the stage for wholesome development in the home. He sets the standard for holiness. The husband's goal for his wife should be the same as Christ's is for His bride. Christ wants a glorious, radiant, dazzling bride, and He has done everything necessary for His church to be just that. Likewise the husband needs to do everything he can do to make sure his wife is spotless and free from immoral filth.

The implications of Paul's comparison are astounding. If the husband is the head that he should be, he will purge from his home all things that defile.

If the magazines he reads do not promote purity in himself and his family he will cancel their subscription. If the movies he rents are not wholesome family entertainment then he will cease renting those kinds of movies. If the cable TV shows he or his family watches promote ungodliness he will change the view habits or maybe even get rid of his TV. The list is endless, but the point is that we cannot risk the purity of our wives and families. When Eve sinned, Adam was held accountable too; so likewise will we be. If we are not constantly monitoring what comes into our family, we may find ourselves condemned.

We need real men in the church who are willing to take a stand against culture. We need men who are not afraid to monitor what their kids are watching, renting from the video store, and listening to on their MP3 players. We need men who are willing to say “no” when they discover that their boy is being tempted by Internet pornography. We need men who are willing to say “no” to their daughters who watch “chick flicks” where bed hopping and fornication is the plot of the movie. In short, we need real men in the church today who will purify their families by the Word of God. We need men who are not afraid to pull the plug on the Internet, cable TV, or anything else that skids our families toward destruction. It is the man’s job to apply the brakes.

Sanctity is something that America has all but forgotten. Nothing is special anymore. We live in a disposable society. It is a use and be used world in which we live. If we are not careful as husbands we will compromise our family’s purity by our own actions or by not restraining our children’s actions. As husbands we certainly do not want to end up like Eli whose house fell because he did not restrain his sons (1 Sam. 3:13). Sanctity means to be set apart for something special and something holy. It is the husband’s job to set his wife and family on that path.

The startling truth of the matter is that sanctity begins before marriage. It begins with the first look as a young man determines not to lust after the opposite sex (Mt. 5:28). It begins with the first date as that man determines he will keep the woman pure and treat her as a sister in Christ (1 Tim. 5:2). It continues through the engagement as both he and his fiancé maturely put the Lord first and save inappropriate touching and kissing for marriage. In God’s system, young men have a much greater responsibility of purity than young men in the world. Typically speaking, in most societies the woman sets the limits for premarital sexuality. Unfortunately today American culture says

there are no limits, and women now unashamedly go along with what ungodly males desire or even initiate the immorality. In God's book, however, the man is the leader. He sets the standard for purity. He determines before the very first date that he will keep himself and his date pure for marriage. He will not presume to desecrate that which God has beautifully wrapped for her husband. In any Christian dating or courting scenario, the woman should never have to worry that she will have to say "No!" She should be able to rest comfortably with the assurance that the man who has asked for the pleasure of her company will find her godliness satisfying enough.

### **Sustaining Love**

As noted at the beginning of our study, the husband has the responsibility of providing a sustaining environment for his family. Paul notes in verses 28 and 29 that the husband is to love his wife as his own body and that he is to nourish and cherish her. The picture that Paul paints here is intriguing. First Paul indicates that the husband should view the wife as part of his own body. Such an idea takes us back to creation when from Adam's rib God created woman. With a twist of divine irony, God created from man that which he was incomplete without. When Eve was presented to Adam he said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). Thus in a philosophical sense when a man loves his wife he is in essence showing respect to the source of woman—himself. In addition, however, marriage takes a man and woman and makes them one sexually. The very act of sexual union is typical of the essential oneness that a man and woman become in the bonds of marriage. Genesis 2:24 says that for this reason a man and woman will cleave to each other as one flesh. In 1 Corinthians Paul uses this sublime truth to demonstrate the impropriety of joining oneself to a harlot (6:16). Thus when a man loves his wife as himself he honors not only God but also himself and his bride.

In speaking of the sustaining aspect of a husband's love, Paul uses two terms that are worthy of note. First, Paul says that a man should "nourish" his wife as himself. The term "nourish" carries the idea of bringing to maturity. It has to do with supplying nutrients for growth. Second, Paul uses the term "cherish." This term is more intimate than the first and has to do with providing a warm, secure environment. Once a man provides the proper nourishment he then must create an environment in which his family can safely grow. A farmer plants seeds and fertilizes them but he also weeds his crop and

does what he can to protect from natural disasters. So a husband's job has only just begun when he nourishes his family. He must also protect them and give them physical, emotional, and spiritual warmth.

Admittedly the picture that Paul paints when he uses these two terms is a domestic one. It is a picture of a mother hen sitting on her clutch of eggs as she warms and protects them until they hatch. So the husband's presence in the home should provide warmth and comfort. His strong gentle leadership should be evident in the words that he speaks and the decisions he makes. When a husband rants and raves he may be "heating things up" but he is not "warming the home" as God instructs.

Practically speaking, a godly husband will nourish and cherish his wife as he comes to know her intimately. In other words, a godly husband will make it a priority to understand the nature of the one to whom he is married. After a beautiful courtship, too many men come to view the wife as the enemy. The home then becomes a battleground for a "Word War" as well as ungodly behavior. It is the husband's responsibility to create an environment of peace and stability. He will be well on his way to accomplishing this task if he truly learns to appreciate and respect his spouse for the person she is. Peter says, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7). Likewise Paul says, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them" (Col. 3:19). A husband should never let a day go by leaving harsh words or hard feels to ferment into bitterness. It is his job to do everything possible to weed out roots of bitterness and to learn to appreciate the differences his wife brings to the relationship.

### **Strong Love**

Finally, Paul indicates that God's design for the husband is to be committed to his wife and family. Marriage is a lifetime commitment. In reality marriage is more than a legal contract; it is a covenant between God, a woman, and a man. Unlike a contract which is based on quid pro quo assumptions, a marriage is based on a man and woman's commitment before God that they will love, honor, and cherish each other for as long as they live.

In a world of disposable relationships, this part of a man's responsibility is often underemphasized. Even in the church we have perhaps failed to teach

as we should the perpetuity of marriage. While Jesus and Paul certainly agree that a marriage may be broken under certain restrictive circumstances, the rule for marriage is found in the creation account. When the Pharisees came to Jesus to test Him, He took them back to the beginning. Matthew records Jesus' words, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mt. 19:4-6). Paul quotes the same Old Testament passage in Ephesians 5:31.

The godly husband is one who marries for life. He is one who never gives up. He is one who does whatever it takes to make sure he has a successful marriage. When a man says, "I just don't love my wife anymore," that man is farther from God than he is from his wife. When a man has no greater reason to stay married than his personal happiness, his marriage is headed for failure. Love is a decision. True love suffers long and responds with kindness. True love never fails.

### **Conclusion**

The bulk of Paul's teaching on the family in Ephesians 5 is aimed at the husband. The wife and children certainly have responsibilities, but the man sets the tone in the family. If he is a godly husband, the family will be well on its way to success. If he fails in his responsibility, not only will he be a personal failure but his home life will not reflect the picture of Christ and the church.

The fact that our marriages should be an accurate portrayal of Christ's relationship with the church should make all husbands sit up and take notice. But the picture we are painting in our marriages of Christ and the church begins before marriage. When a person dates and then marries outside the Lord, that marriage is not the picture described in Ephesians 5:32. Parents need to train their children to understand that marriage is serious. It is the hardest job you will ever love, and it can only be a success when the husband becomes a real man: a man of God.

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## **GOD'S WILL FOR THE WIFE**

*Mike Criswell*

### **“Who can find a virtuous wife, for her worth is far above rubies” (Prov. 31:10, NKJV).**

One has to wonder what Adam thought as he awoke, wiped the divine slumber from his eyes, and looked over to see Eve. He had never seen a woman before, and no doubt he was intrigued. It was God, not Adam who had said, “It is not good that man should be alone.” It was God, not Adam who decided to create a helper. And besides, even if Adam had realized the dangers of his own solidarity, he would not have been able to do anything about it anyway. That day, Adam’s first day on earth, had already been a busy day. He had received instruction from God about the Garden and what he could and could not eat. He had finished his career training as God told him about tending the Garden. And one by one the animals had paraded before him and he had given them their respective names. In all of this, however, there is no hint that Adam understood the magnitude of his isolation. The text is simple yet clear, “So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him” (Gen. 2:20). It was at this point that God intervened and miraculously created Eve, the first wife, the first mother, the first helper. At that moment the first family was born. Adam’s only comment is really an understatement: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.” In reality, his statement is one of fact more than it is an exclamation of praise. But then how could he possibly know what being married was all about?

Perhaps Adam found out rather quickly that women are a mystery. Though taken from his rib, Eve soon displayed that she had a mind of her own. It was her decision to talk to the snake and then eat of the forbidden fruit. But then again it was his decision to follow her lead and step from the role of leadership that God had assigned to him. At the moment they both sinned they embarked on a physical and theological journey that would take them from the Garden to a world of suffering and pain. By the sweat of his brow Adam would provide a living from the cursed ground, and Eve would pass through the valley of the shadow of death to bring new life to the world.

We are not told much about Eve. We know she bore children and no doubt fulfilled the role of “suitable helper” for which she had been created. But Scripture is sparse as to what kind of woman Eve was. Was she godly? Did she tell Cain and Abel about her sin in the Garden? Did Seth clamor to hear over and over again about the time in his mother’s past when snakes could speak? Did she warn her sons about the Devil? One wonders just how successful both Adam and Eve were as parents, for soon one of their sons would commit the first murder. The free will of each individual and the silence of the scriptures forbid us from indicting Adam and Eve, but one wonders about how successful they were as parents. One wonders about the source of Cain’s rage. Why did he not understand that worship was serious? How did he come to the conclusion that murder was an option? Did he inherit his impetuous nature from his mother? Caught up in the moment, did he impulsively act just as Eve had years earlier when Satan baited his snare with an “apple?”

The point of the musings above is designed to make us think about what kind of woman Eve was in relation to what perhaps she should have been. The deeper question is what kind of person should any woman be? What characteristics should a wife possess? What character quality in a mother leads to success in her children? In short, what is God’s design for a Godly woman?

Obviously the answer to these questions cannot be found in culture. Worldly culture is the product of the ungodly masses. Culture is the masterpiece of the spiritually fallen. It constantly changes and fails, only to recreate itself again in its own image. It is certainly not a guide for the woman who seeks to please the Lord.

Twenty-first century culture runs in stark antithesis to the Word of God. Modern society lauds a woman who is self actualized, career oriented, and



endowed with business savvy. Today a woman is a success if she dumps her kids off at daycare, scurries to the office, crunches the numbers, lands the big deal, moves up the corporate ladder, and hauls in a big salary. Furthermore she is approved if she has had an abortion, supports the feminist movement, and submits to no one.

Christian women are called upon by God to be “counter culture.” The world of the Christian will by definition collide with the ungodly norms of society. Certainly this does not mean that a Christian cannot be industrious or even be well blessed with business savvy. Neither does it mean that a woman must spend her every waking minute within the four walls of her house. Scripture certainly does not necessarily forbid a woman from working outside the home. However, as we will see, the plan that God designed was for the woman to put her home first. Everything she does, whether in or out of the home, must compliment the raising of her children and the proper ordering of the house. When her job or non-home pursuits take precedent over her home, she has violated the pattern God laid down from the beginning.

The way these priorities are worked out in each household may be different. It is presumptuous for any preacher or writer to prescribe a strict paradigm for what the wife or husband must be doing at any given point in their day. Every family has different economic considerations, health concerns, and goals which affect decisions about work, income, and role differentiation. However, it is dangerous to adopt the cultural notion that the wife and husband have no role differentiation and that the wife can, for example, take on a career while the husband stays home with the kids. As we have already seen in previous articles, the husband must be available for his children, but it was never God’s design for the husband to become the wife and for the wife to pretend she is the husband. Modernists will view such an assessment as the epitome of “sexism.” In the end, however, it is not society that determines truth. God’s Word is the ultimate truth for any issue. As we enter an era in the church where more and more women are becoming medical doctors, health care professionals, and starting their own businesses, we face the danger of gender roles being smudged. While we must be careful that we do not try to enforce a “Leave it to Beaver” 1950’s style model on families in the church, preachers and teachers need to encourage their wives and sisters in Christ to make home the lens through which they filter all of their decisions.

Without doubt many of the recent difficulties we have faced in the church regarding the woman's role have occurred because of cultural influences. Whether we are talking about women's conferences and seminars or women in the pulpit, we see societal trends at work. Every generation must find the balance between life and the truth of God's Word. But God has given us a gender framework in which to work. Men need to allow women to do their part in the church (Titus 2). But women should also understand that God never intended them to assume a public role in teaching God's Word. Furthermore, God even forbids women from being the "head." In reality this was Eve's downfall when she stepped out of her role as "helper" and led in the fall. Women have a beautiful role to fulfill as they lead meek and gentle lives. But home must be at the center of everything they do. Even the teaching and instruction of the Bible they are commanded to do is not a product of organization as much as it comes about naturally and incidentally as they carry out their domestic role.

Perhaps the perfect picture is that found in Proverbs 31. The woman described here is almost a "super hero." She is busy, active, savvy, business oriented, and generous. But notice that this paragon of virtue is someone who, in spite of her many pursuits, centers everything on husband and home. She is truly God's design for a godly wife for any age and time.

### **The Right Heaven Relationship**

A woman cannot be a godly wife unless she first has the correct heavenly relationship. Because all of her actions will emanate from her philosophical underpinnings, she must cultivate a godly worldview in order to be a successful Christian woman. In every age the women that God approved were women who put Him first. Women such as Sarah, Ruth, and Hannah set the standard for women who trust in God and want what is best for Him. Mary, the mother of our Lord, was a woman who was busy cultivating a godly character even at a very young age. When the angel appeared to Mary to announce her pregnancy, his words were laden with praise: "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women!" (Lk. 1:28). We are not told how old Mary was at this time. Because Jewish marriages took place at an early age, some scholars conjecture Mary may have been no older than thirteen or fourteen. In any event, her heavenly relationship was well known. It seems safe to say that Mary was not "highly favored" because she would bear

the Son of God; rather, she was chosen to bear the Son of God because she was “highly favored.” There is no doubt that God would not have chosen an unspiritual, worldly woman to bear His Son.

The right heavenly relationship is addressed in Ephesians 5:22 when Paul says, “Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord.” In other words, a woman ranks herself under the leadership of her husband because of her primary relationship to Christ. She submits to the Lord, and her submission to her husband is simply an extension of this. We have already noted in previous articles that a woman voluntarily submits to her husband. Submission is not something the man forces on his wife but is something that the wife does of her own free will. While such selflessness is not easy, for men often fail as godly leaders, her duties are made more palatable by the fact that Christ is over both her and her husband. Her husband is also learning to submit to Christ just as she is learning to submit to her husband.

### **The Right Husband Relationship**

The right relationship with heaven leads both husbands and wives to have better relationships with our fellow human beings. As a person’s heavenly relationship flourishes and matures, so will his or her human relationships. This is especially true in the home. As a wife grows in faith and love, so too will her respect for her husband. Her own growth will lead her to more fully understand the man in her life. The deeper her relationship becomes with Christ, the more appreciation she will have for her husband. The more she comes to understand how much God forgives her, the more she will forgive her husband.

Obviously, the scenario described above is dependant on a wife having a husband who has at least some semblance of goodness about him. Hopefully she is married to a godly man and one with the same spiritual values. Marriages where husbands and wives are on different theological tracks perhaps can survive and even be fulfilling to some degree, but they can never soar to the same lofty heights of splendor attained by Christian marriages. The sad reality, however, is that many women are married to men who have no visible interest in spiritual matters. Either because they married before she came to the Lord, or because she made a poor choice in a husband after baptism, the woman finds it impossible to share with her mate the most intimate part of her life, her faith.

The answer to such a scenario is not to wallow in the mire of self pity. It is not to give up her faith and distance herself from other brothers and sisters in Christ. The answer is to set high spiritual standards for herself and her children and never compromise those standards. A husband who suspects that his wife is not fully committed to the Lord will do everything possible to bring her down to his level. In most cases he will chip away at what little faith she has until she has taken the path of least resistance—his path. The best thing a woman can do if she finds herself in a marriage where her partner is an unbeliever is to refuse compromise. If she refuses to miss church even on family vacations, if she refuses to compromise her modesty, if she refuses to take on her husband's worldly ways, she is much more likely to convert him. Most men will be un-swayed by a spouse who only gives lip service to her faith.

With this said, however, refusal to compromise is only half the picture. A wife may be staunch in her commitment to attend church, read her Bible, wear long hair, and dress modestly, but if she does not demonstrate a meek and gentle spirit, she is likely to drive her husband toward obstinance. Because of his gender-specific personality, a man generally does not like to be driven but prefers to be in the driver's seat of his own destiny. Nagging, harshness, and other coercion techniques may have the opposite than the desired effect on a husband's behavior. What then is the best thing for a woman to do who has a husband who is an unbeliever? Peter addresses this situation in his epistle when he says, "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear" (1 Pet. 3:1-2, NKJV).

The impact of Peter's statement sends a shockwave through the natural tendency of the husband or wife who had an unbelieving spouse. Notice that Peter does not say, "Divorce your spouse"—something that Paul directly forbids in 1 Corinthians 7:13. Neither does Peter suggest that the wife apply pressure to her husband. In essence Peter relegates the wife to "silence" and leaves her to whatever positive influence she may exert through a chaste and respectful demeanor. Again, this is clearly in antithesis to what comes naturally for an overly zealous or frustrated wife. A wife might be tempted to go on rampages and throw out her husband's cigarettes, write scripture on his shaving mirror, and leave chiding sticky notes on his dashboard. But these will have much less

effect on her spouse than him seeing her quietly reading the Bible, praying, or gently gathering the children around for church on Sunday morning.

### **The Right Heart Relationship**

The above admonition given by the apostle Peter is continued as he addresses the right heart relationship. The fact that the godly wife is able to calmly and quietly point her husband to Christ is the result of her inner qualities. Her heart is right with God, and thus her actions follow in the footsteps where her heart has already gone. Her words, or lack thereof, her actions, and even her dress gently broadcast her faith in God.

Today, as in Peter's time, we need women in the church whose modesty manifests the inner qualities of their heart. Ladies, your primary focus should never be on the newness of your clothes, the designer label on the back of the neck, or whether or not your garment trends with the latest fashion. What you wear, what you say, and what you do should reflect the deep piety you hold with the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice how Peter connects the woman's "husband relationship" with the "right heart relationship." Peter says:

Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands (1 Pet. 3:3-5, NKJV)

While Peter is not addressing the activities or attire that a husband and wife share in the intimacy of their private chambers, he is addressing the overall comportment of the wife. A husband with any semblance of dignity and maturity will find his wife's modesty far more appealing than a short skirt and gaudy jewelry.

### **The Right Home Relationship**

Finally, God's design for the wife is to cultivate a proper home relationship. Indeed each of the relationships we have mentioned must be cultivated. They

do not sprout and grow to maturity overnight. They take careful nurturing and patience.

That God wants women to have the proper home relationship should come as no surprise given the domestic role they were given in creation. From the very moment that God relegated childbirth to Eve the die was cast for the woman to be the princess of her home. The real problem for women is not that they have been given too insignificant of a role. The problem is that they have been given such an important place in God's scheme that their success literally affects the future of society as well as the church. If we could ever come to understand that the world has it backwards, and if we could ever realize that God's plan of male/female differentiation is one of necessity, and if we could ever convince women, especially in the church, to make a career of homemaking and let side jobs be side jobs, we might very well see our youth more interested in spiritual matters and might see less of the church losing its youth to the world.

There is ample evidence that the woman of the home has the child in his or her most formative years. When women dump their children off in day-care, when children call the baby sitter "Mommy" as readily as their biological mother, when mothers shuffle their kids here and there between grandparents and other relatives simply because they are too busy working, then they have abandoned their godly role as princess and caretaker of the home.

Paul knew this would be a problem in the church. He instructed the older women to be busy teaching the younger women the skills of homemaking. Of the older women he says:

That they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. (Tit. 2:4-5, NKJV)

Notice that Paul says the young women must be taught to love their husbands and children and to take the attitude of submission and purity. Yes, these are qualities that can be taught. They do not necessarily come naturally. Furthermore Paul says that the young wives must be taught to be "homemakers." The word Paul uses here in the Greek (***oikos ergon***) literally means "home worker." It is unfortunate that the King James Version translates this "keepers at home." While a home worker may at times be in the house, the Greek word does not necessarily restrict her to a particular physical location. In other words, Paul's instruction is aimed at the young wife concentrating on

her home in general. Home is her priority. While she may need to go to and fro in keeping up that home, just as the Proverbs 31 woman did, she always filters her every decision through the lens of what is best for her husband and children. Notice that the older women are teaching the younger women these things. There is no generation gap in Christ because the older and younger have a very special teacher/student relationship. Also, because the qualities that Paul mentions are not qualities that generally can be learned in a seminar or class setting, it is clear that Paul has in mind the teaching that goes on incidentally and naturally within a home environment. Furthermore it is obvious that the older women are mentoring the younger women by their own example of putting their husbands and children first. One wonders today in the church what kind of example and mentoring are being carried out as more and more of our older women become career women.

Finally Paul adds the note, "That the word of God be not blasphemed." What does Paul mean by this? Is Paul saying that unless a woman confines herself to the four walls of her home and unless she spends her entire day washing clothes, cooking, cleaning and ironing that she blasphemes the Word of God? Is Paul acting as the "wicked stepsister" as he relegates the wife to a "Cinderella position" among the ashes? Certainly not! Paul is not forbidding a wife from enjoying a whole range of worldly pursuits. In fact one would be hard pressed to prove that Paul is forbidding a woman from holding down a job that compliments her home life. What then is Paul's point?

Perhaps Titus 2 is best interpreted in light of Paul's instruction to the young widows in First Timothy 5. In verses 11-14 Paul says,

But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, . . . they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not. Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

The weight of Titus 2:5 and 1 Timothy 5:13 comes as a result of "idleness." Paul's main point is not that a woman should imprison herself within the confines of her home's four walls; rather, he is saying that she should be busy taking care of her family. When children are small this may mean that she stays at home 24/7 while the husband puts bread on the table. After the children are in school, this may mean that she takes a job outside the home

that compliments the home. In either case, however, all of her activities center on her home. Anytime a woman takes a job of any kind to the neglect of her husband and children, she has sinned.

To be fair, however, just because a woman stays at home does not mean that she is fulfilling her God-ordained role. The woman who watches TV all day, talks on the phone, or reads books to the exclusion of housework, meal planning, and child care, has equally violated God's law. In 1 Timothy 5:14 Paul instructs the young wife to "guide the house." Literally, she is the "ruler of her house." She is the house manager, seeing to its needs just as she would a business. Notice again that the Proverbs 31 woman had servants, went on buying trips, purchased real estate and did many responsible things that complimented the home. In essence, the command that Paul gives is the same as noted in Proverbs 31:27, "She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness."

### **Conclusion**

Nothing excels the beauty of a wife and mother more than when she fulfills her godly role. Society screams that women sell themselves short when they stay at home with the kids, submit to the husband's leadership, and sacrifice their wants for the needs of their family. Society has it all backwards. The abandonment of the gender roles that God ordained in the beginning has produced nothing but confusion and general dysfunction in the family unit. Today America is in trouble. She is the richest nation in the world but groans under the woes of immorality and neo-paganism. It is time America gets back to some principles that will reestablish her on the right track. Unfortunately, this may never happen in society, but it is not too late for the church. Eve and Adam both abandoned their roles in the Garden when they abdicated their respective responsibilities. By getting back to God's pattern, however, we can restore in our homes that which our fore-parents lost. The world will never be rid of its thorns, but for the godly family, paradise can bloom again when the Rose of Sharon is in its midst.



## **RAISING KIDS GOD'S WAY—LESSONS FROM THE GARDEN**

*Mike Criswell*

If I were to ask you to image the perfect parent, who would come to mind? Perhaps there is an older couple at church who seem to be the paragon of perfection. Perhaps their gray hair, their placid and dignified demeanor, and their constant devotion make it easy to see why their children walk with the Lord. Or maybe there is a mother or father in the Bible who strikes you as the perfect parent. Maybe your picture-perfect parental paradigm is Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who prayed for a son with the promise of giving him back to God. Maybe your ideal of a godly mother is Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist. Or maybe when you think of godly parents you think of Joseph and Mary, whose purity and devotion to God made them suitable to raise the Messiah.

But have you ever considered God as the perfect parent? No doubt if you are a Christian the fact that you are God's child has at least crossed your mind. No doubt you have considered the verses that describe God's love, His care, His provision, and even His rebuke. No doubt you have called Him Father as you poured out your heart to Him in prayer. Without reservation we can say that He is the perfect parent.

The lessons we can learn from God about parenting go beyond the application we make to our spiritual lives. I am convinced that His techniques for dealing with humanity are in reality the same techniques we must implement in raising our kids. I have entitled this little study, "Raising Kids God's Way: Lessons from the Garden." What I would like to do is to briefly study the way God acted and reacted to the first humans. What methods and techniques did God use with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? Naturally, we can only

extend the illustration so far as Adam and Eve were created as adults. However, I believe when we look at the Garden we can see the wisdom of God at work in dealing with His children.

There at least seven lessons from the Garden that we can learn about raising kids. Certainly there are many more tucked away in Genesis 1-3, but these seven seem to set the parameters for what parents need to implement today.

Before we get started, however, let me make this observation: If we are going to have children then we need to overcome the fear of being parents. As we will see, once God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden, He was not afraid to get involved in their care and correction. Too many parents (especially young parents) today seem to have forgotten that God put them in charge of their children. It is amazing today at the lack of discipline society and sometimes even church parents administer in parenting. By "discipline" I do not mean yanking the child up and thrashing him every time he whimpers or acts up. Such actions might well be abuse as much as total neglect. True discipline is "training." In other words, it is the parents' job to train, to nurture, to mentor, and to mold their children into productive adults. However, due to pop-psychology, political pressure, and hyper-liberal child abuse laws now being legislated, many parents seem paralyzed. Little three-year-old Johnny goes wild in the grocery store, tearing down canned goods and screaming at the top of his lungs while a passive father quietly tries to reason with him with techniques he's learned by reading his latest self-help book. Teenage Mary contemptuously smarts off to her mother and lays down the law about how late she will come home on Friday night while mom cowers to the immaturity of her daughter.

The point is this: parenting is not for cowards. Parenting takes discipline of self and the administration of discipline toward the children. It is a training process for both parents and children. Ultimately, however, parents are in charge. God did not grace us with children so they could be our best friends, although a great parent/child relationship is necessary. God did not bless us with bundles of joy so we could abandon them to the babysitter or, even worse, the T.V. Neither did God make us fertile so we could abuse our children physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Unfortunately I believe that such abuse happens in the church today. Children are sometimes "spanked" inappropriately out of anger. Children are sometimes berated and belittled by their parents in front of a crowd at church. Sometimes kids become exasperated

when they feel their parents not only do not understand but do not want to understand about their problems. Remember parents, perception is the bigger part of reality! If our kids “think” we do not care, for all practical purposes we do not! It is our job to connect with our kids, to build a relationship with our kids by getting to know them as people, and to nurture and protect their interests inasmuch as they are healthy and in accordance with God’s Word. Our children are not necessarily like us. They may have different interests, goals, and traits. It is our job to take those characteristics and gently bend them toward God. The only way we are going to be successful is by getting involved in their lives—not by being domineering or harsh but by leading them in the same righteous paths that hopefully we are walking in.

Before considering the lessons from the Garden, one more fact needs to be understood. In spite of our successes there will be times when we fail. We should not be afraid of correcting our mistakes and even apologizing to our kids. If we have falsely accused our kids of something then we should apologize. If you have treated them unfairly or harshly because we were having a bad day and lost our temper, apologize! A child will not view a parent who apologizes for mistakes as being weak; rather, that child will learn forgiveness by being empowered to forgive his or her parent. Parenting is not about pride or keeping up appearances in spite of our mistakes. While we are responsible for our children, we also are responsible for our own sins—even those committed toward our kids. Asking our children to forgive us is not a sign of weakness.

With that said, however, there are sometimes when we can do everything right, as far as we can humanly see, and yet our kids go astray. As we will note, God is the perfect parent, and yet Adam and Eve sinned. They corrupted the entire human race. Was God somehow responsible for their sins? Well, ironically yes and no. God was not responsible in that He somehow made a mistake in the instruction or the care He provided, but God did give them free will. Because our children have free will there will come at time when they will be at liberty to choose their own spiritual path. Hopefully they will remain faithful to the Lord, but just because they go astray does not necessarily mean that we are at fault. Do we all sin? Certainly! But we need to be careful about shouldering unhealthy blame. Sadly, some parents spend their waning years turned toward the shadows rather than enjoying the golden sunset. In their

minds the waywardness of their son or daughter is entirely their fault. They live in a past of “what ifs” rather than in a world of hope.

The problem with this assessment is that it is not productive for the parent or child. If the parent can think of mistakes he or she has made that contributed to the delinquency of the child, then that parent needs to repent by confessing his sins to God and to the child. But when confession has been made and forgiveness has been obtained from God, that parent needs to get on with life. To live in the depressing shadows of the past will not change the future. In fact, it robs us of the energy we need to move ahead. The beauty of parenting is that no matter what mistakes we have made, each day is a new day. There is hope as long as there is breath in our bodies and as long as our children are alive. Woe to any preacher or counselor who sells a bill of shame to the parent of a prodigal. Parents, spend your emotions elsewhere!

### **Provision**

With God as our model, we want to notice seven things a mature, godly parent provides for his or her kids. The first of these is “provision.” In other words the righteous parent will raise children God’s way by giving them what they need physically. Genesis 2:7-9 tells us that God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there he put Adam and Eve. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.

In our previous studies we have noted that it is the parent’s role (especially the father’s role) to provide for his children’s physical needs. Even after the fall, God instructed Adam to work and that by the sweat of his brow he would provide bread for his family. Parents today must provide for their kids. We may never be able to lavish on our children the abundance that God lavished on Adam and Eve, but then again we are not Deity. However, we can learn a lesson from God, the perfect father, by applying His concern for His children to our own. God was the perfect provider physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Inasmuch as we are humanly capable of providing for our kids, we must follow our Heavenly Father’s perfect example.

### **Responsibility**

The second thing God did as the perfect parent was to give Adam and Eve responsibility. One of the overlooked facts about Eden is that Adam and Eve

were assigned tasks even before they sinned. In other words, they were required to “work.” Often we imagine Adam and Eve in the Garden, lying in hammocks all day sipping on fresh nectar without a care in the world. While it is true that they had no cares until they sinned, it is not true that they had no responsibility. A careful reading of Genesis 1-3 indicates that God gave Adam rules about what to eat and what not to eat as well as rules about tending and keeping the garden (Gen. 2:15). What specific tasks this included is not stated, but even before the fall Adam had to work. The fall did not create “work,” but rather it just took the fun out of it.

One task that Adam was given was naming the animals. Genesis 2:20 says, “And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him” (KJV). The irony of Adam’s task is that he was required to take note of each pair of animals when he, as a person and as a species, was alone. It is from this loneliness that Adam awoke to find the woman of his dreams.

Furthermore, God instructed Adam and Eve to tend the Garden. It is clear that God did not expect His children to be idle. In fact it would seem that Eve’s idleness was perhaps that which gave rise to Satan’s opportunity. We can at least say that had Eve’s mind been on her work, Satan would not have had his way with her.

Parents need to give their children responsibility. Naturally, those tasks must be age appropriate. It would be foolish and dangerous to send a five-year-old out to mow the yard with the push mower. However, the child could certainly handle picking up his room, taking out the bathroom trash, or maybe even helping in the kitchen or garage. Though tasks must be appropriate, we must not be afraid to teach our children to work. As society gets further away from the agrarian lifestyle of our forefathers, children find more and more idle time on their hands. There was a time when those not much bigger than toddlers helped do the farm chores. There was time when, for all practical purposes, a young person was a man or woman and knew how to work for a living by the time he or she was 15 or 16. Rural life was tough, and hard work was the companion of every man, woman, and child. Often out of kindness a parent wants his child to have it easier than he had it, but this may not necessarily be the best thing for the child. Naturally we should make sure our kids have what they physically, emotionally, and spiritually need. However, maturi-

ty is not best cultivated in the lap of luxury. A little struggle and work will serve our kids well as adults.

Work habits begin young. If a parent does not begin at a young age to instill within his kids a work ethic, he should not be surprised if his teenager is lazy. A parent will do well to begin early in a child's life with clearly defined jobs for his kids. As the children grow and mature, parents should add more age-appropriate tasks while maintaining time for appropriate leisure and recreation as well. Work and play must be balanced; our kids are not our slaves. In reality, the best way to teach our kids to work is by example. Fathers, take your sons to the garage and show them how to change the oil on the car. Mothers, take your daughter to the kitchen and have them help fix dinner. Show them what life is all about. Make it fun! Work does not always have to be drudgery. Most of the difficulty we have with work occurs because of a negative attitude. Parents, teach your kids that work is God's gift and one of many ways we show that we love Him.

### **Freedom**

One of the most basic innate needs of man is freedom. Self-actualization, as it sometimes called, is the need man has to be autonomous and to be free to control his own life. Naturally the Christian must keep this in perspective. "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23, NKJV). However, even God knew that His children needed freedom. Notice what He tells Adam and Eve: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat . . ." (Gen. 2:16). In other words, they could choose what to have for dinner. They could eat pears, cherries, cauliflower, or even broccoli at will. They had freedom to balance their many responsibilities.

The same is true with our children. When a parent tries to control the every move of his or her child, that child will be more likely to rebel. As we will see, children need and even want parameters, but controlling parents often raise rebellious children. The eagle learns to soar by being allowed to leave the nest.

Leaving the nest must be accomplished over time and is a process that takes into consideration age, maturity, and many other factors. A parent must know his child. It is foolish to turn the car keys over to a child who does not have the maturity to drive. But it is also foolish to refuse a child his own life by never letting that child do anything away from his parents. Psalms 127:4

says, “As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.” But keep in mind that arrows are useless unless they are given freedom to fly. Our children are our arrows to take God’s message to the next generation. To do this they will have to have some freedom, and that freedom begins at home. The protective environment of home is the best place for us to begin to gradually release our kids into the world.

Parents should give a certain amount of freedom even when our children are young and then increase the freedoms as the children grow. A child who proves faithful in small things should be rewarded with bigger responsibility. However, let us not be naïve as parents. Just because our children attend church, just because they are good kids, and just because they have good friends, does not necessarily mean that they are mature enough to handle cart blanche freedom. Just because our children will be out on the town with other church kids does not mean there are no dangers. Just because our kids will be at a big brotherhood meeting does not mean that they are free from the temptation of sex or drugs. While it may come as a shock to some, children in the church face most of the same temptations that other children face—sometimes caused by their own church peers. It is our job as parents to give our kids freedom to pilot their own boat while realizing that ultimately we are the captain.

Maturity is the result of having the right amount of freedom at the right time. Parents stay in tune with your kids! Pay attention to their growth—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Set parameters, but allow your children to develop their own talents, will, and personality. And in conclusion, do not be afraid to allow your children to make some mistakes. Naturally we as parents want our kids to be successful. We never want to see them get hurt. We never want to see them fall. But sometimes allowing our children to taste the fruit of their own actions is the best medicine they can take. What safer place to make mistakes and bear the consequence is there than the home? Someday they will be out on their own and will not have us to fall back on. Home is a place for just enough failure to make our children successful in life.

### **Boundaries**

We have hinted at the fact that a good parent will provide boundaries for his children. This is exactly what God did in the Garden of Eden. Not only did God give Adam and Eve the run of the Garden, but He also gave them parameters. God says in Genesis 2:17, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil you shall not eat.” In other words, while God gave Adam and Eve a “yes,” He also gave them a “no.”

While parents need to say “yes” as much as possible, they also need to learn to say “no” to their children. This does not mean that they say no just to be saying no. This does not mean that a parent is a tyrant who says no to demonstrate his power over his kids. Rather, this is a “no” that is designed to keep our kids from making mistakes that will destroy them. As noted, some mistakes teach valuable lessons, but other mistakes are irreversibly destructive. We must do everything possible to keep our children from destructive kinds of mistakes.

God was not a permissive parent who, in the name of love, allowed Adam and Eve to do with impunity anything they wanted. God told Adam that in the day he ate of the forbidden fruit he would “die.” Literally in the Hebrew, “Dying you will die.” In other words, he would experience the worst kind of death—physical and spiritual. It was God’s love that caused Him to set rules. True love sets boundaries for the genuine good of our kids.

Several things must be considered about boundaries. First, they must be clear. A boundary that keeps moving at whim only teaches our kids to test the limits. If today we lay down a rule arbitrarily that tomorrow we change on a whim we will eventually find our kids ignoring all of our rules. If we lay down rules just because we are angry and not because that rule is the best for the child, our kids will become discouraged. Although we may not feel that we owe our children any explanation for our rules, they are thinking creatures. Saying “no” is probably sufficient enough for toddlers, but when our kids get older, such a response teaches them very little. It gives them no insight into the wisdom that led us to make that rule. The goal of rules is not to exercise our own authority but to protect our kids and give them wisdom. Even God explained Himself to Adam and Eve when He made the rule not to eat of the fruit. Did they fully understand the consequences of the rule? Probably not! Nonetheless, God gave the rule with clarity and age appropriateness and told them exactly why He was making His pronouncement.

In reality rules, when given properly, are an expression love. Even consequences for disobedience are an expression of love (Heb. 12:6; Rev 3:9). No one can question that God’s rules are for our own good. Actually rules provide freedom. This may seem a contradiction at first glance.; however, think about the house that is built on the edge of an ocean cliff. The view is spec-



tacular but the drop is deadly. When a parent builds a fence around that house it gives his children, or their pets, the freedom to romp and play at will as long as they do not cross the fence. They know that within the parameters of that fence they are perfectly safe.

Parents, your children want rules in spite of what they might say. They want to know that you are ultimately in control and that they are not responsible for making every single decision for their own lives. Well-placed rules will be liberating to your kids. When our children suspect that we have their best interests in mind, they will more readily respond with obedience. A parent who arbitrarily changes the rules of the game in mid-play, however, will surely be the target of manipulation and rebellion by his children.

### **Consequences**

A rule is worthless if it has no teeth. In other words, rules without consequences are meaningless. We may lovingly craft our instruction and clearly explain ourselves, but if we refuse to follow through we have but wasted our breath. It is better to not make a rule at all than to make one and have our idle threats turn us into liars. No doubt it pained God to punish his children, but He had warned them, and their sin left Him no choice. They could no longer stay in the Garden. As surely has they sinned, so they began to die.

We can imagine that God was more disappointed than angry with Adam and Eve. He had given them everything they could have possibly wanted, and they had rejected Him. It would not have been wrong had God acted solely out of anger. God is perfect and makes no mistakes in judgment. With God, the punishment always fits the crime. With us as human parents, however, we need to be careful to be just. We should never administer punishment when we are angry. No matter what our kids do, it is never appropriate to lash out in retaliation. To thrash a child just because it makes us feel better is an abuse of our parental authority. God never punished Israel, the most wayward of people, without a spiritual goal in mind. Likewise, every time we discipline our kids there must be a spiritual goal in mind. To strike or belittle our children out of anger violates what Paul commands in Ephesians 6:4 when he warns fathers not to exasperate their children. A child who is belittled or struck out of anger will grow discouraged as he realizes that his parent cares more about relieving his own tension than providing loving, biblical discipline. Discipline is not synonymous with “a whip,” as some seem to think, but is the

product of power under prayerful control. It is designed to cultivate the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12:11).

While infractions need to be handled in a timely fashion, and mothers should probably not make the child wait until the father gets home to be disciplined, parents should not punish their kids out of anger or impulse. A parent who is not calm enough to pray with his child before he administers consequences probably needs to take a deep breath, back away from the situation, and take another approach.

### **Socialization**

The final thing that God provided for His children that godly parents must provide for their kids is “socialization.” When God created Adam He also gave him a helper, Eve. God realized that humans are social creatures and need the company of others. No man is an island to himself. People need people.

Much has been written and much could be said about the proper socialization of our children. But this aspect has practical implications for those of us in the church. Everyday our kids are being socialized by the world. They go to school and develop friends. They join sports and clubs where they find peers with common interests. All of this is part of the socialization process. But parents, what are you doing to guide you children toward godly socialization? What are you doing that puts your kids in contact with other Christian kids? What are you doing as the social coordinators of their lives?

God was the perfect parent with Adam and Eve. Not only did He provide them with each other, but also He got to know His children—or rather, He let them get to know Him. Genesis 3:8 indicates that before the fall, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve on a daily basis. In the cool of the evening God communed with His creation and gave them the perfect social setting. One imagines that before the fall, Adam and Eve came to God and told Him about their day, the birds they saw, the fruit they had tasted, and maybe even what they had talked about together. Such sweet communion later made their game of “hide and seek” all the more pathetic as they tried to shun their Best Friend.

The point, however, is that the godly parent will do as God did. The conscientious parent will get to know his children. A godly dad or mom will spend time with his or her kids. Time is the key. We often hear a working parent tout that they might not have much quantity when it comes to time but

the time they have is “quality” time. This excuse, usually designed to make the parent feel better for neglecting his kids, is nonsense. Quality is not defined by the hands on a clock. You cannot schedule quality time between 9 and 10 p.m. on Thursday evening. Quality time occurs spontaneously and without notice as a parent spends large amounts of time with his children. The most influential of spiritual moments occur without warning as, for example, the child asks his daddy about some spiritual matter. Our kids will let down their guard at the most unexpected times. We have to be with them enough to be there when they are ready to open up their hearts. Moses describes the spontaneity of godly parenting when he instructs Israelite parents to teach their children when they lie down, when they rise up, and on the road of life. You cannot schedule quality time, but you can schedule quantity. No job and no hobby is more important than spending time with our kids. Spend it well and spend lots of it. Spending time with our kids is one of the few things that takes no money but when neglected costs us a fortune in pain and sorrow.

Beyond their own influence, parents need to provide external godly socialization for their children that will supplement and support what the family does at home. Whether it be local gospel meetings, brotherhood meetings, or other church events, putting our kids in contact with other Christian families is invaluable. However, parents please do not assume that just because your child has met someone at a church meeting that he or she is going to be a positive influence on your son or daughter. Not all “Christian” parents have the same worldview, and not all families have the same spiritual values. Get to know the parents of those with whom your kids associate. Find out what their values are and if those values are compatible with what you read in God’s Word. Make sure that those parents have the same standards you do when it comes to movies, TV shows, approved social functions, and behavior in general. An ounce of prevention is certainly worth a pound of cure.

Finally, as a godly parent do not be timid in investing in your children’s lives both with time and money. Travel is expensive and is generally too cost prohibitive for most parents to take their kids to every gospel meeting the brotherhood has. But if it takes pinching pennies to put your kids in contact with other godly families, then make your pennies squeal. The sacrifice will be well worth it.

**Conclusion**

No doubt there are other lessons we might learn from the Garden. God is indeed the perfect parent. He demonstrates the perfect balance between rewards and consequences. He never spoils us, but He never neglects us. He is there when we need a shoulder to cry on, but He is also there to give us a life of laughter. He provides everything we need to be fulfilled physically, emotionally, and spiritually. As physical parents we will never live up to God's grand paradigm of guardianship, but we can attempt to emulate Him. If we do, maybe in spite of our imperfections, we can protect our children from the thorns of life.